

Your Face is So Mysteriously Kind

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What is objective? The weather.

What is consciousness? Rain on your face.

What is subjective? "My hairstyle is a mess and my make-up is ruined."

Objective is what happens.

Consciousness is presence.

Subjective is complaint.

Objectivity is appropriation.

Consciousness is absorbency.

Subjectivity is defeat.

Object is ground.

Consciousness is mask.

Subject is projectile.

You say:

"there is much to be learned by hurling ourselves, again and again, against the bars of our cage. It is in our necessary failures as much as in our partial, modest and always fragile successes that we learn how this society has crippled us, what it strips from us in terms of dignity and fulfilled desire. But we shouldn't pretend that we are liberated when we are not."

Once, monsters born to the village being not suitable for manual work sold their deformities, physical, and of the soul, to the circus. In this way they were both set free of the conventions of village idiocy and constrained to contemplate themselves only as other saw them, an entertainment; today, abortion has greater cost effectiveness than lifelong confinement.

Tell me, which spectacular creature has an instinct for self-harm? Answer, the social activist.

The activist, whose phantom subject consciousness is defined by its vain wounds, collects injuries by throwing its body at a motionless objectivity, *these are my chains, see how they chafe, this is my cage, how the shadows of its bars fall across me*; Jesus and Rome. Anti-capitalism is a freakshow, a wound parade. Must I cut me and rub earth in the gash to learn that dust is dry? In the hot days of Tehran and Beirut, demonstrators by-passed self-preservation instincts to prove the interpenetration of their subjectivity with the object by hitting themselves on the head until blood ran over their faces. Ketchup is as red but smeared over the head as a sign of fanatical commitment, ultimately inscrutable. Fire workers demonstrate subjective control of their consciousness and thus confound the invitation to conform with objectivity, it is true that their feet are not burnt but their heads are full of ashes.

I do not feel the need to hurl myself, I am hurled. I do not require lessons in necessary failure. My life is lived amidst the failing petals of disappointment. So they say, where there is no pain, in that very place, there is no gain. But I say, learning at the school of hard knocks makes you stupid, look at boxers. Starving all morning doesn't make you appreciate your dinner at twelve and the staged, white knuckled contest with objective conditions, riot shield, pepper spray, water cannon does not illuminate subject/object relations it merely transforms consciousness into a crash helmet. Let the demonstration of force be equal to its capacity to force home the demonstration. Foot dragging non-cooperation remains the best option, the doing of nothing that contributes nothing, the sullen stare that so infuriates our redeemers. Sufficiency. Adequacy.

Life is best in idleness and comfort; intelligence and sensitivity are characteristic of a subject position squeezed from sunshine and soft clothing like red juice from a pomegranate. Revolution is the actualisation of human beings as the object of their subjectivity, it is not religious martyrdom minus the religion. If the walls are not made of paper, don't punch them, if the bars are not made of chocolate, don't eat them. If you cannot win, refuse the fight.

You say,

“...cops, priests, and parents, or anarchists and activists-come into existence through complicated social processes ... the collective human dynamic by which social groups and professions (cops, priests or activists) emerge out of the division of labor ... activism cannot be given up by the individual; it must be superseded in the collective process of overthrowing capitalism ... the subject in the context of its complex, objective social mediations...”

At all times the subject referred to as activist in our investigation is the historically specific, anti-capitalist activist which we do not accept is a subject at all but a phantom of political consciousness. Anti-capitalism in its own words:

“From tribal resistance against Indonesia to the festive attack on the financial heart of London on June 18th these are the voices, not of outsiders or journalists, but of those in involved in the struggle themselves. In these times of concrete alienation these voices shine hope from movements that aim to defend nature, create revolution and re-wild humanity” (*Do or Die* journal).

Stillness, quiet. Noise, frenzy. Staring at a blank wall or senses overloaded? Activism supplies itself as a means of addressing the appearance of social deadlock. The activist can't take it any more, the terrible, terrible silence. It strains at the conventions of appropriate behaviour, *let me dash out into the blizzard and howl, naked and true, if I fail no man may doubt the true grain of my soul*. To the activist's running mouth morality we say, steady boys, steady, wait, steady. But the hothead runs into the street, *come out you murdering dogs*, are its dying words. A fullstop of automatic fire. Good unit but overwrought. Authenticity, publicly witnessed authenticity, drives activism, it senses falseness and aims its critique more at mass conformity than capitalist exploitation; there is little moral doubt in activist heads that social change is predicated only on more people becoming just like them. In its passion for cultural alternatives we see the desire of activism to be not just a negation of present conditions but an incarnation of the future, like Jesus turning up before John The Baptist.

The activist makes its appearance in conditions of tableaux. There is desert, there is sky, of this we can be certain but as to where one begins and the other ends... where there should be definition there is haze. If we are waiting, waiting and watching, for something to happen, for change, the haze is maddening; we cannot make out the horizon. We can see nothing, we pull at our collars, push back our caps, wipe sweat from our eyes; more time passes and still nothing; we have no timetable. We sense something is wrong, is something wrong? Or is this normal? To be expected? And then at last a sail, is it a sail or just a mirage, we've been wrong so many times, is it one of ours or theirs, it approaches in dust. Omar Sharif. Is the desert subjective or objective? In our head, or out? Must try and remember objective is call and subjective is response. Objectiveness is reality and subjectiveness is perspective on reality. So you say.

You say, do you say, objectivity, because it is real, is also true and subjectivity being 'bourgeois, individualist' is fragmented and secondary? In contradiction we say, objectivity is also absorbed, it is not merely 'objective'. It is in us, it is the historical condition of our perspective. And subjectivity is dictatorship, the capture

of reality; the ruling class is a subject and its subjectivity defines our objectivity. The ruling class is a subject not because it has been produced by objective process but because it possesses objective processes, or that is, a bigger chunk of them than anybody else. And this is how it is that the subject became not merely product but also producer; it is the subject in the morning that names itself by taking up its axe, stepping out into the world. The subject is not only defeat, it is also resistance and making. Objectivity is obscured when the subject separates itself by aiming at another subject. Shall we say, that there is no objectivity, only the temporary tension, the aggregate of all subjective forces at work in one instance? That and ideology, objectivity is a weapon that the subject uses on the subjected. The dominant subject imposes hierarchically graded subjections on rival subjects. The dominant subject seemingly dissolves its own subject position and transforms it into objectivity. The only legitimate activity assigned to the subjected subject is to articulate a motive for choosing to do what it would be forced to do anyway.

Activists choose to be activists, They choose not to be what is assigned to them. Their struggle with reality is external to their subjectivity; they adopt a subject position not assigned them and in consequence cease to function as a subject component at all, becoming a projection. By choice activists become something other than what they are objectively. And this is a revolutionary act. It is a revolutionary decision which fails to coincide with revolutionary events.

It is the stillness in which they move that forces activists upon our attention. They are the seizure on the bus, the fainting guardsman on parade.

Activism is the military imposition of a would-be dominant subject position but without sufficient force of arms. Who asked them? Delegated by nobody, in accord with no process, emerging at no particular juncture they are, historically, putschists; by their intervention they hope to inspire force. But force does not follow intent, just cause, or compelling argument, it follows force; power tends toward power and activists, good time gatecrashers to a wake, lack the necessary muscle; they chant, ring bells, wave coloured cloth but the world stays mute, we stare at them, then they fade away, like phantoms, join us, they whisper but we carry on greyly. They act in the name of the earth or justice or the working class, whatever is mute, big and objective-seeming but they do not register, they are not real.

Activism is not produced by the some processes that make the police or managers or plumbers or counter staff or machine minders — as these, precisely, are the invisible, the objective, the grains of sand, the function/defunctioning, the writhing backdrop across which subjects inscribe their routes, the stuff from which collectivities are formed and frustrated. Activism is not a function of political economy, it has little connection to the objective and therefore no claim to subjectivity (perhaps it is an existential function of reality). It describes a negative figure in con-

sciousness, it is one part phantom subject and one part appropriated subjection, it has a need to feel oppression, to take on board suffering from elsewhere. It perceives what is wrong and simultaneously imposes itself, inappropriately, as a solution. At all times it affirms the necessity of what it does, deriving the justification for its actions from higher exigencies, objective laws.

The drive to affirm 'action' is an apparent anomaly for a negative social construct, we would otherwise expect ambivalence, uncertainty, the nagging doubt: *if we are not part of the objective, then with what is our interest bound?* In the positivity of activists, their not despairing, there is another element present, folded into the accentuated rebellion — activists search for solutions within existing conditions, they ask themselves, *of all the ingredients present in this moment, which is the one that will abolish it?* They rarely fail to identify themselves.

Activism refuses what it is first given but its drive against passivity draws it at last to act both within the zone of the dominant subject and in a manner appropriate to that zone. It begins in attacking a manifest appearance, *the golden arches*, and ends up in attacking the non-appearance of the masses. If structural oppressiveness supplies the entrance for the anti-capitalist character, generalised political indifference marks its exit.

Behind the vaunted alternatives to globalisation are the bourgeois values of social democracy, the concept of universal abstract equality of individuals; *real democracy* requires only that individuals *become* their abstract value, if only people *participated* and made their voices heard, incarnate the theoretical human being of rights and belief, fill out the legalistic skeleton of right bequeathed to every individual with the flesh and blood of engagement in civic forums, then, a-ha then money could never withstand the advented blossoming of this new Athens. When the masses do not lift up their snouts from the all-consuming, filthy and destructive self-indulgences then it is time to drink the bitter tea of decision: the question is formulated, whether to work with those who are listening (the state as charities/capital as alternative markets) or to go on and *do it* anyway, force it on those bastards who don't give a damn. Either way the charred and grisly chunk that floats to the surface of activism's cauldroning stew is, with or without wood ash, a final contempt for the working class.

At the structural level, that is the most cruel level, and in the guise of a rancid consciousness, activism is the dominant subject's judgment on itself, it is the negative judgment of imagined, objective authority.

That which at last must out itself as reformism (a recent anti-capitalist counter conference in Porto Alegre, *'Une internationale rebelle mois democrotique... Une internationale patiente, sons grand soir ni illusion lyrique. Une internationale sans dogme, sons hymne... [le Nouvel Observateur]*, an international so keen to get the job done that if it has to it is prepared to work with the least bad bits of the state (to

get things done, to make achievement concrete), an international of pragmatism, of works, an international that the least bad bits of the state recognise as people it can do business with; the common ground is effectiveness, the radical scythe that cuts through the old Byzantine hierarchies, the fire that burns but renews. What the least bad bits of state/capital recognise in anti-capitalism is the entrepreneurial impulse to begin again — the optimistic search for green shoots, the management of crisis, the positive factor in economic meltdown. In the social structure, anti-capitalism appears as the angel of destruction but it is a deity nonetheless dedicated in the Pantheon — a catalyst in the change of details. Activism is the begin again Finnegan. The mutual interest of state and anti-state is the factor of effectiveness, to getting things done on tighter lines. But effectiveness in the capitalist sphere is always a movement towards the maximisation of productive efficiency.

Revolutionary positions begin to take shape in activist groups within this context of reformation and the re-alignment of apparent enemies in terms of achievable detail. The revolutionary reflection on *doing it* takes the character of despair, it begins by listing failure, limitations and unnatural couplings.

The revolutionary critique of activism's rejoining the world, which begins within the terms activism has set, is manifested separately at precisely the point where a negative evaluation is imposed as a reflection on small group action. Despair finds that the self-defined subject, that is *revolutionary desire*, does not have sufficient force to strike at the world; and if it greatly increased its resources it could only swap seats with the present incumbents (and so the foraging for resources, endorsements and recruits by activist parties) — the more activist individuals there are, the more custard like their consciousness, the closer their organisations resemble those of the state; twelve.

The revolutionary reflection on activism is constituted as an awareness of the powerlessness of activism and its deluded march on power. The revolutionary position found after activism is not a fully formed subject position but a mode of consciousness (*for-revolutionist*); it maintains itself by doing nothing until it is finally abolished by or fused with the revolutionary subject proper. (*For-revolutionist* is the term given to a position which desires revolution but is conscious of its inability to make it.) It is likely that the revolutionary subject under pressure of events, will immediately grasp everything *for-revolutionary consciousness* has struggled to articulate in two hundred years.

The revolutionary subject is, quite plainly, the revolutionary working class but this is not a theological matter, there is no necessity for belief; it is so, simply because only the working class have direct access to the processing of power and simultaneously no structural interest in the continued existence of the process. Revolution begins exclusively in the self-interested actions of the working class, defining itself as a subject and defending itself against objectivity. What any fu-

ture relation might be between *for-revolutionary consciousness* and the formation of the revolutionary subject is unclear. The revolutionary subject is mode from the working class which is the subjected subject position, how is the working class to become the revolutionary working class? Impossible to say.

they saw the effect but not the cause

You say,

“the need for a theory, a theory that can *think the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ simultaneously*, seeing them in all their mutually-conditioning relatedness ... We all know that one of the main characteristics of the traditional activist is a disdain for theory...”

The need you talk of is that of vinegar for salad. But revolutionary theory is not the dressing of practice, it is practice; it does not inform or motivate, it cannot be acted on, it does not explain, it does not provide justification or understanding. *I tell my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries.*

As ideas do not determine reality, theory does not have to be servant of reality.

Revolutionary theory engages or it is philosophy but the form of engagement is not set in advance, revolutionary theory has no role to play but that of being itself.

We are not concerned with the convenience of the revolutionary organisation. Spring does not raise up the dead leaves of Autumn and sew them to the trees, the project assigned to theoreticians of revolution by events is to theorise.

Elsewhere, theory is a trick, the window-dressing that gets the punters in. Today I saw a Socialist Workers’ Party sticker in new ‘protest’ graphics and radical, groovy typeface. It did not say, ‘trotskyists go to raves too.’ It did say, ‘our resistance must be as global as capitalism,’ (dozens of passers-by nodded off after only momentary glances). The left wing fragments of the state are generally submitting themselves to a stylistic makeover, everybody’s funky nowadays. Several left groups have shifted the emphasis of their rhetoric and it’s no more ‘come on workers sign a petition to defend the NHS’, now its, ‘rebel’ ‘resist’ ‘fightback’ — they are the sting without a bee, they are the pie without a filling; these dull trudgers with pingpong eyes and feet like penguins, the slogan this is consciousness tattooed to their foreheads; these are the issue troops marching, marching, marching, all dressed in slice ‘o’ bread jackets soaking up the rain like gravy. Selling revolution on street corners to the Saturday shoppers is altogether futile, unless that is you are some kind of Reggie Perrin.

The hope of revolutionary theory is for its own potential usefulness, but that is not its function. What is said, as theory, is not significant — theoretical intervention rarely has a consequential content; for it, context is all. Where it speaks, who it speaks to, that’s what matters. So long as it addresses the revolutionary milieu,

revolutionary theory can say anything. So never hold back, do not appeal, do not sell, do not imagine that what you are saying is reasonable or convincing, don't overestimate the power of truth, which in most lives is no more than an irritant, treatable with lotion. He who has ears, let him hear! We shall connect only with those who are able to connect.

The object of revolutionary theory is not to address consciousness and thereby correct it, the eyes that browse along the supermarket shelf see just another can.

Revolutionary theory is bound up in events; what is its relation to the revolutionary position and what is that position's relation to the revolutionary subject?

Clownish absurdities at the right moment are more magical than understanding and the luxury of nonsense demonstrates mastery of conditions. Natural selection asks of birds an exhibition of their startling plumage, simple communication of information is not sufficient.

When the event is the event of falling apart it is the theory that may be broken into pieces that is most useful. Theory to be kept in pockets or scratched onto surfaces – theory is what prevents you being broken down, it's what stops you playing for the other side; in crisis, theories are instruments for changing terms; in crisis theories are portable tools that connect to larger forces, levers to weights; a ladder, an aspirin, a jackhammer and becomes a shelter for the birds of the sky.

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