

The Modern Rings of Survival

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From the realism and the achievements of this splendid system one could already infer the personal capacities of the underlings it has produced. Misled about everything, they can only spout absurdities based on lies – these poor wage earners who see themselves as property owners, these mystified ignoramuses who think they're educated, these zombies with the delusion that their votes mean something.

How harshly the mode of production has treated them! With all their "upward mobility" they have lost the little they had and gained what no one wanted. They share poverties and humiliations from all the past systems of exploitation without sharing in the revolts against those systems. In many ways they resemble slaves, because they are herded into cramped habitations that are gloomy, ugly and unhealthy; ill-nourished with tasteless and adulterated food; poorly treated for their constantly recurring illnesses; under constant petty surveillance; and maintained in the modernized illiteracy and spectacular superstitions that reinforce the power of their masters. For the convenience of present-day industry they are transplanted far from their own neighborhoods or regions and concentrated into new and hostile environments. They are nothing but numbers on charts drawn up by idiots.

They die in droves on the freeways, and in each flu epidemic and each heat wave, and with each mistake of those who adulterate their food, and each technical innovation profitable to the numerous entrepreneurs for whose environmental developments they serve as guinea pigs. Their nerve-racking conditions of existence produce physical, intellectual, and psychological degeneration. They are always spoken to like obedient children – always willing to do what they're

told as long as they're told that they "must" do it. But above all they are treated like retarded children, forced to accept the delirious gibberish of dozens of recently concocted paternalistic specializations, which one day tell them one thing and the next day perhaps the very opposite.

Separated from each other by the general loss of any language capable of describing reality (a loss which prevents any real dialogue), separated by their relentless competition in the conspicuous consumption of nothingness and thus by the most groundless and eternally frustrated envy, they are even separated from their own children, who in previous eras were the only property of those possessing nothing.

Control of these children is taken from them at an early age – these children who are already their rivals, who laugh at their parents blatant failure and no longer listen to their simple-minded opinions. Understandably despising their origin, they feel more like offspring of the reigning spectacle than of the particular servants of the spectacle who happen to have begotten them, and think of themselves as only half-castes of such slaves. Behind the facade of simulated rapture among these couples and their progeny there is nothing but looks of hatred.

Guy Debord *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni (film soundtrack)*
<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord.films/ingirum.htm> – **the entirety bears reading...**

The Trajectory...

You roll out of bed and check the iLife strapped to your wrist. Water prices have gone down enough to let you take a short shower. But the only thing that jobmarket.com has for you today is grave-digging. The circuit design gig has been put off till Thursday since India's Internet is back up for two day.

But on Thursday, the gig is locked in and estimator.com says your income looks

good for the week. If the price of New Dollars holds up, you'll even be able to afford to move back into your own house by next Tuesday. Three people have bid for your sexual favors but their bids are low and the iLife has already rejected them. None of your sex-bids have been accepted either, though your ex-husband has offered you five credits to take the kids hiking on Saturday. You wonder if you will ever meet anyone. What would you say?

The iLife's screen flickers multiple colors as it sorts through more LifeScenariosTM. Healthdots.net has imposed a slightly upped dose of sedatives for the afternoon and the iLife has already sucked up the necessary chemicals from the local pipes. The TempRoom you've stayed for the last two nights is a bit dreary but it is well connected to the local ChemicalLines. The iLife reminds you that with only two more payments, you'll go from leave 2 to level 1 probation and wearing the monitor would become optional. You wonder what your wrist would feel like...

The Eaters Of Poison

(At the peak of the mission system's development) the mission padres had performed a combined total of 87,787 baptisms and 24,529 marriages, and recorded 63,789 deaths

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Missions

In the European conquest of North America, there were numerous instances of natives who died simply from their condition of domestication – not being acclimatized to conditions of servitude, everything from their immune system to spirits expired from the condition inflicted on them by their conquerors. Today, along with the many obvious stresses, the chemical industry invisibly fills our air and water with a variety of pollutants, some of which mimic sexual and other hormones. Our loss of self-

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generated culture and our dependence on an artificial culture synthesized by mass media is also invisible to us.

Given all of this, we need to keep in mind we are the survivors of a harsh and unrelenting regime. Human beings are intellectually, socially and biologically

adapting to current conditions in ways that we do not fully understand.

Certainly, we would-be revolutionaries are not the same as the heroic previous generation. The traditions that brought forth the IWW, The Second International, the Surrealists or the Situationists are gone for good or for ill. Whether

they call themselves the IWW, Pro-Situationists or Stirnerites, the major portion of all of today's would-be revolutionaries only link to previous traditions based on reading some fanzines or some Internet posts.

One idea I've tried to thread through the texts of this magazine is that the task of contemporary revolutionaries is to further transform our conditions beyond the present existence. We need to do this not by simply returning to the theories or the conditions of previous eras but by the entire dispossessed class transforming our weaknesses, the conditions of our existence, into strengths. I adopt this position not simply to have a cool Tai Chi kind of approach but because we can see that capitalism is continually transforming and so I conclude the only way out is transformation beyond it.



Immigration

Some time before the most recent round of anti-immigrant repression, maybe ten years ago, a given Mexican laborer who might come to America was often able (and to an extent is still able) to support an entire family and buy a retirement

home in Mexico on a minimum wage job. So working in the US for minimum wage was a good deal and a lousy deal rolled into one for them. Neither the left nor the right is willing to recognize the Hispanic chasing the (still ultimately

futile) American dream as a reality, each preferring a myth of either worthy oppression or evil criminality as the uniform condition of Latinos when the reality is that America is composed of different groups of people playing different shell games.

We shouldn't have a problem with Latinos coming to the US for "opportunity," even if such opportunities are often mirages. Capital's world of social survival hinges on a system where laborers at many different wage levels feel impelled to spend their entire wages on an augmented survival system. A house bought on credit, an unsustainable small business and saved money for college or retirement all hold out the possibility of a guaranteed place in the system.

These augmented survival systems divide the world like never before. Mobile phones speed the race for survival for

nearly all, from the apparently rich to the very poor. A cellphone is now a survival item for the homeless but it also makes it easier to be homeless and make a homeless person a more reliable worker. So the whole survival race today takes us in a spiral path. You get the same misery at a quicker pace.

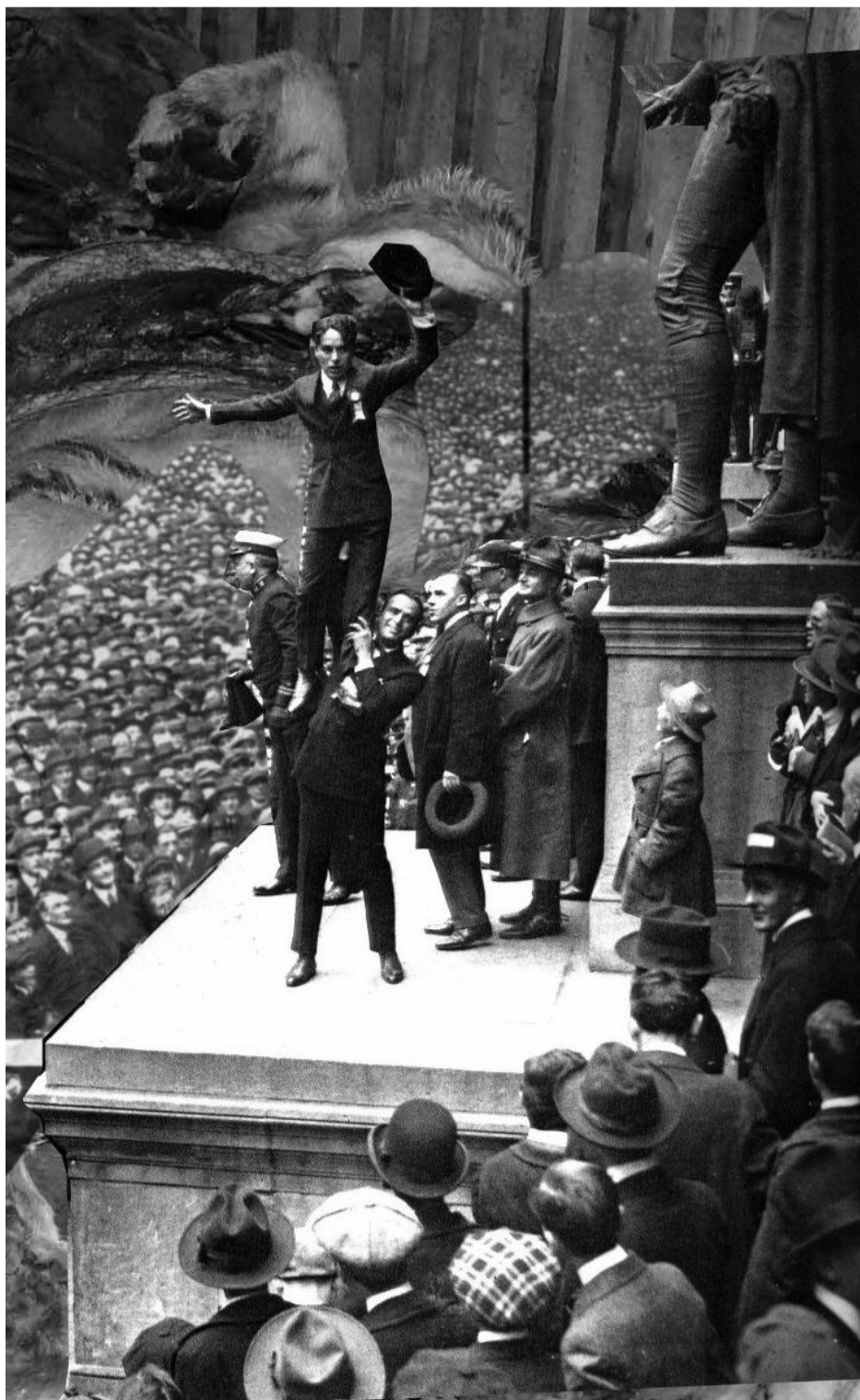
And this augmented survival must be preserved in a variety of ways. The entire landscape has been reorganized to permit only working, shopping, driving and sleeping – the shopping mall, the industrial park, the freeway and the housing development. Sub-prime mortgages constitute a zone from which the rest of the financial system would like to protect itself just as the choices made by those who walked away from sub-prime mortgages must be hidden from those who still labor relentlessly to pay their mortgages.

We are all migrants on a landscape both desolate and filled with possibilities. This offers seduction as well as exploitation. This society survives because it seems to present some combination of survival and wealth later to just the right mix of citizens.

Flexibility

The ideology of free markets gives the impression that the average enterprise is concerned with being flexible and adapting. This is not true. The capitalist enterprise, on average, large or small, must be a rigid and controlled regime. The capitalist is a money maker. These "risk-takers" always aim for the minimal risk and maximal gain because they are putting their skin, their entire social existence, on the line.

The capitalist market indeed certainly creates risk but it is not capitalists who are expected to normally take this risk. Instead, we are. The leading edge of capitalism is in managing a workforce which is impelled to be more and more flexible. The product that the large urban areas offer is the adaptable workforce. The most flexible of the capitalists are simply those who buy the flexibility of



the most flexible workforce. No number of Spenglers, Schumpeters, Hayeks and Ayn Rands can train the bourgeois to a higher purpose beyond easy money. Money-bags instead has every incentive to just buy the skills and the materials he needs rather than being a

clever risk taker or manager - even if these skills might seem closer to the high bourgeois than the skill of brick laying. Indeed, in *The Economist* you can find "risk management services" for sale along side management talent. Of course, we can see how well the some of the

Madoffs feed off of this situation but it doesn't change the picture. The capitalist's position is like that of the police. While the policeman's job is to use violence to suppress many sorts of non-conformity to society's rules, they on average risk less on-the-job-injury than a bus driver. No one in a dominant position is going take a course of action on a day-to-day basis which risks the very conditions of their domination. The large corporations aim for some racket which guarantees reliable and predictable profits – and gets them, unless some crisis comes and washes their schemes away. Even the "start-up" realm is a casino where the small guys pay-in and the large investors are guaranteed a payoff at a certain point. A further wrinkle in this dynamic has been that capital has still relied on the upper segments of the proletariat to buy its goods despite the massive pressure that it simultaneously puts on us/it. Thus we see the continuously escalating credit bubble – first coming from Wall Street and now possibly being revived through the massive bailout.

Flexibility itself today is thus a two edged sword. From the 1960s and before, the working class' resistance to the capitalist order has involved becoming flexible enough to live in the intestines of the capitalist beast. From bums to bohemians, those who never worked often labored hardest to escape capital's control. But this same flexibility has been harnessed by capital when it has needed to increase the rate of exploitation. It is our immediate experience of economic development and collapse as the two tendencies merge into one.

The Adventurer

If modern capital divides us as wage workers into a variety of skill and consumption tiers, it is unifying us by the travails it puts us through. Janitors and graphic designers are equally obligated to pump their gas and remove the viruses from their own computers. Here is where flexibility is the name of the game.

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The problem is that this flexibility now serves the economy and not our interests. This attitude of minimally-consuming self-reliance was once a hallmark of bohemia but it is now becoming more and more universal, while less and less exciting. While the model of the young adventurer might not fit thirty or forty-somethings very well, the condition of the capitalist economy is offering fewer and fewer alternatives. Earlier bohemians grew old but sometimes their skills and connection were sufficient to maintain them into active old age. Odysseus returned from his travails and lived in contemplation. Now, *Time Magazine* proclaims “you may never retire”. The adventurer of today simply continues indefinitely in an empty now.

Hence, all marketing is youth marketing in the sense that all marketing moves the consumer closer to an infantile demand for immediate experience. Modern capitalist society modifies the contours of daily life for its purposes;

our pre-built culture becomes more and more a youth culture.

Thus our purely atomized consumer makes choices in an infantile, a-historical now. Death and old age are non-existent. Each individualized individual longs for an adventure taking them to far places or to the ideal lover.

Thus we see an entire society with no thought of the future. We can congratulate America since it is one society which deserves no future. Yet we can also see the horror felt by those growing old in isolation.

Survival

The first phase of spectacular society was the phase of the destruction of the means of outlining the communist program within the language of capital. The triumph of the spectacle has

manufactured a world in which, except on unique occasions, every sort of permitted speech can be translated into statements about the management of the existing exchange system.

In this world, the undermining of the dominant discourse has become more resonant than any ostensible Revolutionary Speak. This is the system's own detournement – the most powerful statement is a collage of present “evils” and “goods” subjectively expressing their unity at a glance despite our objective inability to do so. Except in those



periodic moments of break-down, there is a near total disconnect between any objective articulation of opposition and subjective experience of opposition. And subjective opposition to this dominant world thus must be everywhere.

And now, we can hypothesize that spectacular society has moved to a further level of social decay. As current miseries cannot be hidden, the atomization of human existence prevents social communication. The individual is further divided within themselves. We face complex pressures that we can survive only with a kind of managed schizophrenia. And here the ultimate state of the modern person lies. We are beyond conscious of ingredients needed to maintain the illusions which allow us to survive. In this schizophrenia, the qualitative question of whether you see

through the illusions is replaced by the quantitative question of how much you are willing to take. Thus, we can map the conditions of the modern person by how they manage this division.

Modern Americans in particular are divided within themselves. Hyper-competent and wholly incompetent, active and passive – sometimes in the same person, sometimes in different people. From Urban Shamans driving SUVs to welfare mothers supporting Sara Palin to Marx-quoting vulgarians, the matrix of identities is more arbitrary. The

rise of bicycle messenger bags and vegan computer programmers, the rise and quick fall of metrosexuals, the homeless with laptops and cell phones, all speak to a constantly increasing flexibility, a flexibility which at first can seem to benefit us but which ultimately allows capital to transfer its problems and crises to us. This situation was characteristic of the earlier petite bourgeois. But in a world where capital attempts to move the maximum risk down to the working class, it spreads it

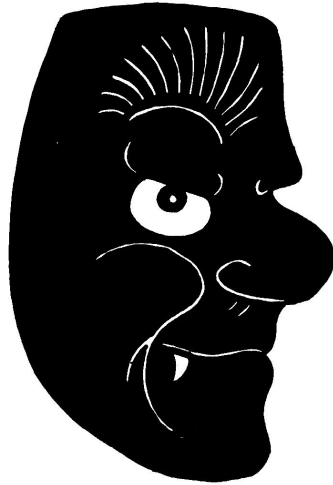
more and more widely.

For us, we have no sentimental need to regain earlier forms of capitalist exploitation (permanent jobs, etc.). Rather, we are curious what happens when this roller-coaster goes all the way to the end. Certainly, we identify less and less with the job we happen to have for a moment. On the other hand, we are connected with our ability to survive the social factory. And this social factory is the endless uncertainty of chunks of labor power attempting to sell themselves - chunks of labor trying to get paid. And just as much, this process involves navigating attitudes and connections, even for positions like taxi driver, carpenter or waiter.

This comes as the process of atomization has caused interpersonal roles to join the market place for capital. The decade and

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century-long movements for Gay Liberation, Women's Liberation, Black Liberation and a host of others have boiled down to the ability of every gender and culture to sell itself. This has also resulted in the less recognized roles and identities being made to wait in the wings for validation – a margin within marginality itself. In the world of capitalism's "war of all against all" few identities are neutral. When your condition stops being an advantage, it becomes an disadvantage – and vice versa. Moreover, your membership in your role needs publicity. In every role, there is the uncertainty of "passing". We may be only somewhat concerned if we don't pass as a customer when we walk into an expensive jewelry shop but we may be quite worried if we fail to be recognized as a man or as a woman when interacting socially. Gayness and its hipness is not an advantage for just anyone who has sex with those of the same gender. But it can be for those who can represent themselves best with the gay flag. In other circles, homophobia is applied to anyone who doesn't satisfy the heterosexual normal of middle America. Only a small minority of people can pass perfectly in all of the social roles that they might want to appear in. A large number pass with some worries while others simply fail. But since there are many nooks for each person, each of us can experience the feeling of being frauds, of failing to pass, of not meeting some of the "job description" that we use to construct our self-image. When the universality of this experience is recognized, a different community can appear. A community that denies capital's war of all against all finally can allow a self-acceptance that no amount of "dignity programs" can match. The advertising of this age naturally



projects a fantasy of paradise but such a paradise is particular to this age and the method of advertising; all of the immediate pleasures of the senses are laid out in a quick montage. Such a paradise might seem to actually happen to the celebrities at the center of the largest parties.

- Basically, the ideal of existence is an ad-hoc series of stunning actions – this is the adventure that remains within the present age. It is natural that this chic of being on the edge has been digested into a homogenous youth culture.

A laundry list of ways to NOT get followed on Twitter:

- **By not using your real name. I'm talking to you, socmed14413 and flygrrl182.**
- **By not using an actual photo of you (like your logo or something). Or worse, by not adding a photo at all.**
- **By not providing a link. We're not convinced. We want to find out a bit more about you before following. If you don't have another link to provide, write a blog or join LinkedIn and come back later.**
- **By not providing a "one line bio". Think of this as your answer to the question "why am I interesting?" Leaving it blank gives people no reason to follow you back.**
- **By calling yourself a "social media expert". Even if you are one. Everybody on Twitter calls themselves a social media expert. After all, they do have a Twitter account.**

Let's help these folks out. What else you got?

<http://www.darowski.com/tracesofinspiration/2009/05/26/how-to-use-twitter-and-not-be-a-douchebag/>

Exchange for the sake of producing more exchange value relation was old when Karl Marx described capitalist society. Images divorced from representation existed long before Guy Debord described capitalist society. What characterized these two phenomena is the way in which certain behaviors go from a background position to being socially dominant.

The automation of social representation has gone along with that representation detaching itself from the concrete social relations which underlie it. The spectacular relations involve both a simulation of social interaction and a process of capitalizing (on) those social interactions. Once highly valued speech, music or images can be detached from the individuals who generate them, they integrate into both control systems and the exchange economy.

The Internet naturally only intensifies this tendency. The world of the Internet involves intensive mutual self-surveillance as well as assigning exchange value to information.

Adaptation

We have to dig our way to the bottom before we can dig our way out of this mess. It is easy to denounce the dehumanizing qualities brought on by increasing traffic, constant cellphone conversation, work that both speeds up and bleeds into our "free" time. But we also need to discover how the present "flexibilized" workforce can be a more effective enemy to capital than the organized factory workers who came before them. Otherwise, our struggle will simply be a repetition of previous failures – with capital using all its new tools along with the recuperation and repression of times past.

So who are the modern citizens? "Bike messenger chic" first appeared with a group of casual workers who needed to modify their clothing to adapt to heat and cold: the messenger's image as the adventurer of casual work. They combined pleasure and survival by doing

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a grueling job which kept them in excellent shape and led to adventures and parties (for as long as the messengers remained in their twenties).

It is natural that capital wants laborers who have no past or future, who do the required activity and can be “on to another adventure”, with capital having no responsibility for the worker’s survival in that further adventure, especially no qualms about the workers becoming old, injured, etc.

The wearers of messenger style bags get a chance to take part in this chic, but with all the rough edges worn off. The cell phone replaces the CB radio – the universal tether of a present worker as opposed to the particular tether of the old times. Experiments in quick access to documents have shaped a bag now holding telecommuting laptops.

Historic capitalism began with medieval society, numerous hereditary classes, from kings and popes to squires, village priests and burgers, all arrayed above the peasantry. As capital dissolved these fixed class hierarchies, it established the social role, the changeable position which could be occupied by anyone. An enterprising individual may occupy many roles as their position in the labor market changes. Social roles have multiplied even as we each uniformly face the market place with nothing to sell but our labor power.

Modern citizens, those above the very bottom, are today asked to play a greater and greater number of roles today. These are most often simply paid positions within the economy, but they also include unpaid positions. They include friends, but also roles of “oppression”. You can be a “red neck” writer, a drug-addict college professor, a student and a prisoner, etc. Thus, in a given day, we wind-up playing a series of roles, some thin and surface, some deep and closely held (of course these roles are more muted).

Past upheavals have allowed capitalism to become a more streamlined capitalism, spiraling inwards. In producing a realm

of fused work and consumption, capital created work-roles which strongly implied a linked level of consumption. The accumulated individual rebellions of the 1960-90s produced many who would refuse the producer/consumer role which their producer role mandated for them. These were the modern survivalists, putting together lives from thrift stores. But as an individual response to a collective problem, these responses constituted both a bit of passive resistance and an opportunity for capital. We have an unending fight between the dispossessed’s efforts to create space for themselves and capital’s ability to recuperate all partial resistances. Bike messenger bags or cell phones are neither good nor bad.

The rise of capitalism resulted in the gradual simplification of ruling and ruled classes. The complex feudal mesh of social obligation was gradually torn to shreds. Class as a condition that one was born into faded as the world was divided into two economic classes – the capitalist class and the dispossessed class.