



Councilism, Solutionism & The Communist Critique

A collection of excerpts
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1. I am at pains to relate the question of workers councils to the existence of many millions of people and their relation to their environment rather than to the question of political positions, this involves the application of certain theoretical filters.

2. To this end, I did not want to find myself in agreement with the left-anarchist position on self-management but I did not want to simply disagree with it.

3. It may seem strange, it does to me, to propose a critique of events and actions that have not yet occurred, but my interest is not so much located in the future as in the alterations that are effected within possible positions we are able to adopt in the present with regard to possible future events. Obviously, the alteration in definition of a future goal transforms the activities that are deployed in the present which are aimed at achieving/relating (to) it. I say 'obviously' but as the goal only really exists in purposeful activities in the present, its transformation is quite subtle and complex.

4. Specifically, in attempting to think in terms of algorithms and the functions within processes playing out or unfolding it removes that terrible, and tragic, burden of having to decide which reality to choose (as if that were in any way possible).

5. The more decision, policy making and so on are contextualised, the less the tyranny of 'either/or' will dictate - in the case of any proposed free decision making at any critical juncture mere prejudice and fear have a much greater impact than any of us are prepared to admit.

existence of radical groups, all of which are contained within the political-cultural field and are neutralised along the lines of politics and culture. Better to not engage at all, do nothing, make no comment.

Cultural preference, especially the pursuit of the authentic, is not an appropriate form of communist struggle. The only important cultural forms for communists are those that may be reused to articulate and illuminate experience of negation and engagement within the economy. Walter Benjamin, for example, observed that the machinery of the fairground accelerates, through shocks and jolts to the senses, the process by which workers are habituated to the horrors of mechanised work; at no point did he argue for the organisation of radical or alternative fairground forms to oppose desensitisation, indeed all such theatres of cruelty, and confrontational circuses, despite their radical ideology, only thrust the capitalist form further into people's heads. Benjamin's conclusion was simply that as this unavoidable disciplining could not be effectively opposed on its own terms, it was therefore to be hoped that the always decreasing distance between workers and industrial machinery would somehow facilitate the workers' expropriation of the machines.

-Monsieur Dupont, 2003

through a maximisation of the role of the culture industry through lottery funding, 24 hour broadcast media, the internet, and the manufacture of celebrity as a product but nothing could be duller than our bungee-jump society created out of the unholy union of capital and radical imagination. The preference for extreme, *to the max* entertainment has something Roman about it but it remains spectacular, that is beyond critique or engagement.

The answer of revolutionaries to the perceived threat of cultural recuperation is to push *it* still further, finding aesthetic beauty in the ugly and discordant 'real' of everyday life, delinquency is celebrated as a form of total resistance (rather than the state supervised macho social incontinence that it really is). In Kings Lynn, Britain, Spring 2001, a pizza delivery driver was surrounded by a gang that demanded the contents of his van and then beat him up. Some pro-revolutionaries would probably celebrate the youths for attacking a representative of domination and the Americanised food industry. Some would say, of course, that the gang should have drawn the line at physically attacking the driver, but, even so, such events are often routinely portrayed by pro-revolutionaries as signs of *movement*, of *escalation*, of an emergent generalised radical consciousness, the gang may even be celebrated for enacting the revolutionary necessity of the redistribution of food (we have seen how attacking McDonalds or parked cars has been advocated as *direct action*, but, in fact, these acts are cultural and based upon certain aesthetics of preference). The pursuit of radicality or social and political extremism within a society grounded in extreme maximisation of exploitation is an impossible and unsustainable strategy, all cultural extremism feeds into the amphitheatre; extreme gestures become, literally, a kind of trailblazing of cultural forms. The cultural elitism inherent to anti-capitalist forms, which claim to pose more *real* forms (music, language, literature etc), to the mystifications of the establishment, disprove themselves by their own existence; capitalism is easily capable of supplying dissonant forms, the proof for which is to be found in the

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There will be workers' councils, if there is a genuine economic crisis of capital, there will be workers' councils.

The problem ought not to be viewed as the advocacy of councils within a milieu where it is set up on its merits against other options, as a strategy or solution that must be pursued, but of what happens next, what happens once the councils are established.

It is inevitable, as capital flees from industrial crisis, i.e. from its inability to reproduce the terms of its relation and extract value from its processes, that process will attempt to manage itself. During a crisis in the productive relation the proletariat will go with the pressure of necessity and step in to take control of production - general economic conditions will force such a move, the proletariat will respond positively initially to ensure its own survival, and because that will seem like the only realistic option open to it. It will attempt to manage 'business as usual' because it will not yet understand the contradiction in that act, i.e. that its continued existence within the productive relation (and production itself) is contrary to its interest.

There will be no reason to advocate the instigation of *self-management* when this will inevitably emerge anyway as an algorithmic working out of the 'liberated' forces of production. The problem is what these liberated forces will then be saying to humanity in general at that particular moment and through self-management, its necessary form. We know what the councilists and left anarchists want the council form to express: *it being the institution of the triumph of use over exchange*.

But I do not think productive forces will *forget* their exploitative character and *allow* themselves to be socialised as easily as many left anarchists imagine. Class based existence is written through the processes of the factory and this will automatically attempt to reassert itself behind, beyond and through any decisions (and decision making bodies) set up 'against' it, and in favour of socialised production.

Will the workers' council form ever have sufficient power to rein in and transform the autonomous capitalist character of the forces of production? There is no evidence that it will.

The question beyond that of the relation of workers' councils to crisis, the question raised after that of the councils' established existence as the embodiment of suspended value production, is located in the critiques which will be developed because the councils exist, because of their algorithmic aspect within production, and their relation to value, their role in the return to the capitalist form, but also, in the other direction, to the prospect of a genuine human community.

Most left anarchists will be transported into patriotic ecstasies by the *coming-to-be* of the council form because the form itself is their ideology. They will not be troubled by the form's *intrinsic*, just-so quality, this after all can be explained *historically* as a new phase, a new epoch. As the councils are established, the anarchists will institute their bureaucracies, principles, and declarations that set the limit of society and humanity itself as the celebration of the form. These partisans of the council, and of the fetish for 'self-management', will be the last to recognise that these ideologies also function as a 'fetter' (to use Marx's term), and thus will become their reactionary defenders' of the new alienation.

By contrast, the inevitable critique will initially be undertaken in terms of the alienation experienced from the allegedly objective character of the forces of production, both by communists, who will illuminate the non-identity between communism and the council form, and by the individualist anarchists via their revolt against the generalised imposition of work and the ideological character of 'use'.

popular culture (Dean, Presley, Brando, and later Guevara) also contributed to the legitimisation of pursuing the forms of ideological oppositions. In the end it became, and it is this mockery that present day advertisers use as a jemmy, the opposition of boring normality against the coolly different – revolutionaries were the cool sect.

The mainstream media now grounds its operations in the production of maximised untypicality; on any single evening it is possible to find on TV celebratory reference to cannabis, sexual fetishism, *independent* pop music, spiced and groovy foods, stylised homes and gardens. It is assumed that normality is now individualised, there is a background of millions of people going off backpacking to faraway places, people are young, they are funky, they want more than their parents had, more in the sense of *different*. Very amusing and slightly embarrassing but nonetheless not at all revolutionary. And so the pro-revolutionary, operating with the Sixties legacy of *IT*, *Oz*, *The SI* and within the cultural/ideological sphere, must push it further: pirate radio, webcasts, clubnights (there are more leaflets given out at *Reclaim The Streets* events for raves than for political positions); the *real thing*, that is, the subjective conditioning and autonomous production of non-conformity must be even more cutting edge, more knowing and more stylistically radical than the latest Ball and Theakston product. Unfortunately, 'style', the production of stylisation, is dependent on who has the best video editing technology; so the BBC, the not so stuffy any more BBC (the BBC of *The Love Parade* Great Britain) can now produce images, sequences, cultural products that outstrip the efforts of any pro-revolutionary and his photocopier in radicality of form. Thus the efforts of RTS to parody *The London Evening Standard* and *Monopoly* seem rather tame and formally conservative.

Imagination is taking power used to be a slogan of the libertarian left as it role-played a series of surface oppositions that portrayed the establishment as inhibitive and itself as carnival harlequin; now imagination is in power, it has been recruited

How many of you are there?

A few more, than the original guerrilla nucleus in the, Sierra Madre, but with fewer weapons. A few less than the delegates in London in 1864 who founded the International Workingmen's Association, but with a more coherent program. As unyielding as the Greeks at Thermopylae ("Passerby, go tell them at Lacedaemon..."), but with a brighter future.

-SI Questionnaire

Revolutionary groups, in the absence of the realisation of the unity of theory and practice, sought to establish the reality of truth in two places at once: in their own heads and in the objectively constituted but autonomous working class engagement with the economy. But the contemplative role of the revolutionary cell soon became restrictive, and so to compensate for this, or at least to address this discomfort, the groups sought out means, events, modes, ideologies, whereby they could justify their appearance on the stage as actors. It is important that the move towards action and its justification was begun in response to initial passivity, that is, direct political engagement was begun from a predication of subjective, ideological factors; for the revolutionary groups becoming fidgety it soon became morally insupportable that they should 'sit by' whilst momentous events were unfolding, that they should 'sit around theorising', when they ought to be 'out there showing solidarity and getting our ideas across', But what can ten or twelve déclassé individuals 'do'? Make situations of course. It is at the juncture where the individual or small group seeks to make itself significant to the world that leftist ideology becomes less concerned with inconceivable masses and more focused on conceptions of the self. From *S.o.B.*'s initial transformation of the formula for social division from owner/worker to ordergiver/ordertaker, a sudden rush of new theories of polarity went in and out of leftbank fashion: authentic/inauthentic, tuned in/straight, spectator/actant. Existentialism, Marcuse and the mythic heroes of

The theoretical critique of workers' councils begins in the general tendency experienced in all historical examples of the form - that is, self-management of production by the proletariat has always, and without exception, facilitated the return of capitalism. The question of the nature of this facilitation is open to discussion in this seminar: either, 1) the councils were too weak, not generalised or organised enough to impose themselves; or 2) they are, in their essence, an emergency capitalist form which is made to appear when all other forms are unable to function.

Workers councils and productive forces

That the workers will take control of production. That the workers are a product of production. That production will be the product of the workers. That production is the combination of past and present labour. That if capitalist exploitation is removed from production then production and labour are liberated from capitalist exploitation. That the passage from capitalist production to social production will be facilitated by proletarian control of production. That capitalism has produced the proletariat. That the proletariat will bury capitalism. That capitalism has produced the proletariat and that the proletariat will produce the end of capitalism and the beginning of communism. That the passage into communism will be piloted by the proletariat. That the proletariat, the product of capitalism, will produce in its turn, communism. That the beginning of the next phase will be found in the end of this phase. That the essence of the next phase will be found in the accumulated techniques of this phase. That the powers inappropriately developed in this phase will be put to proper use in the next. And Hegel wrote:

Hence it is that, in the case of various kinds of knowledge, we find that what in former days occupied the energies of men of mature mental ability sinks to the level of information, exercises, and even pastimes, for children; and in this educational progress we can see the history of the world's culture delineated in faint outline. This bygone mode of existence has already become an acquired possession of the general mind, which constitutes the substance of the individual, and, by thus appearing externally to him, furnishes his inorganic nature. In this respect culture or development of mind (*Bildung*), regarded from the side of the individual, consists in his acquiring what lies at his hand ready for him, in making its inorganic nature organic to himself, and taking possession of it for himself. Looked at, however, from the side of universal mind qua general spiritual substance, culture means nothing else than that this substance gives itself its own self-consciousness, brings about its own inherent process and its own reflection into self.

The relationship of the proletariat to production is essentially continuous from capitalism to communism but is ameliorated, mitigated, recognised. Effectively, the fetish of the commodity is replaced by the fetish of labour which achieves the actualisation of its role in production – labour does not alter its character so much as it is no longer obscured by mediating ‘things’ – work is not abolished so much as institutionalised as Value.

However, the experience of the worker within instrumentalist-communism would remain unchanged, the basic, immediate sense of alienation that he had felt in capitalism would go unchallenged in communism – except to say that he would have become his own alienator.

If it is decided to run the factories ‘communistically’ then it is decided that capitalism is immediately abolished. That is, the rate of exploitation is immediately reduced to an acceptable level, despite the proletariat continuing to undertake exactly the same tasks.

The worker would continue to be dictated to by the needs of the processes that were first organised by commodity production and which materially express the fetish character of the productive relation... within this understanding, the greater part of capitalism goes unopposed, on the contrary, the objective developments of capitalism are understood positively and the question set by instrumentalist-communists only concerns the re-direction of the means of production towards ‘social’ needs.

-Frere Dupont, 2008

On the reduction of the rate of exploitation

If the discourse of the critique of alienation is abandoned, all that is left for communists is a discourse based upon the proposal of a reduction in the rate of exploitation of labour – and such relativistic formulations are not the stuff of communism at all.

The identification of communism with the objective continuity of the forces of production is a gambit based upon an a priori and unexamined assumption concerning the objectively acceptable rate of exploitation of labour.

Within the capitalist mode of production the rate of exploitation is considered currently too high but nonetheless this has produced a benefit in the form of the material accumulation of dead labour which, under different managerial direction could facilitate an objective reduction in the rate of exploitation.

This reduction of the rate of exploitation by dead things of living activity is called self-management.

That communism itself is synonymous with a relatively reduced rate of exploitation of the proletariat within the productive relation.

The material base of the commodity relation, it is foreseen, may be simply disconnected from commodity production itself through, what is in effect, a change of government.

It is strange, or I think it is strange, this notion of an inherited objectivity that was developed out of subjective revolt against inherited objectivity. It is strange, or I think it is strange, that the struggle to break free from inherited forms should be conceived as a developmental emergence: the bud, the blossom the fruit. I also think it is strange that after everything, that after all the myriad details of history Marx should adopt the model of primogeniture as the means for explaining the passage of one form of human society to another. The idea that much of what capitalism is, ie what Marx called the forces of production, as well as the human needs that this specific form of production presupposes, will be carried into communist society, is truly baffling. It seems not to have occurred to many who advocate self-management to consider whether the character of technological progression, a progression driven solely by the production of commodities, might cause human society, as it is realised in its needs, to regress. In other words it is not possible for the proletariat to manage all moments within the development of productive forces equally - in most situations the character of the productive forces (what they are, what they do) is in active revolt against self-management.

Given that the productive forces dictate the reproduction of the productive relations and that communist revolution is realised by the proletariat expropriating the productive forces then marxists define communist society as capitalist productive forces under workers' self management, or, as Lenin said, soviet power plus electrification. I find this conception of Marxist revolution, of the objective continuity in the accumulation of productive activity, to be an unprepossessing prospect - it is as Wellington said of Napoleon's strategic genius, 'he's just a pounder after all'. Marx is just a pounder after all.

As if there were nothing to dispute about the specific nature of the productive forces, as if the material that has been developed from alienated labour can be divided from the exploitative relation which set the process in motion, as if, even as we make the break from capitalism, we are condemned to live within the modes of existence that we have inherited from it - that we are objectively, and not merely contingently, of its lineage. The metaphors of pregnancy that Marx deployed as some sort of threat of inevitability through which capitalism's limit was set by objective social development, now come back to haunt us... it seems we cannot escape the womb of our castrating mother, our revolution is dictated by what we are in revolt against.

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society -- after the deductions have been made -- exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labour. For example, the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labour cost. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another.

Communism is not a place where meaning will rest and solutions be discovered but rather it will hold within its frame the constant and living intensity of relations which we might term as, *an appropriately scaled and directed revolt against reflexive conditions.*

Perhaps an alternative to the proposed pamphlet would be entitled Anarchism for Marx; the strength of anarchism is its under-theoretisation, i.e. its escape from the German Idealist categories which dominate marxism. Anarchism, or rather, true anarchism (lets say, insurrectionism, primitivism) maintains its critique of capitalism at the level of intuitive consciousness of alienation from the position of actually lived experience. By contrast, the critique of alienation is almost entirely lost from organisationalist anarchism precisely because of its cross-fertilisation with crude marxism, in fact, class struggle organisationalist anarchism, to the degree that it has adopted crude marxist economist categories, has given up its critique of the capitalist social relation altogether -- developing instead a progressivist, forces of production argument filtered through an ideology of self-management.

...The supposed maturity that rebels accede to when they read Marx is in reality an indicator of their stepping back from the critique of capitalism, a coming to terms, a truce with the forces that first produced their alienation.

The abandonment of the critique of alienation and the fetishisation of Germanist objectivist/economist categories

Here is a whole different transformation problem to grapple with: the critique of political economy does not precipitate any particular set of politics because it is no more than an interpretive tool for understanding political economy. As Redtwister/Chris has said elsewhere, the critique of political economy is not a critique of the capitalist social relation; the former is an analytic/interpretive method, the latter is a political intervention aimed at the totality of human life in the present. There is no necessary connection between the two and furthermore opposition to capitalism does not require grounding in the exegesis of overly-valued texts.

It is clear that marxism has produced a small number of useful interpretive tools for the better understanding of contingent aspects of human society (although the predictive capacity of these tools is extremely limited) however, the political interventions and organisational attempts supposedly derived from this interpretive method have signally failed – primarily because, in my opinion, they do not accurately locate the essence of human existence, which is not labour but ambivalence.

If it is true that anarchists grow up to become marxists, it seems this urge to read Marx is only a pseudo-maturation, by contrast the most interesting marxist politics only really achieve authentic maturity when they discover the limitations of their orthodox framework and must depart them (Perlman is a case in point).

Success, or the effects of conscious purpose on human adaptation

There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.

-Donald Rumsfeld

Do you not think that successful struggles within capitalism produce (however temporarily) the kind of direct social relations between people that prefigure communisation? Obviously these can't coexist in a stable way with capitalist ones, either being pushed through to communisation or dissipating as they achieve their limited goals or are defeated, but the future is not of a different dimension to the present, however much of a rupture is required to realise it.

I think the shortest response I can give is that I have at least a basic grasp of the reasons why our individual assessments of the outcomes of particular struggles never exhaust the matter, and that the reception, or recycling, of an outcome is of greater importance than the outcome itself. It is a cliché to say that success is relative but it is also true that further problematics appear from the vantage point of an achieved objective. Each breakthrough discovers another border against which it must set itself.

There are few rules set in advance by which we might predict outcomes for a potentially communisable endeavour other than that it must be commanded by a lived element (rather than say, by the unstoppable inertia of historically accumulated forces of production). We cannot say that the demand, the objective, the organisational vehicle adequately express what success might be exactly, or what it would mean to us, these elements are already given, they belong to the political vernacular when what is being felt for is that bouncing rhythmicity of the transcendent.

The prosaic framework of our demands does not at all articulate what it is that we need, which is always something other than that set by the terms of the struggle. And when we are not careful in what we pray for, as in the case of the abolition of the Poll Tax, we are humiliated by our successes, we find they are worth nothing to us. It seems, from experience, that more elaborated criteria for evaluating particular successes can only be applied with rigour retrospectively - unfortunately, we are able to understand failure within such endeavours after the event but we are not able to extrapolate from this a set of criteria for making accurate predictions about further events. The reverse is true in fact, a 'successful' demonstration for example is repeatedly restaged with less and less effect until the organisers have destroyed that bouncing spontaneity which defined the success in the first place and which they have vainly sought to recapture. As a consequence of the great variety of variables involved, all any of us with an interest in these matters can do in relation to the 'struggle', is continue as best we think fit whilst hopefully developing a subjective and communicable capacity for critical reflexivity.

However, this doesn't imply that there is nothing else to say on the matter. We can at least sketch in some of the parameters for evaluating relative successes, particularly as this is the issue under discussion here.

The question of success within a hostile environment is essentially one of adaptation (and even of exaptation, cooption and pre-adaptation). But first we must note and keep in mind a taxonomic disjunction which will influence our evaluations concerning the success of an event or project. This disjunction relates to events occurring within different scales, and may be stated simply as a rule, 'that which is significant for the group or individual is not necessarily significant for the class, but that which is significant for the class is always significant for the individual or group (although this may not be consciously recorded as such).'

for all those workers who can't face work without tranquillisers, drinking a bottle of whiskey a day, or fighting down there fear and desperation; and for those who hit their kids, who get divorced, who get to 60 somehow and then die, having achieved literally nothing as individuals. This perspective, this experience, is discounted, if we take the factory system as simply a method of 'making things'. It is ironic, to me, that much of 'class struggle' politics, idealises the work system and denies the unhappiness of work.

It really is not okay to say that the misery and early death is worth it. The capitalist system, above all, is located in the exploitation of labour and the conversion of alienated life-force into abstract labour. As a communist I can only attack the process as an individual work unit (my influence is below negligible) but I am in a better position to attack the ideologies that legitimise the system, that have become habituated to the process and take it to be a second nature. As far as I am concerned *communism is the transvaluation of all values, it brings everything into question, it demands that all aspects of human being are questioned, negated, altered, re-valued*. There is nothing belonging to now that is not infected with the problems of now, therefore everything must be challenged and then challenged again. I will not accept a progressivist/cumulative account of history because that severs my connection, my humanity, from all the human beings who have suffered and died as a result of capitalist process.

As a communist I put actual human experience, and experience is synonymous with shock and pain, at the forefront of my project. I want to articulate it and I want it to be addressed. I would suggest that lived experience rather than 'solutions' or processes ought to be the main frame of reference for communist engagement with proletarianisation. Others will take another view and these different perspectives are combined socially at a much higher level than individual opinion but *I will fight as best I can for the 'for-human' approach to communism and against the tendency to emphasise process* which occurs elsewhere within our milieu.

If you argue that we must retain factories, you are also arguing that we retain the dictatorship by things over life. I see my role as a communist is to point this out and to problematise the smug, hostile, intolerant, progressivist accounts of human society which see this question as already settled, and which I was arguing against. The solutions are not found to the problems of human society and must be undertaken consciously, piece by piece – this ‘other’ process of setting the human at the centre of social production rather than as an adjunct to the production of things, is what I understand ‘communisation’ to mean.

I do not say I have the solutions to the factory system but, in the absence of anyone else, I will put forward the perspective derived from experience of factory conditions, the perspective based on human alienation, I will argue that the illnesses, the drudgery, the pain, the alienation are not ‘worth it’ for sake of the ‘bigger picture’. I do not say my view cancels every other view out, only that it must be taken account of. I attempt to express the human costs of factory life.

I understand that most of the people I was arguing against are white collar workers, that’s okay, that is what I am now but I also have direct experience of factory conditions, of organising with factory/manual workers and intimate experience of the health costs of factory production. My father worked 40 years in a factory, when he retired he died from a work related lung illness (idiopathic aveolitis) caused from inhaling solder fumes. His brothers have the same illness, because they worked the same lines... millions and millions of people have lived truncated, damaged, unfulfilled lives because of their employment in the factories. Sometimes in the mid-90’s my wife had to force me to go to work, we were living in such desperate conditions; I would literally cry as I cycled miles to work at 4 in the morning. I would drink myself stupid at weekends and sleep like death only for it all to start again on Monday. Every aspect of our lives was dictated to by the miseries of work. I speak from my life experience,

In other words, none of us as individuals can really perceive in its entirety the complexity of the conditions which have created our cognitive-perceptive faculties.

Historical society is a stochastic system based upon the separation of what we as humans are consciously capable of on one side (e.g. elective, direct relations) and all the ‘random’ factors which thwart consciousness on the other. The nature of the relation of part to whole means that we (from the perspective of being a ‘part’ within the ‘whole’) are unable to pass final judgement on the determination of ‘surface’ events by shifts in underlying general relations (our inferences within this field are fraught with dangers). If success is finality, i.e. the loss of energy from a particular struggle, then it is a condition reached only by transformations occurring beyond the terms of the struggle, that is when historical conditions themselves have changed. Otherwise, as a conflict remains ‘current’, its status and significance is subject to multiple reversals - it may have seemed to those participating that a particular event, say the 1905 revolution, was a disaster but then later it may be viewed as, for example, ‘a necessary step’ (and visa versa, a perceived great success may turn out to have subsequent negative effects - the dispersing effects of the anti-poll tax or anti-CPE campaigns as examples).

Taking the definition of success you mention above as ‘direct social relations that prefigure communisation’ with the proviso ‘obviously, these can’t coexist in a stable way with capitalist ones... etc.’ we understand the concept ‘success’ structurally to mean an event or tendency which feeds back into its environment and changes it. From this definition we can go on to identify positive successes and negative successes, the former where, as you say, a set of relations are ‘pushed through to communisation’, the latter being the production of unforeseen and hostile outcomes (the negative success of the situationists occurs to me as an immediate example).

Beyond the limited particularity of specific struggles, success in terms of the general social relation would be defined by a higher rate in occurrence of similarly identifiable events which presently only occur sporadically. A higher rate of discrete successes during moments of social crisis could be seen as an identifiable pattern or 'movement' particularly when they begin to feed into each other, culminating in the generation of an autonomous environment, or cycle, of successful occurrences. Evidently, such a movement would only occur when underlying conditions have themselves changed, the successes acting as an expression of the separation of events from the previous form of the relation.

But our understanding of what are, essentially, autonomous zones still founders on the (Hegelian) logical paradox of containment of smaller events by larger forces, i.e. if a local strike culminates in a 'success' then this outcome remains within a context of hostile relations - and thus still expresses the length and breadth of that relation.

Ordinarily understood, successful discrete opposition to the general conditions which gives rise to the particular forms of opposition in the first place, never exceeds the limits of those conditions. Specific manifestations of success are equally expressions of systemic success. The tension between an environment and its supported lifeforms perhaps is the main factor which ensures the health of that environment. During December 2008 Greek anarchists exploited the 1974 asylum law, which has forbidden entry to the universities by the police unless they are invited by the university authorities, in the cause of their protests. The social standing of the autonomous base nuclei that has developed on the legal framework of 'asylum' in Greece is derived from the military's attack on student occupiers of the Athens Polytechnic in 1973 when 24 students were killed. In other words, although the anarchists seem to successfully attack their conditions, this success also successfully expresses the legally defined limits of those con-

My argument is that because they have let go their critique of work, the entire body of their critique of capitalism has shifted. They have ended up actually affirming the greater part of capitalism. To understand this, it is important to see what capitalism is as a social relationship rather than, say, as a system of producing things. It is important to think of it as a relation between people rather than, a process of getting jobs done, things produced etc.

If we look at the various moments in the most basic circuit of capitalism, this issue becomes clearer: (a) the conversion of life energy into labour; (b) the channelling and exploitation of labour within imposed processes; (c) the conversion of labour (representing life energy) into both (i) material things and a further abstraction into (ii) 'Value'; (d) Value retains the life energy of human energy but in abstracted form, its power is then deployed to attract and combine further life energy so as to reproduce itself in a spiral of abstraction, condensation, precipitation.

This process is concentrated in what we recognise as factories. Yes, factories produce 'things' but their main purpose is to convert life energy into higher and more potent forms of abstract Value. In order to routinize or preserve this circuit of energy conversion, by which life is converted to concentrated, truncated behaviours timed in hours, measured in outputs of 'things', capital has to ensure the 'factorisation' of the entirety of life; this is called 'proletarianisation', or the reproduction of labour. The reproduction of labour is ensured by the conversion of life into 'things' which become the object and purpose of individual life. These dead things which are the output of alienated activity, because they are the object of life, literally tell us what to do; our life is governed/corrected/channelled as if we were the products on a production line and the processes of production were the most important thing in life.

The critique of alienation vs. the critique of political economy

Your opponents seemed so intent on convincing the two of you otherwise (that factories cannot exist in any form whatsoever in communism), that they forgot to ask a simple yet crucial question. I am not interested in arguing for the existence of factories under communism, but your position begs the question: how exactly will we build anything in communism then?

Well, no doubt it will be some form of factory/mass production. It is not for me to say, it is a problem that must be settled at a higher organising level than individual opinion. The point is to ask this question: what is the appropriate communist response to the basic capitalist mode of accumulation and production? As far as I am concerned, it is to find fault, and problematise the totality of what currently exists rather than attempting to isolate, affirm and identify with aspects of capitalism which you agree with.

Do not forget, that the people arguing favour of factories also argued in favour in prisons, they also argued in favour of forced medicalisation of those who refused it, they also denied any relation between the stress of modern life and the causes/exacerbation of illness.

In other words, these people do not have much of a critique of capitalism, in fact they affirm all the historical 'objective' forces and preserve their critique purely for the political direction, or management of, those forces. IN my opinion, the identification with contingent historic forms of the productive forces of society is an anti-proletarian ideology, it neglects, even negates people's experience of their conversion into labour units. For them, communism is materially the same as capitalism only with a more humane form of government – although, as I have pointed out, their version of 'humane' is rather prescriptive and intolerant of those who disagree with it.

ditions. Success, in conventional terms is always supported by the environment of which it is a product... a defined environment of available resources is able to support a greater or lesser diversity of successes in terms of lifeforms, populations, behaviours etc. and which, at all levels, always tend to optimise the resources that are available to themselves. In this way, success should be understood as an optimised relation between competing species and between the species (individually and collectively) and the environment of which they are an outcome.

The supportive environment only reaches a critical condition when a particular form of success expropriates resources beyond the ordinary limit of what is available to it. A positive feedback loop exacerbates the success of a particular outcome of an environment at the environment's expense - in this situation, the system itself behaves in such a manner that facilitates the continued uncontrolled growth of just one of its outcomes at the expense of diverse others. In the case of the Greek anarchists, a feedback runaway would have been established, that is a truly extralegal position would have been achieved, only where the supportive legal environment passed into a critical condition, thus exacerbating the revolt. Apparently, such an exacerbation is possible only where those who actively produce society withdraw their productive activity. This simultaneously adds to the destabilising factors whilst subtracting essential elements from ordinary process. If these reinforcing factors do not occur then the apparent subjective success remains within the terms and resources allocated to social dissonance by a system that retains its equilibrium in part via a defined quantity of revolt. The continued equilibrium of an environmental system is its definition of success, and this is attained by means of nourishing a proliferation in diverse 'life-forms'. Evidently, this systemic success is of a different magnitude to that of the anarchists in Athens, bear markets spirals on the stock exchanges, the spread of cholera in Zimbabwe, or the locust swarms in Australia.

At this point, we must set ourselves this question: what do we think is the historical significance of discreet examples of 'direct social relations'? If we hold to an aggregational perspective, as do many political activists, then we would argue that there must be a colonisation of the world success by success; we would also argue that struggles must be connected and that this conscious imposition of connectivity will eventually achieve a critical mass. But if we maintain an essentially Hegelian understanding (by which I mean the local is determined by the structure of the general) then all successes remain within a hostile territory and still express the depth and flexibility of the totality of the social relations of which they are a product.

As we go... Back, back and forth and forth. This is not to deny that the territory itself sometimes become fluid and that the simultaneous spontaneous appearance in many different locations of similar events and actions are the first indicators of a possible alteration in the general relation. Even so, identifying what is new and belonging on a new designed terrain will not be an easy matter when so much else is thrown up into the air simultaneously.

We are left with a structural paradox, something like a Catch 22, in order for communising acts to occur there must first be general communist relations and yet this generality has no prospect of becoming established without identifiable instances of 'communisation' undertaken by actually identifiable groups of people. Similarly, although capitalism was derived from the activity of actual human beings, the capitalist organisation of these people, and the globalised capitalist social relation always existed prior to any specific capitalist undertaking. The structure must be in place so that instances belonging to it are validated by it. Unfortunately, for those involved (and how is this for a lapse into calvinist theology?) the significance of communising undertakings, does not lie in the authenticity of the acts themselves, but in their increased

That messianic time is not a rupture with what has gone before, in the sense of a separate future but rather the predicting of a different past. I am thinking of that line in Negative Dialectics, 'history is not a steam roller', Adorno at his most Benjamin-like.

Very often 'philosophy' by which I mean the abandoning of 'lines' in favour of 'fields' occurs at the point where individuals cease to adhere to an 'ism'... so it is that departures from orthodoxy become fascinating (e.g. Camatte, Foucault, Perlman, Debord, Deleuze... these are people who departed set frameworks). It is often said that anarchists grow up to become marxists but the best of the marxists grow up to rediscover, what we shall call, anarchism (an unacceptable designation but one which defines that other place beyond intellectual 'commitment' – their becoming 'honest' and the substitution of 'desire' with acceptance of, and honesty before, the big A other of systemic failure).

Complex superstructures based on restrictive value systems remain fragile and are prone to radical decomposition when the underlying 'operating system' itself becomes subject to contradictions which it cannot resolve on its own terms. To conclude this, the totality of human society cannot be channelled along a royal road to 'communism' as allegorised in Mao's conceptualisation of the Long March to power. Communism is not realised by the 'successful' rationalisation of the political-economic sphere. The continuing success of any complex structure such as society cannot be reducible to a single, underlying, motive power, policy implementation, or class interest. Such a reduction, i.e. communisation through state power, has always induced both a tendency to overspecialisation within the structure as well as causing a warping effect via the subsumption of multiple attributes and capacities to a single, overriding imperative.

Contrariwise, success is defined more by a capacity for diversification of modes of activity on the one hand and on an ability to adapt to as wide a set of circumstances as possible on the other. Success, as understood in the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould's concept of the 'branching bush' takes its form in proliferating improvisations from out of an infinite number of practical bases. In this sense, the successfully achieved diversity of a genuine human community may never be recognised by the ideological form of communism which might be considered to be a pretty passing pity - and yet, the mere embrace of totality often indicates a tendency towards a loss of internal discipline and focus, so it can be argued that this refusal of recognition may still play a developmental role (in that it preserves a de-limited coherence as it engages as 'part' to 'whole').

My definition of success is/was the domination of a cycle/series by the lived moment as it achieves a vantage point of a for-itself existence. But now I see that perhaps success is merely the release of past lost codes... that a pure 'living activity' opposed to 'dead labour' is not the thing.

generalised frequency - one hundred 'thorough' acts of communisation in one year might indicate failure whilst one hundred 'incomplete' acts in one day might indicate success.

One problem in recognising what is successful and what is not and adjusting behaviour accordingly is that aspects of communism will very often not function 'consciously' and will not appear with a 'communist' label. Many of these recalibrations of society will be directed towards the conditioning types of apperceptive capabilities including those for recognising success. A greater part of the change in relations will occur at the 'hardware' or 'latent' level of society and will not be labelled in everyday exchanges explicitly as a 'communist' practice. This is a difficult point to make, because it is assumed that communisation is synonymous with communist consciousness, with identifiable 'communist' activity and that this must translate into both a continual purposeful referencing of activities to values (declarations of intent and justification) and deliberate organising (the planned economy).

However, historically, the role of consciousness, the deliberate imposition of values on lived life, has only really existed within religiously orientated societies; otherwise social values tend to perpetuate themselves unconsciously, and through activities which seem 'natural' and autonomous of their conditioning. Therefore the dictatorship of a 'communising' consciousness is probably not necessary and would even function negatively against a genuine communising movement. Ordinarily, human interactions, although a direct product of general conditions, do not make conscious reference to those conditions... and in fact consciousness is constructed so that personal interactions and reflections on the conditioning of those interactions cannot be experienced or articulated simultaneously.

At this point, it is appropriate to mention that I am not beholden to the underlying pragmatist conception of human nature that most leftists adhere to - I am not hung up on bringing the masses to a rational evaluation of their interest. I do not accept that the proletariat lack a necessary consciousness-component or that the addition of such a component would improve the prospect of their interest if expressed in the revolutionary events that might attempt to follow the (inadequate) political outlines of such a consciousness. The implication of this is that the proletariat does not behave as the left expects it to, that is in accordance with a rationalised representation of its interest, and nor will it ever achieve that degree of subjectivity.

Although, this will seem like some late addition to the post-Kojeve framing of French intellectual life of the mid-1950's it remains the case that when we are evaluating instances of success we soon discover that we are simultaneously charting the movement of the Other, and the movement of the (big A) Other takes on very precise forms as it drifts through projects, events, organisations, causing them to fail. We can see from the operation of rationalised systems, and communism in most formulations appears as the successful implementation of a rationalised productivist system that is organised around instituted claims for use-value, that they tend to produce curiously characteristic displacements of irrationality, to give 3 mentioned examples from the news in the last week:

1. The economic dependence on intricately planned global distribution has produced lucrative opportunities for pirates who happen to be located, inopportunistly for insurance companies, in Somalia (a 'failed' nation) for ease of operation in the Gulf of Aden where information concerning the highly co-ordinated movement of shipping is obviously available on the black-market.

2. The increased use of surveillance cameras in the UK perhaps 4.2million (some utilising face recognition technology) alongside harvesting technologies such as the national DNA database of 3.1 million people (the Forensic Science Service can handle 10,000 crime stain samples and 50,000 individual's dna samples per month) indicates a massive technologisation of forensic investigation. And yet this investment in forensic systems has resulted in a decline in violent crime detection from 71% in 1998/9 to 49% in 2006/7 (that is, during the very period we would expect a sharp rise in technologically driven convictions). Rationalised processing within the criminal justice industry produces strange transgressive ghosts such as the German 'woman without a face' who has according to forensic investigation left a dna trace at more than 20 scenes of theft, assault and murder, hundreds of miles apart and over a 10 year period.

3. The violent death of the child legally designated 'Baby P' occurred not only under intensive scrutiny by child protection agencies but also because of active decisions that they made. This case is an exemplar for the critique of the welfare state form, within it we find a number of systemic failures of which I will list a few. The first is stated in the principle 'everything that can go wrong must go wrong' (or Murphy's Law) but it is a characteristic of defensively designed bureaucratic structures that if every unit can malfunction individually then, at some random point, every unit will go wrong simultaneously and systemically (a negative example of transcendent bounce). Another aspect of systemic failure is a process of desensitisation to, and relativisation of, ethical values. Professional detachment shades into brutalised indifference - managers, case workers and 'clients' learn the limits of the system and play it as a game. This periodically reaches a cyclical climax in bursts of vile, and always unprecedented, irrationality. As a subset of this, tolerance levels are defined very precisely, but also rigidly, and it is easy to lose sight of the wider picture, after all, what is being 'managed' here is abuse of young people by older people.