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# REVOLUTIONARY THEORY FOR BEGINNERS

(PURE & APPLIED)

Three Situationist Texts



Critical theory does not present a fixed, "objective" truth. It is an assault, a formulation abstracted, simplified and pushed to the extreme. The principle is, "If the shoe fits, wear it": people are compelled to ask themselves to what extent the critique rings true and what they are going to do about it. Those who wish to evade the problem will complain about the critique as being unfairly one-sided, not presenting the whole picture. Conversely, the dialectically ignorant revolutionary who wishes to affirm his extremism will confirm the critique (as long as it's not against him) as being an objective, balanced assessment.

## ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, 1976

by Nadine Bloch

In September 1973 I participated in the formation of the Center for Research on the Social Question from which I resigned in December 1975. At that time, all things considered, I definitely had to acknowledge my personal failure during those two years, which can be summed up as follows: I did not have during that period any individual theoretico-practical activity.

*The members of the CRQS are chosen from among the revolutionaries . . . who want to assemble in the present semi-organizational solution in order to continue, in their name only, to address the revolutionary movement.*

*(Declaration concerning the CRQS—Bloch, Charles, Cornuault, Denevert)<sup>1</sup>*

What follows is a reflection taken, for the most part, from this failure.

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Practical impotence—behindism<sup>2</sup>—is the result of the contradiction between the theory an individual adheres to from the exterior and his practice, i.e. the real choices that he carries out in his life; so that there is apparently more truth to the ideologue of the right, left, or whatever—who defends in his 'ideas' the poverty of his life and who thus gives proof of a certain ideological coherence—than there is with the behindist. But the epoch makes it more and more difficult to maintain such a total illusion about it and about oneself.

The proof of the efficacy and the extremism of a theory at whose center is the affirmation of the individual is that it's impossible to adhere to it from the exterior without becoming totally impotent: it allows neither half-measures nor compromises. But it is also this theory's task to determine and theoretically and practically resolve this contradiction; to consider it not as an aberration located outside itself but, rather, as its own internal weakness. Revolutionary theory is concerned with its own spectacularization. It is a matter of answering this question: why, and also how, do people adhere to revolutionary theory from the exterior?

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To practice theory, one's own theory, it is necessary to subjectivize the world: to recognize what in it is opposed to one's interests, objectives, and desires, and to avail oneself of the means to realize these; to consider exterior reality as a field for personal experimentation, the terrain of interventions, of the possible. This is what the behindist, passing his time in analyzing what about him is opposed to his ideal revolutionary realization, does not know how to do. However, this moment does not suffice, because it does not allow anyone to make the choice between his individuality, his desire to master his life, and his alienation. On the contrary, outside of revolutions and isolated moments of revolt, it is not real aspirations which are spontaneously known and pursued, but rather those which each particular spectacle designates, for it is those which do not encounter opposition in the present social organization. The moment of subjectivization is thus the moment of modern spectacular consumption, including its counter-cultural pseudo-alternative; it is the moment of the illusion of authenticity.

One must therefore, at the same time, objectify oneself: which is to say, seize in oneself what belongs to the spectacle and alienation—that is, every-

1. The Declaration may be obtained in French from the Centre de Recherche sur la Question Sociale, BP218, 75865 Paris cedex 18, France, or in the English translation of *Theory of Misery, Misery of Theory* by D.Denevert, translated by Cooperstein, Hammer & Knabb. Write: R.Cooperstein, p.o. box 950, Berkeley, CA 94701, USA.

2. See *Double Reflection* (K.Knabb, p.o. box 1044, Berkeley, CA 94701; French translation available from the CRQS) and *Behindism* (C.Shutes, p.o. box 950, 4502 Berkeley, CA 94704, Nadine Bloch will send a copy of her French translation upon request). *Double Reflection* also available from Nick Brandt.



thing which tends to maintain the status quo of dominant social relations—and be as severe as when these things manifest themselves elsewhere. This is the never-definitively-established condition of a true seizure of one's real aspirations.

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Repression is directly opposed to the practice of theory; it is always **simultaneously** repression of real aspirations and failure to recognize their inversion in alienation. A repressed individual—and to a large extent **one chooses** repression almost consciously—is just as incapable of really intervening in the world as he is in himself. The choice of repression is thus choice for **what exists**, for submission, falsehood, ideology, spectacle. This does not mean that someone who practices theory does not know repression, but his work leads him to progressively discover new interests, desires and objectives, as well as new resistances and new obstacles; in this process he transforms himself. The individual who chooses repression is neurotic, but not necessarily more than someone else; he can even be relatively free of neurosis; but he does not change himself; it is circumstances which change him, circumstances which anchor him more and more deeply in the dominant alienation.

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The choice of repression, of resignation, does not appear as such to the individual's consciousness; to be able to tolerate it and **himself**, to flee his shame, he justifies it by an objective, exterior constraint stronger than he. During the previous phase of class society, authority and hierarchy constituted this at once **objective and subjective** internalized constraint which, when accepted, justified resignation. Today, when the old forms of hierarchization are breaking down before the obstinacy of proletarians in struggle, the resigned individual tends to replace those forms with **affective ties**, a new excuse for his complicity with the existing world. But clearly such ties have only a subjective reality.

Having feelings of affection in regard to other people is not contradictory in itself with maintaining an individual point of view—**true** affection can only exist where there is individual affirm-

ation—except when these feelings serve as **justification** for a person to abandon his point of view. I define affective relations as those relations justified by 'affection' which can only maintain themselves on the basis of repression.

Pseudo-affection, which serves as justification for self-betrayal, must itself be justified—to give a coherent appearance to this very betrayal—with **objective** qualities, be they real or imaginary, encountered in the people who are the objects of pseudo-affection. But in so doing, the affective individual reveals that he aspires to be loved for his 'objective', intrinsic qualities, even though he does not know how to put them to use **for himself**—and thus these qualities do not exist—any more than he knows how to recognize through practice the qualities of his friends. Having renounced his point of view, renounced critique, he demands that others reciprocate, that they leave him alone, that they accept him as he is. What is to be found here is in fact the old mystico-bourgeois conception of the 'interior richness of the human being, always there to be discovered', which would have it that a person is something other than what he actually does. And with the affective revolutionary, interior richness becomes 'interior radicality'.

However, in all of this, we can recognize, although certainly in a reified form, a manifestation of men's and women's real need for affection, for friendship, for love, a need which is so frustrated in the present general conditions of separation.

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The affective revolutionary endeavors not to be criticised: on the one hand by effectively not doing anything, not making any 'error' which might offer the basis for a critique, on the other hand **by not playing any precise, identifiable role**. He is generally modest, even timid, pleasant, loyal, lucid, full of good will, etc. . . . But this no longer means anything, since the modern spectacle makes use of this facile contestation as anti-role. In fact, if a person does not manifest his opposition to the dominant conditions **actively**, by decisions, oppositions and errors, he merely manifests **his desire to be recognized by others as anti-spectacular**. This

role is the ultimate recourse of those who still do not want to face up to their lot, when all the other attitudes—such as the arrogance without content of the pro-situationist—have appeared clearly and been denounced as mystifying; but these people are mistaken if they think that the modesty of what they hope to **buy** with their role—tranquility in mediocrity, a good conscience, and a little sympathy, rather than power or prestige—protects that role from an all-too-rapid devalorization. The anti-role already appears for what it is: a manner of fleeing and distorting reality.

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It is astonishing enough that the majority of those excluded from the SI (as with many people from whom other radical groups or individuals have had to separate) thereafter definitely renounced—judging from their silence—the perspectives they had till then defended. In fact, we must suppose that many among them had never really defended these perspectives, that they had not felt totally engaged by them, that, in one way or another, these perspectives had been exterior to them.

What the affective revolutionary wants to avoid above all is the exclusion or break (one can have the same kind of relation to an organization as one does to one or more individuals, even if the existence of a collectivity camouflages this relation), because this appears to him as veritable treason on the part of the object of his attachment, in fact because it signals the end of his illusion about himself, an illusion sustained and dependent only on the maintenance of this very relation, of his membership in the collectivity. But he nonetheless remains in constant fear of what might happen, as though it were a matter of a misfortune which can only be inflicted on him from on high, by an authority to whom he has submitted for so long a time. All his talk and gestures are calculated in avoidance of it; but his margin of maneuverability, between the minimum apparent autonomy which he must keep up if he does not want to be rejected immediately and the complete abstention towards which he tends, is slight.

To the degree that a person 'loves' an authority who accepts him as submissive and impotent, this 'love' transforms itself into hate and resentment when this authority refuses to be one any longer. The violence of breaks is well-founded when those breaks are caused by the publicity, stemming from a concrete fact, of **previously concealed individual renouncement**. And it is only traumatizing for someone who, even after the separation, continues to accord an authority to those from whom he is separated. This traumatism and the resentment which accompanies it is one of the factors which can precipitate the abandonment, even brutal rejection, of the perspectives apparently defended till then.

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When an affective revolutionary undertakes to consider his past, to understand what errors he made and what wealth they held, he realizes that he cannot. From the multiple experiences he has participated in, **he cannot draw any particular lesson**, because his experiences have never belonged to him, he has never been really involved in them, the errors that have been produced were not his. He has made only one 'error': that of not beginning from himself, or of having forgotten himself along the way. This is the total error, the error which does not contain any element susceptible to being corrected, precised or developed, until a **total reversal of perspective** has taken place, until the illusion which founded the refusal to begin with oneself has itself been considered and **critiqued practically**. In short, the affective revolutionary must make decisions which directly modify a concrete situation which has made illusion necessary.

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Historically, this has been the general situation of women<sup>3</sup> (just as individually they are very often affective persons). The history of the theoretico-practical struggles of the proletariat for its liberation does not belong to them. They can only appropriate this history in acquiring **the understanding of the causes of their absence**, therefore in

3. See *Arms & the Woman* by Jeanne Charles; English translation by Ken Knabb, available in the original French from the CRQS.



seizing hold of their present history, which is something they are beginning to do everywhere. Since even in the dominant class women were excluded from the active exercise of power, the autonomous struggles of women have long been bourgeois in nature, demanding formal equality for men and women in the framework of existing conditions. It is now, when the development of the spectacle and the commodity has rendered possible and necessary such an equality, that feminine alienation, and not inequality, clearly appears as the one of these subjective conditions which has permitted this development; at the same time, a quasi-total absence of the critique of this alienation becomes evident. In this light, one can affirm that the ensemble of theoretico-practical struggles of the proletariat is more the result of the critique of masculine alienation than of feminine alienation, which is visible as much in their form as in their content, even though these struggles have always implicitly included—to various degrees—a critique of the dominant relations between men and women.

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At the center of the alienation of women one finds both their need to submit to men and their criteria, and the contempt that women have for themselves. The general absence of autonomous and qualitative activity of women in the situationist milieu signifies that the struggle of women against their condition is not yet developed to a point where they have mastered its expression, and also that revolutionary activity as it is still practiced today is too masculine, still contains too many criteria to which women can submit.

It is significant that the participants (all men) in the Orientation Debate of the SI never stopped posing the question of the appropriation of their theory by the workers, of the necessary interaction between the theory they formulated and this appropriation, without ever even citing this same question for women.

This problem can only appear within and coming from a sufficient critique of everyday life, when activity no longer separates itself from this critique. Thus wherever only men have an activity and women do not (whether women aspire to one or not), critical activity itself is

considered by men, and by the women who submit themselves to them, in a narrow manner, as essentially written and public production. This written production is considered not as one necessary and natural moment in the ensemble of the work of the negative, 'a refined product of practical struggles, consciousness momentarily crystalized in a form on the way to becoming broken down again into raw material for other struggles' (K. Knabb, *Double Reflection*), but as its whole. Even those who in speaking and writing pose the critique of everyday life as central can ignore the critique of their everyday lives. And it is only because it is envisioned as separate activity—by its spectators and all too often by its producers—that theoretical activity is considered prestigious.

This so-called practice of theory leaves a part of the individual's life and real needs out of consideration: the part that the individual does not want to change, the part he has accustomed himself to, the side of him that is resigned. Everything the critique leaves out is left to the spectacle. All the while, the content of this so-called theory, no matter how much of it is objectively correct, still constitutes a theory of separated, mutilated life.

Men who practice a theory separated from their lives exclude women *de facto* from this practice, 'hence the particular miseries in the love relations in the situationist milieu' (Knabb). Unable to have 'theoretical' relations with women—the only relations which really interest these men and which they are capable of following out—these men find themselves not knowing what to do with women, except to lavish advice on them or to show indulgence for and pseudo-comprehension of 'their difficulties in producing theory'. And when men renounce this task from weariness or when the inefficacy of this attitude becomes apparent to them, they undertake sexual relations with women which are all the poorer as they are envisioned as separate from their critical activity—an aside, a pastime. This semi-conscious contempt for women is only the contempt that men have for sexuality in general, for their sexuality in particular, in fact for their own concrete existence.

These men are not without 'exigence' for women. They want women to be

'revolutionary'; which for them means: that women recognize them as revolutionary; which is to say that women be

subject to the same criteria as men are; in fact that women not be revolutionary.

## Cancerous Consciousness

or

### The misadventures of the theory of character

*It seems that when it is preoccupied with itself, consciousness disturbs its own functioning. The pause which ushers in the act of consciousness has been for some of our contemporaries a pretext to flee from action. Like Zeno's runner, in reflecting on the cause they lose the power to attain the goal. . . . Interior life serves as excuse for deserting exterior life. Introspection replaces action instead of transforming it . . . This cancerous consciousness employs the processes of consciousness to reverse the very function of consciousness. Creative consciousness is action and command . . . ; cancerous consciousness is retreat in the face of action, and resignation to one's lot. Creative consciousness is an instrument of truth and clarity. Cancerous consciousness is an apparatus of mystification.*

Emmanuel Mounier—*Traité du caractère*

This cancerous consciousness has manifested itself—as an essential aspect of behindism—within the revolutionary movement. Here are some critical judgments which expose what the behindists seek to ignore, to themselves and to others, and what the psychologists certainly ignore: what truth is mystified and why? what action is fled? What interests can someone have in maintaining himself in such a situation?

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Nadine Bloch (10.16.75)

"On the terrain of the possible, character is the principle obstacle to autonomy. In my opinion, it is not for this reason that one must launch a head-on attack on one's character; this is the mistake that I have made too often. It is in the very course of life, in the difficulties and blocks encountered there, that the diverse manifestations and peculiar aspects of character present themselves as a concrete hindrance to the realization of desires and objectives. Moreover, in this process one can push oneself and transform oneself without submitting to external models.

. . . The critique of a person must bear this in mind: it is not a question of the degree of autonomy effectively attained by an individual, for this does not make sense and necessarily lends undue emphasis to the most spectacular aspects of autonomy, but of the capacity

to approach and resolve the conflicts arising between character and one's conscious perspectives. A revolutionary person knows how to put himself in situations where he encounters blocks and learns to supersede them. Through their gropings and errors in these situations individuals are furnished with the bases for their theory of their own lives."

N. Bloch (11.19.75)

"The self-critique of J. is not one, it is really a self-depreciation essentially because it remains in the upside-down perspective of the 'critique of character' which always and inevitably poses character and characterological attitudes as a person's normal condition. Of course, the real question is not to determine the part of consciousness which remains in the unconscious, but to create the conditions which will suppress the part as yet unconscious still existing in consciousness."

Daniel Denevert (October 1975)

"(Let no one speak to me here about character, that latest find of determinism. I will answer that I hold character to be a conscious choice effected and repeated in the use of life. That here autonomy applies itself through the form of character simply in order to flee itself; that this choice is not so irrational—much less innocent—to the extent that in existing



conditions it takes its stand flatly on the side of Power, a power which in the present alignment of forces still designates real autonomy and not character as the **position of weakness**. That whoever enters into the revolutionary adventure ceaselessly interposing failures and limits which he attributes to the difficulties that his 'character' gives him, makes me sick. That I won't play this game. That I don't for one moment believe him to be the victim of his unconscious; that I take him for someone who wants to play both sides at the same time, that is to say for a faker and a swine! And that his first fakery consists in his not leaving behind his need to fake, that is, his choosing to **still fake with us!**")

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COMPTE-RENDU 1976 by Nadine Bloch

available from Nadine Bloch: BP 167,  
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N.Bloch (November 1975)

"I believe one can state that the ideological utilization of the theory of character, which would have it that an individual could be excused because he is a victim of his character, is nothing other than a **counter-offensive** within the very heart of the revolutionary movement waged by the least conscious, more submissive individuals against the power—all-in-all legitimate—that the more conscious individuals have over them; a counter-offensive, in fact, by **dominant power against consciousness**. In presenting itself for something other than what it is, this counter-offensive has been a real trap."

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON SUBJECTIVISM AND INTELLECTUALISM

by Joël Cornuault

*When a person decides to become a revolutionary . . . he lapses into the state of being merely pro-situ when he fears starting his critique of everything from himself. As a result, he becomes incapable of really criticising anything, for no other reason than the fact that his critiques don't proceed from his passion to liberate his own daily life, from his own subjectivity.*

(Gina Rosenberg, Chris Shutes—*Disinterest Compounded Daily*)<sup>1</sup>

So, it is necessary to start from oneself, from one's own subjectivity, to practice theory. But **subjectivism** makes an ideology of the essential: it is the false claim to desire, the claim to apparent desire. Subjectivism wants the realisation of all existing desires, including alienated desires, those desires which belong to the spectacle—'the moment of subjectivation is thus the moment of modern spectacular consumption, including its counter-cultural pseudo-alternative; it is the moment of the **illusion of authenticity**.' (Nadine Bloch—*All Things Considered*, 1976).

In recuperating an **aspect** of revolutionary theory—"I want to realise my subjectivity; my desires only are important, they are beyond discussion, blah blah blah", which is exactly the kind of behaviour which finds a niche for itself in the ultra-modern spectacle, and, more and more, enables it to function—the subjectivist puts his mediocre dream to live in abundant ease and tranquility into pseudo-subversive language.

He is the individual of **illusion** par excellence, because he has not lost the belief—a banal but essential one for the survival of the system—that there is a place, somewhere in **this society** where you can enjoy 'the good life'; or that there is a social status, or people that could make him happy; the subjectivist is utterly colonised by the spectacle, that is to say, by the organisation of the **appearance of happiness**.

But once you have got through his superficial eccentricity, the weird and showy veneer of his 'desires' and his 'subjectivity', the subjectivist always has appallingly conventional tastes, habits and motives.

As long as it doesn't realise its true desires, humanity will remain unhappy—a good reason for being merciless with pseudo-desires, with the desires for appearance, with apparent desires.

Subjectivist confusion, and the whole ideology that goes with it, results from the fact that desires come to consciousness indistinguishably—there are, at one and the same time, **authentic** desires and **apparent** desires, profound and superficial desires. In a given conflict, contradictory desires face one another. The only reality apparent desire has is to impede authentic desire from revealing itself as the real desire, and to seek its satisfaction. When the real desire hasn't been realised, it gives birth to other new apparent desires, and one flees again and again, accumulating debts towards oneself.

Is there nothing easier—but eventually more unbearable—than to avoid intervening in one's desires—i.e. to realise only one's apparent desires, to consume them? It is the very proletarian condition, the subjective condition of the new poverty.

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The point is therefore not to defend **every** aspect of subjectivity, to leave untouched the miserable part of subjectivity (whether one calls it character or not).

The notion of 'the dissolution of character'—though it has the advantage of indicating that there exists a conflict of opposed interests, within the individual himself, a conflict between resignation and revolution—is nonetheless far from satisfactory.

The ideology of the dissolution of character serves as an escape from practical criticism of daily misery and enables one to maintain contradictions. If one has to wait for people to dissolve

1. Available from the authors at: P.O. Box 4502, Berkeley, Ca.94704, USA.



their character before they start to move a revolution will never happen, and there would never have been any revolutions in the past.

Dissolution of character is a person's capacity—or inability—to triumph at a given moment in a situation of **dual-power**; it is his capacity to make the choice for theory, truth, revolution at this moment. What one usually calls dissolution only has a permanence in as much as these choices and these moments are **renewed** in one's life.

The **progress** an individual makes is a sequence of deepening breaks with the system and with the new equilibrium points it tends to re-establish at every stage. (Clearly some characterological blocks are permanently destroyed and therefore there is no need to fight them any more; but experience shows that they are not always the main blocks.)

Parallel to the demand for an abstract dissolution of character—a demand which is only a **fake** coherence, and mostly consists in attacking what revolutionary **ideology** points out as criticisable—the subjectivist spectacle is more or less explicitly underlain by the belief that people **have no power** over their own subjectivity, that it dominates them as an alien force. In fact, this mini-ideology must be understood as the essential argument for **resignation**. What is absent from it is the desire to conquer one's life.

Only those people drowning in the spectacle of revolution can imagine that the revolutionary theorist doesn't meet any **difficulty**, any inner resistance, and that he has 'dissolved' his character thanks to a miracle. This is a particular effect of their general taste for facile things. It is easier to imagine the theorist as a kind of God who lives radically without problem, because it allows one to justify one's **own passivity** in relation to the divine nature projected into this hero, before whose steps obstacles just miraculously crumble.

But beyond those illusions there is obviously no **miracle**. What subjectivists don't want to understand (and they actually refuse to cope with the consequences which may arise from it) is that if the desire for life which asserts itself in practical-critical activity is a **source of joy**—an activity which is 'so often fun, absorbing, meaningful, exhilarating, funny', as Ken Knabb puts

it,<sup>2</sup>—it is also necessary to launch **battles** which are not always the cause, or even the object of the immediate pleasures that subjectivists seek to consume in this activity, at the same time as they admire it.

The critique of daily life is not always that **easy**, and 'Will alone does not suffice to provide oneself with courage and to remove fear; truly, one must toil to consider the reasons, the aims and the examples which are able to convince one that danger is not overwhelming, that there always will be more safety in defence than in escape; that one will gather glory and joy as a winner, whereas in escaping one can only expect regret and shame.' (Descartes)

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*Since we know that they triumphed only in the framework of a global failure, it's necessary to re-discover the entire truth, and re-examine all the oppositions among revolutionaries, all the possibilities that were neglected, without being impressed any longer by the fact that some revolutionaries were right as opposed to the others, that they dominated the whole movement.*

(Internationale Situationniste, no. 7)

Up to now, revolutionary theory has essentially carried out a critique of the **subjectivist aspects** of ideology, but it has tended to neglect a critique of the exact opposite ideological misery: its **intellectualist aspect**. This weakness was not accidental; it is merely because subjectivism, in its naivety, illusions and incoherences was more **visibly criticisable**. What we must now criticise is the opposite ideological tendency, which has found a place to strengthen itself in the very existence and development of the implicit or explicit subjectivism of a part of the revolutionary 'milieu'.

Subjectivism and intellectualism can only be understood in terms of their—false—opposition: for the most part, the subjectivist reproaches the intellectualist for his lack of **sensitivity** (theory is cold, impersonal, only for egg-heads etc.), while the intellectualist reproaches the subjectivist for his sensitivity, a sensitivity seen as the cause of his **lack of thought**, the source of his weaknesses, of his character. But both of them are

merely talking of **spectacular sensitivity** and thought. They don't criticise each other, they merely complain about the other for not being an accomplice in the same spectacle.

If the subjectivist seeks to **defend himself against criticism**, the intellectualist, on the contrary, seeks to use **criticism itself as a defence**. It is the beginning of the **theorist role** (to have spoken of the theorist as a 'professional', would have been very unthought out, since theory ends where a profession begins; the choices of a career are immediately in conflict with those of practical truth).

At the individual level, intellectualism is mainly a **defensive role** against one's own feelings which are seen as mere **weaknesses** by the intellectualist. He is haunted and tormented by his fear of being 'caught out' by others; fetishism of coherence threatens him and he builds up his situationist armour: 'the "miserable without theory" mistakes publicity of misery for a mere display of misery . . . conversely, the "theorist without misery" conceals his own misery in theoretical activity. The theorist both fears and needs others' misery because he wants to hide his own.' (Peres—On The Side of the Subject).

The intellectualist is the individual who **inhibits misery**, and intends this to be its **supersession**. His motto could be: 'I'd rather suffer than let my misery appear to others.' But he forgets the work that this inhibition produces in him and in his social relationships. The sufferings you impose on yourself, you want to make others pay for; it's the alpha and omega of the intellectualists' tactics.

Inhibition of alienation is **self-interested**, just as its mere display: in the former position, the individual tries to put himself in a hierarchical situation; in the latter position, he tries to organise his escape from autonomy.

Subjectivism and intellectualism are born in the **very crisis** of the old hierarchical models as the final<sup>3</sup> resistances to their supersession. Practice of theory is self-assertion on the external world: but the poverty of subjectivists' and

intellectualists' social lives comes from the fact that the former can't **assert himself** without denying to others their quality of **autonomous and thinking** individuals, whereas the latter can only assert himself by denying to others their quality of **loving and sensitive** individuals.

Whilst the subjectivist constantly tends to **appropriate** other people—especially in identifying his own misery with that of the others, creating thus purely affective relationships with them—the intellectualist constantly seeks to **reject** them—especially because he can't bear any recall of his repressed sensitivity through others: it is a **fake** distancing, purely defensive and fearful, a pseudo-criticism used to resolve complex relationships, to put an end to difficult situations. One has built an ideology of **reconciliation**, the other an ideology of **separation**.

To each of them, the personality of the other is a threat for it **embodies** their own repressed. If the subjectivist sees the intellectualist as a monster of rigidity and hardness, the intellectualist sees the other as a monster of looseness and weakness.

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The little mythology that the intellectualist constructs for himself is as stupid as that of the pro-situ or the subjectivist. If the subjectivist keeps portraying himself as a very passionate and sensitive person, the intellectualist is infatuated with images of coherence, strategy, rigour, as self-managed spectacles. 'Life is a game of chess' is usually his crudest statement.<sup>4</sup>

To the intellectualists' **spectacle of thought** corresponds the subjectivists' **spectacle of passion**: although they aren't two absolute and perfectly delimited models, subjectivism is more a tendency of **alienated women** and intellectualism a **masculine tendency**.

In the context of the separation between men and women, **alienated femininity** (and its complacency with images of sensitivity and vulnerability) finds itself enforced by the reverse role provided by masculinity, which is complacent with images of strength and thought.

3. This is abstract-situationist rhetoric: there are no final resistances to the supersession of hierarchy.—Nick Brandt.

4. Such is the vicious circle of the intellectualist that he will almost certainly noddily smile in intellectual 'recognition' of such a critique: but his schizoid reaction always returns to haunt him, at the very least in his dreams.—Nick Brandt.



Masculinity thus finds a place where it can develop itself in the 'revolutionary milieu' when the relationships between men themselves are considered as 'theorists' relationships'. Exactly like in ruling masculine relationships, they are the cause and the consequence of a **direct hostility** towards<sup>5</sup> women, and the desire to **exclude** them from the complicity-rivalry balance which masculinity characterises and which is necessary for the maintenance of a masculine power over women.

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**Form and content** of theory can't be separated.

Intellectualism is a fetishism of form, i.e. a form **without** content; it is the intelligence of one's aims which forgets that you can't fight alienation in an alienated way. Contemptuous of content, the intellectualist can only be hostile to its quality.

At the opposite pole, and as its inverse misery, the subjectivist can only grasp **content** without its form; because he lacks purpose, the only thing to him is immediate content. His judgements

are subject to his—more or less mysterious and mystical—'ability' to 'feel', or not, people and situations; he is incapable of going beyond his immediate **intuitions**.

If the intellectualist sacrifices the living content to the coherence of its form, the form of theory is 'cold' to the subjectivist; according to him, only the form is criticisable. Accordingly, he thinks that he's right to criticise theory for being an 'intellectual', and not a **sensitive** matter.

But it is only in the spectacle (whether ruling or revolutionary) that thought is considered an obstacle to sensitivity, and sensitivity as a lack of thought. Sensitivity and thought are only opposed in **ideology**; the ideologue is not capable of feeling and thinking at the same time; he can't understand his thought as sensitive, and his sensitivity as intelligent. When he begins thinking, he believes he has to forget his sensitivity, and when he conceives feelings he believes he must put aside his thoughts.

Theory is nothing but the reconciliation of sensitivity and thought in the individual and his practice, the end of **separated sensitivity and thought**.

This is a translation of *Les Événements Courants 3: Quelques Réflexions Sur Le Subjectivisme & L'Intellectualisme Pour Servir A La Critique Des Separations* by Joël Cornuault, available from the author at B.P.167, 75864 Paris cedex 18, France.

The pamphlet was written in January-February 1977

5. And fear of.—Nick Brandt.

## Some excerpts from ON THE SIDE OF THE SUBJECT by Jean Pérès, Bordeaux, May 1976

### On Theory

Revolutionary theory is inseparable from its particular conditions of becoming public. The **mode of production** of theory and the social relations which form its base must be criticised by precisely theory itself. In accepting within itself the relations of alienated communication, the revolutionary movement only submits itself to the **a priori** conditions of its recuperation.

The critique of reality can no longer ignore the processes by which this critique separates itself from it and which are concretely manifested in the relations that individuals entertain with one another. This opposition, between the critique and its object, misery, is expressed at the heart of the revolutionary movement by two apparently contradictory but really **complementary** attitudes.

For some, access to the totality consists merely in **unveiling** their own misery; for others, it consists only in **theorising** misery. Thus, two attitudes completely devoid of **self-critique**. And one can therefore accuse the other of being a **theoretician without misery**, only to hear himself then being called a '**miserable without theory**'. The '**miserable without theory**' confuses the publicity of misery with the **simple advertising of misery**. He ignores the fact that the publicity of misery is radically opposed to the simple advertising of misery; it must be the publicity of the **critique** of misery, the critique of its negation. The simple advertising of misery separates the publicity of misery from the idea of its suppression. It shows only the misery in misery, without seeing the subversive side of it that will overturn the social order. The simple advertising of misery only **spectacularises** it, and this mise-en-scene founds the community of 'miserables'.

Someone whose misery hasn't sufficiently shown up is suspected of dissimulating it. The miserable wants everyone

to be like him, and seeks **security in identification**, not in supersession. Like the society in which he lives, he speaks of his own ruin in order to get accepted. He is fundamentally the conservationist of his misery and that of others.

Inversely, the '**theoretician without misery**' dissimulates his own misery in **theoretical activity**. The theoretician at the same time fears and needs the misery of others, for he wants to hide his own. Which is expressed by the fact that as soon as the misery of the other appears, he theorises it. All he knows is the general misery, and his activity consists in **generalisation**. For him, the particular is not **himself**, but merely a **concept**; that's why he's always embarrassed to talk about himself. If he once in a while experiences some little misery of the miserable, he stupidly rejoices and blurts it out to show that he is a complete person. But his true joy resides in his theoretical successes.

You can tell a theoretician by the way he speaks of 'practical theory'; whereas his theory is not practicable and especially not for him.

The particular misery of the theoretician is in his practice: **theory**. A practice that he is certainly impotent to theorise. The theoretician is identical to the **spectacle** whose mode of concrete being is precisely **abstraction**. For him, to be criticised is to disappear as a theoretician; one can understand his blindness.

The fetishism of theory and the fetishism of misery can survive side by side for a long time. In this **division of labour**, each finds in the other what he imagines himself to lack: the 'miserable', his theory; the theoretician, his misery; in reality, each lacks not what he obtains from the other, but rather the knowledge of his own theory and of his own misery, which appear to him **falsely and separately**. And 'the group', if there is one, will be generally separated from what it will call the 'exterior'.

In these relations of individuals, the cohabitation of misery and of its interpretation—separated from each other



and from the totality—clarifies the separation in the dominant ruling spectacle between the dissatisfaction which is presented on the one hand, especially by images, and its interpretation which is presented on the other hand, by **diverse bureaucrats and specialists**; this being anchored to the very conditions of separation, which make such a separation of representation possible.

In the relations between the 'miserable' and the theoretician, the latter commands practically the language of explanation—formally he possesses the sense of the others' activity. The 'miserable' possesses neither the sense of his own activity nor does he understand the misery of the theoretician; he is constrained to agree to the explanations of the other, thereby sacrificing his satisfaction in being a 'miserable', and accepting the theoretician as he is. The theoretician becomes the leader. But in this hierarchical relation, conflict is installed. The dissatisfaction remains imprisoned and reappears at the drop of a hat. Each time the theoretician must become the boss, the 'miserable' must rise against him. The permanence of the movement of hierarchical crystallisation prevents each from criticising the qualities that define the 'miserable' and the theoretician, the qualities which are at the source of their reciprocal alienation.

The fetishism of theory is clearly the fetishism of the theory of the others and of the theory of a past moment. It comes out clearly in the **pro-situationist mentality**. This absolutism of separated theory would evidently want itself to be **immediately practical**. The fetishism of misery corresponds to the **anti-situationist mentality** and finds its expression in the theory of the anti-theory, in which separated misery wants itself to be **immediately theoretical**. These two positions are equally opposed to a **unitary struggle** against separation.

Theory is a practical process. Empirical life contains theory as a means which develops with it, and the manner in which an individual conducts his life visibly demonstrates his choices.

In concrete experience, interpretation is always an acting force; but fixation on daily life and the excitement which results from it gives it a function limited to the short-run, if not to the immediate,

thus corresponding to a need to **consume thought**. The consumer, as everyone knows, is a **very active** individual, principally determined by the always deceived search for immediate pleasure, and transforming the very means of pleasure into commodities; and among them, **thought**.

When individuals, for example, decide to meet in order to treat their personal or collective problems, what is frequently ignored is that the meeting is itself an aspect of practice, an activity. It is the form in which interpretation is generally separated from the reciprocal determination of the individuals in the very heart of daily life, in order to be constituted at a **proper time and place** particularly favoured and appreciated by the specialists of separate interpretation. This type of meeting, which generally produces only other meetings or their necessity, brings out an **organisational reflex** typical of the renunciation by the individual of his own thought.

At root, the separation between theory and misery is a separation at the very interior of the individual between his thought that he does not sufficiently live and his life that he does not sufficiently seek to understand, a separation that he himself permanently maintains, reproducing it in diverse forms everywhere.

## On Ideology

The point of view of the individual is the right way of posing the problem of activity. From this point of view, alienation can be attacked under its fundamental form of **self-alienation**, the processes by which the activity of the individual becomes foreign to him, giving an idea of himself which little by little comes to orient his action and his thought. That is to say, the individual finds himself face to face with the internalisation of spectacular mechanisms, which is the effect of and support for the reformism of power.

The point of view of individual activity, which can seem ridiculous to the old mentality dominated by mass-action and avant-gardism, only takes upon itself and as **point of departure**, the real essence of this action: **relationships between individuals**.

The underdevelopment of individual

practical capacities was fought originally by an illusory response, inherited from the old anarchist absolutism, and from the myth of the individual excellence of the old members of the Situationist International; a response conforming to the requirements of the spectacle of the modern revolution in the form of **autonomist ideology**. The individual herein resumes in himself the original task of the organisations.

In this ideology the subject is himself taken as object; he is not the force which produces history, but its inversion: the **history of the subject** erected as separated totality; his activity is to him a means to valorise himself, and he acts **with this goal in mind**. Facing the uniformity of social behavior, he seeks to appear 'different' to himself and to the others.

The **identification** of the subject to his activity is a constant trait of all the autonomist organisations and movements; but at the individual level, because no particular collective mediation comes between the individual and his activity, the critique of autonomist ideology reveals the foundation of all the specialised collective autonomisms, the alienation of the person by himself. The individual **fetishises himself**.

He makes his power an object of representation and gives it the appearance of himself. He elevates to the dignity of genius all acts which he imagines to confer power upon him.

The consideration of practical activity and its consequences from the **exclusive** angle of the recognition of self leads the individual to artificially assemble his behaviour about this fictive individual unity, going so far as to deem himself **presentable** as the 'self-made man', a fashionable revolutionary.

Autonomist ideology really contains the individual desire to make one's own history, but in wanting to realise this desire independent of his socio-historic conditions, the individual must **submit** to these conditions and realise himself only as **revolutionary commodity** at the moment when the revolution has become a **universally recognised** commodity.

The French expression 'se faire des illusions' (in English, literally 'to make

oneself of illusions') contains the idea that the individual actively participates in the creation of his own illusions.

But these illusions are going to be **embodied**.

For in delegating the sense of his own activity to an abstract representation, in attributing his own power to it, he calls upon his enemies to take hold of this power **against him**. The pseudo-revolutionary workers bureaucracies and all species of proletarian representation are the concrete form of and product of the **weakness** of the revolutionary movement.

**Revolutionary ideology**, today universally shared and of which the Stalinists are the most experienced representatives, is the **ideology of the proletariat**, of the historic subject, and rests upon the separation between the subject and history. How this separation was produced at root: this is the focus of the critique of the **subjective aspect** of practical-critical activity, which is the critique of the proletariat **by itself**.

In revolutionary ideology, the relations between individuals are mediated by the image of the revolution and of themselves as revolutionaries. This ideology aims to maintain class domination and to keep social relations **in the service of the economy**: whether in order to **constitute** the economic base of modern class society (Russia, China, Third-World), or whether to **save** it (Europe). But more and more it is becoming the ideology of all the powers which want to reform the world itself.

And the **individuals** of power have a vested interest in that the relations between individuals remain **reformist relations**.

## On Practice

It is necessary to recapture the internal activities of daily life in their legitimate claim to universal life, in their sense of **social communication** and in the sense of a **social project**.

Everyone speaks, reads, writes, moves himself, organises himself, reflects, loves etc. These innumerable activities contain in themselves, in their relations among themselves, with the totality and the individual who uses them, the entirety



of social relations and social struggles.

In 'passivity' the means really at the individuals' disposal remain in a proletarianised state, in the service of alienated communication and of the interests which are connected to it; this mentality prefers to see activity 'elsewhere', in the others, outside of daily life—in order to obscure to itself its real activity that really produces this passivity and its justifications.

In activism, the illusory reaction to an illusory passivity, activity leaves the terrain of daily life in order to constitute a particular time and place which is going to colonise daily life, so to speak, 'from the exterior'; more precisely, a part of daily life separates off from it and returns to dominate it as an external dictate.\* Passivity and activism are the two opposed forms of the same refusal of conscious intervention in daily life.

On the one hand, subversive activity liberates its own means. In a revolutionary moment, the diverse activities which constitute daily life are seized everywhere in all their profundity as multi-lateral and public communication.

On the other hand, the conscious interaction between the different means of daily life can enhance theoretic comprehension and occasionally unleash subversive activities. Obscurity and confusion are often manifested by the preponderance of a single means of communication, for example, conversation, or a single mode of relation, for example, sexual. Clarification can begin with shifting an ordinary means to a place in which it is unusual, as the situationists did through the use of the tape-recorder in conferences, thereby breaking the pseudo-dialogue between the participants 'there in person' and his listeners.

For example, in cases where one can only read, one writes the author of such and such a text; thus one puts oneself in a situation where one can develop one's own critique, and one breaks the unilateral character of spectacular communication; in cases where there is only conversation without effects, one writes a letter, thus creating a distance conducive to reflection; inversely, in

cases where there is only a written correspondance, one 'makes a trip', in cases where there are only private relations, one publishes, giving a more general sense to the problems posed, to one's personal positions, and thus inciting publicity; one can sexualise friendships, thus liberating the repressed for a better communication, etc.

In another way, facing the profusion of forms which dissimulate the absence of content, one can choose a particular content, a problem that one poses oneself, and momentarily subjugate to it the entirety of social relations: conversations, readings, experiences, observations... In giving, even if a bit arbitrarily, a 'sense' to existence, one reverses the autonomy of the 'nonsensical' and one clears the way for a deeper comprehension.

The danger at each stage is that of fetishising the form or content of what is chosen.

One does not gain access to the totality directly; it is necessary to make breaches in it; the means of access are diverse, and a function of tastes, of lucidity on oneself, of the risks one is prepared to take, and of the moment. It is necessary to consider the organic progression of activity in time; to dispense with this theoreticianist attitude which ignores its own moment, these self-cross-examinations of all existence which valorise the interpretation 'in abstracto'; it becomes the supreme interpretation, the result of a lack of daily interpretation; the mental solution which is dug up with a single yank from the theoretical terrain and which clearly indicates the road to follow. The taste for perfection wants to walk before taking a single step.

Theory must be understood as the intelligence of a personal and historic situation, and of the relation between the two; it is a thought relative to a situation, and draws from this situation the means for an intervention in the sense of individual choice.

The spectacle of the revolution is largely a product of revolutionary activity, of its inconsequence. In the struggle between the spectacle and the revolution, the one only receives

reinforcement to the extent that the other makes it possible. The success of the struggle accordingly depends on the revolution itself. In a society which

proclaims itself revolutionary, the hollow pretensions and silence of revolutionaries have become anachronistic.

This is a loose and slightly altered translation of some excerpts from Jean Peres' *Du Cote Du Sujet*. The original unexpurgated version is available from the author at B.P.37, Bordeaux, Cedex 33037, France.

\* This implies a rigid opposition to intervention in any struggle other than one's 'own'. Whilst it's impossible to be usefully lucid about the conflicts of others if one is not lucid about one's own, a total rejection of such an intervention is merely the flip-side of militantism.—Nick Brandt.



## AFTERWORD

In November 1977, in part as a result of an accumulation of unfought and unreflected contradictions, half-true semi-projections, backtrackings, obsessions, semi-avant-gardist and semi-hermetic pretensions and chronic memory blocks, I impulsively publicised my tangled vicious circles to some revolutionaries (or would-be revolutionaries) in Berkeley and in Paris: the illusory family in my head. This self-imposed jolt—together with the development of other relationships in London—had a relatively immediate personal effect of affectively releasing me from some of my abstractions and absent-mindedness, and of clarifying a few aspects of my past, of my self-illusion. This was because it gave me the impetus and distance I had previously lacked, and also because it was one moment of my break (however desperate and mixed-up) from the knot of my partial emotional and intellectual fixation and submission to some of these people and to some aspects of the past theory and practice of them. Unfortunately the emotional repression and unthought-out strategy returned against me in the form of brief unrevealing (though understandably exasperated) insults—or just plain silence—from the Americans. Others, however, reacted with more concrete and provocative criticism. Moreover, my decisions were not quite as *totally* 'imbecilic' as some of the Americans have made out.

I have printed these pieces by Nadine Bloch, Joël Cornuault and Jean Pérès, since some of what they say articulates—on a general level—a critique of some of my own (still far from reversed) impoverished history—though, obviously, also because they have a more general use. A more precise auto-critique of the situationist or would-be situationist milieu, particularly in this country, over the past ten years or so, including a critique of my own confusions, will be arriving (in some form or another) soon . . . or later: it will encompass a critique of the self-alienation and recuperation of the various sides of the milieu. Almost always 'situationists'—especially in this country—have lagged behind reality, have delayed and forgot-

ten themselves until it was too late. Like the history of the world they have claimed to fight, it has been one of daily *unchallenged* separations, self-contradictions and false choices:

my 'business' and your 'business'; degradation and self-deprecation; rivalry and complicity; objectivist determinism and complacent daily-life-ism; seduction and rejection; humourlessness and compulsive frivolity; unthinking childish impulsivity and characterologically 'mature' distanciation; ideological predictability and crazy unpredictability for its own sake; rigidity and diffuseness; chaos and compulsive 'coherence'; nihilist purism and moralist purism; respectable normality and its flipped-out flip-side; working-class *ouvrièrisme* and flippant middle-class 'revolutionary' dilletanteism; sublimative headiness and unanalysed sexuality; and undialectical combinations of all these. Everywhere the results have greatly differed from what had been desired: on the one hand, varying forms of self-destruction resulting in a confused manic-depressive madness, an unreceptive totally restless inability to listen, read, learn or love, unfocussed semi-solipsistic narcissistic megalomania (poor imitations of Jacques Vaché), a fetishism of intrigue, paternalistic vandalism, anarcho-situ activism, compulsive negativism, militantism of daily life, terrorism, alternations between naive gullibility and ultra-paranoia, secret jealousy, repressed and unrealised bi-sexuality, resigned sexual stasis, impotent didactic intellectualisms, bored despondent resignation, alcoholism, despair and suicide; on the other hand, recuperation in the form of compulsive amiability, complacent cynicism, hedonism, 'radical' sociology, teaching and therapy, eclectic alternative society ideology, mysticism and cultism, punk rock, sexual politics ideology, political theatre and dadaism, council communism and ultra-left politics, and the isolated 'security' of couples (I think that just about covers it all.) It has been a specifically post-1968 'situationist' (implicitly or explicitly) version of some of the ideas on ideology and on mad-

ness in the last chapter of Debord's 'Society of the spectacle'.\* This complex and contradictory intertwining of ideology and lucidity has stemmed from an insufficiently *practical* and *ongoing* critique and *self-critique* of the whole of the daily life of would-be revolutionaries that can *effectively* be challenged this side of the barricades (a 'consciousness' of *unfought* separated mutilated life) and of the failure to face the vicious circle of its consequences, as well as—in this country—an insufficient consciousness of the 'quintessentially English archaisms in the control of daily

life' ('Student Poverty'), their relation to the socio-economic crisis, and of how these have effected both the revolutionary milieu and the more general class struggle. The details come later—and they will come as much from your struggles as from mine. For the moment, I will end with a modern Spanish motto, which, however abstract, and a-historical it seems, is—in this context—essentially true: 'Confusion, madness, stupidity and their contraries are the result of conscious choices the individual makes all throughout his/her life.'

Nick Brandt: London, England,  
January 1978.

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\* Ken Knabb's *Society of Situationism* only just touches the problem, and in a very marginal way,—for reasons that should be obvious to anyone who has 'met' him.



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