

Spectacular Times

THE SPECTACLE

A Skeleton Key

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PART ONE

Once upon a time

Once upon a time there was a revolutionary working class movement - first organised by Marx and Bakunin in the 19th century it has, over the years, been diverted, hijacked and defeated; in the West by the bourgeoisie, in the East by the Bolsheviks.

Capitalism rules. In the West "free enterprise" big business and the multi-nationals - giant corporations with budgets equal to those of medium sized nations.

In the East the monopolists dream - one big company - Soviet Union Ltd.

And the workers? - bored to death in a 'peoples' barracks or legless in Disneyland.

the town that has everything, including a billion dollars worth of casino business a year, 12,000 prostitutes and more churches per head than anywhere else.

A 40ft-high glass fibre statue of John Lennon, called Working Class Hero, was put on show at the site of the Cavern Club in Mathew Street, Liverpool, yesterday.

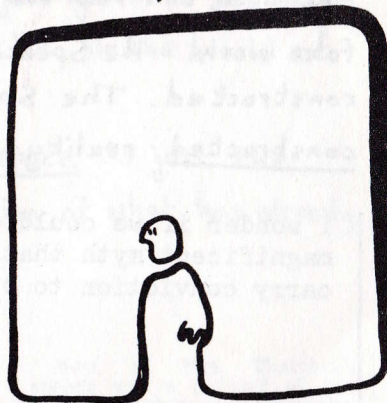
With its modern technology — mass media, rapid transport systems, computers, economic plans, etc., — capitalism can now control the very conditions of existence. The world we see is not the real world, it is a view of the world we are conditioned to see. "They say. They are planning. They are building...." Life itself has become a show contemplated by an audience. That audience is the proletariat. Reality is now something we look at and think about, not something we experience.

Capitalism has made all social relationships commodity relationships. The very structure of our daily lives is based

on commodity relationships. Society is consumed as a whole — the ensemble of social relationships and structures is the central product of the commodity economy.

Carol Ehrlich

Capitalism and the state are genuine social structures, but like most matters of social structure they have also been internalised. In that sense, we are the state. It exists in our minds, and we produce it in our day-to-day existence. The banalities of everyday life, the meaninglessness of most work, our profound isolation from others, and our being treated (and treating others) as objects — these are not by-products of capitalism: they are key mechanisms of social control.



Howard J. Ehrlich

**L'ETAT C'EST CHACUN
DE NOUS**

The Spectacle

The Spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images....The Spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.....the liar has lied to himself.

Guy Debord

In the real world, what is possible is determined only by our resources and the limits of our imagination. But upon this real world a totally fake world - the Spectacle - has been constructed. The Spectacle is a constructed reality.

I wonder if we could contrive...some magnificent myth that would in itself carry conviction to our whole community.

Plato
Republic 3.414

Talking about life today is like talking about rope in the house of a hanged man.

Raoul Vaneigem

Another diplomat, putting a fine gloss on Zia's record since the coup in 1977, commented: "If you take aside the fact that there is martial law here, press censorship, detention without trial, and a ban on political activity, then the human rights situation is not too bad."

"What is possible"
has come to mean
"What is possible
within the society
of the Spectacle."

MEN OFTEN APPLAUD an imitation
and hiss the real thing. AESOP

The old terminology of revolutionary ideology, defined when the technology at the disposal of modern capitalism was undreamt of, has proved hopelessly inadequate. Like a fundamentalist preacher trying to come to terms with space travel, we are caught trying to make the new conditions fit the old analysis.

To attempt a description of these new conditions Henri Lefebvre suggested "The Spectacle" as an ad hoc term - a term later defined and analysed



Guy Debord as
a small boy.

by Guy Debord (see left) in "The Society of the Spectacle" and Raoul Vaneigem in 'The Totality for Kids' and "The Revolution of Everyday Life".

In this Spectacular Society we are offered the image and never the reality. It is a dream (or more properly a nightmare) come true.

It does not satisfy - it cannot satisfy. It offers only the dream of satisfaction.

From time to time the dream even includes the illusion of being awake.

Our life is divided between 'work' time and 'free' time. But we sleep on, buying back in our 'free' time what we produced in our 'work' time. Real life is elsewhere.

Culture as Spectacle covers everything; we are born into it, go to school in it, work and relax and relate to other people in it. Even when we rebel against it, the rebellion is often defined by the Spectacle.

Carol Ehrlich





So great was the demand for last week's rip-off fashions that we have another super offer for you today, exclusively designed for Sun readers at a price you can't afford to miss.

People go through huge portions of their lives without much consciousness of what is immediately around them. The media have convinced them that what's around them is unimportant. And that's why they're lonely. You see it in their faces. First the little flicker of searching, and then they look at you, you're just a kind of object. You don't count. You're not on T.V.

Communication 2

McAllen's police force installed a video-camera in its headquarters' interrogation room in the early 1970s. The purpose, ironically, was to protect officers against trumped-up brutality charges.

In two-fisted Texas, however, with its long history of anti-Mexican oppression, the camera became a 'training tool' that inspired grim competition. Night after night, officers gathered to watch playbacks of themselves beating up drunks and other alleged lawbreakers.

In one tape, five officers take turns at attacking an unresisting, handcuffed young man. He is lifted by pants, belt and hair, then dropped face-down on the cement floor. His arms are wrenched until he screams. His head is smashed time after time into a table top. Amid volleys of obscenity, he is punched, slapped and kicked as he lies pleading for mercy.

The Spectacle makes spectators of us all. Even the 'extras' want to be spectators of their own actions - as if reality can only be confirmed by....

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.. Seeing something
done rather
than by
doing it.

Two people were arrested: one for resisting an officer of the law, a new offence under section 10 of the 1977 Criminal Law Act; the other for obstruction. A *New Standard* photographer who was held, apparently for obstruction, was released after other members of the press had protested to the police and threatened to put their cameras down until he was freed—a tactic that has been adopted recently in France when press photographers put down their cameras in protest at police behaviour.

Of all the events in human history, the one to attract the largest audience was not a great political occasion, nor a special celebration of some complex achievement in the arts or sciences, but a simple ball-game – a soccer match. On a June day in 1978, it is claimed that more than 1,000 million people tuned in to the World Cup Final between Argentina and Holland. This means that something like one-quarter of the entire world population stopped whatever they were doing and focused their attention on a small patch of grass in South America where 22 brightly clad figures were kicking a ball about in a frenzy of effort and concentration.

The very essence of the spectacle is that the spectator should remain passively receptive towards the whole design, however frenzied he is in the pursuit of a particular spectacular myth or fashion.

Alexander Cockburn

Such global 'communities' as this – united only in their passive contemplation of the Spectacle – are fraudulent. They are crowds of strangers – alienated from almost everything and everyone. They cheer together, boo together, cry together – it is the solidarity of a shit-scared humanity.

But alienation is good for business. Alienation multiplies needs (because it can satisfy none of them.)

Which is why we've developed a revolutionary new concept – **One plus One**.

One side a complete album – Plus a bonus –
One side a blank tape.

"What's the point of robbery when there's nothing worth stealing?"

Adam and the Ants

Creating new needs stimulates productivity.
But the Spectacle's immense productivity
has become its central problem.

Enormous energy is now devoted to the
profitable waste of resources —
armaments, advertising, built-in
obsolescence, etc, etc.

The money required to provide adequate food,
water, education, health and housing for
everyone in the world has been estimated at
\$17 billion a year. It is a huge sum of
money....about as much as the world spends
on arms every two weeks.

New Internationalist

All this conspires to conceal from
the people the fact that the
material preconditions for social
liberation already exist.

Recuperation

To survive, the Spectacle must have
social control. It can recuperate a
potentially threatening situation by
shifting ground, creating dazzling
alternatives — or by embracing the
threat, making it safe and then
selling it back to us.

BIG MONEY FROM THE BURGLARY BOOM!

Cash in on vast Security Market installing
MASTERGUARD/LITE-SPY, home and car
anti-theft systems.

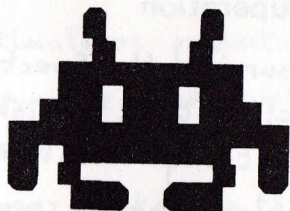
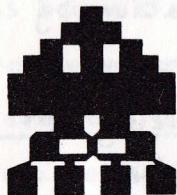
Perfect home-based business. No capital.
Details from: MASTERGUARD/LITE-SPY
108 Princess Victoria Street, Bristol BS8 4DB
Follow on service back-up

**Peoples
march**

**for
jobs**

Just follow the yellow brick road...

Getting angry?



Here is your
enemy.

It can also recuperate a demand by
giving us (almost) what we asked for
— ad nauseum.

"I remember how shocked I was, the first
time I read one of your big circulation
newspapers.....crime, divorce, anecdotes,
twaddle, anything to keep them distracted,
anything to prevent them from thinking."

Aldous Huxley

Just connect to the aerial socket of
any colour or black and white domestic TV receiver and to
your Post Office installed jack socket and you are into the
exciting world of **PRESTEL**. Via simple push button use you
are able to view a staggering 170,000 pages of up to the
minute information on many services and utilities, order
goods from companies, even play games!! All this and
more without ever leaving your armchair!

75
Exposure to this flood of information may
serve to narcotise rather than to energise
the average reader or listener...In this
peculiar respect, mass communications may
be included among the most respectable and
efficient of social narcotics. They may be
so fully effective as to keep the addict
from recognizing his own malady.

Paul F. Lazarsfeld

Robert K. Merton

1948

If we get bored with all this
materialism.....

A String Box

Country House Price

£9.95 J089

That endless search for
useful and original presents!
Here is one that is really
unusual. This handsome
box dis... a ball of string
means an... for elusive
which always... if and

when you find them. It is
made for us, and only for
us, by hand, out of a solid
block of mahogany on the
Island of Muck in the Inner
Hebrides. Each one is
turned, then polished, with
loving care and attention by
one man devoted to his craft
and proud of his results. It
measures approximately 6"
tall by 4½" wide.

Postage and Packing £1.10

Some souvenirs will be
commissioned by the limited
company set up by the bishops,
Papal Visits Ltd. Other com-
panies who want to use the
official motif will have to sub-
mit their designs for approval.

Tea Bag Holder

Country House Price

£9.95 J080

... the Spectacle encourages us to possess experiences (carefully structured, of course.)

AMONG ITS attractions, the Great British Alternative Holiday Catalogue is offering an adventure vacation in a Nazi-style prison camp established near Winchester.

Among the features of the holiday camp are: arrival by cattle-truck late at night, barbed wire compounds, search-lights, watchtowers, up to 50 guards in SS uniforms, the stamping of the guests' foreheads with serial numbers, and a week-end of forced labour, dowsing with hoses, and deprivation of sleep.

has been established that your immigration to South Africa will be to our mutual advantage.

The huge complex near Cologne presents fun, adventure, and romance to everyone. A wild west town, a bobsleigh run, a monorail, a pirates' galleon and a haunted castle — all this and much, much more in a clean and charming atmosphere.

Saturday is Phantasialand Day! Our tour includes entrance to the park, and all rides are free!! Only those who have already been to this German jewel will know what awaits the visitor here — it can only be described as an exceptional experience, and should not be confused with the usual imitations, whether at home or abroad.

Time simply flies by in a magical way.

..... and now you've got all that out of your system.....

Then it's back to Cologne — perhaps for some shopping in the renowned Schildergasse.

You may like to walk the city walls, visit the National Railway Museum, explore the narrow winding lanes with their ancient timbered houses, or simply browse round the shops

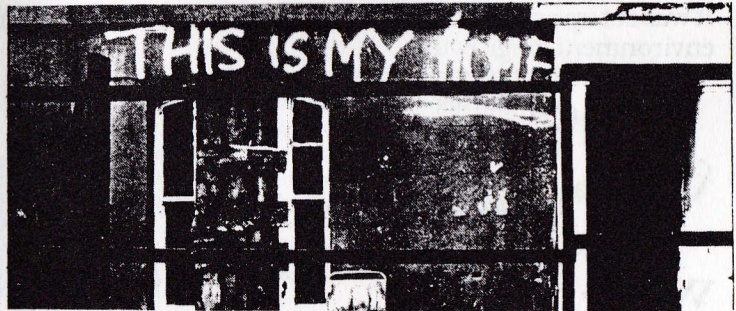
The afternoon is yours for more sightseeing or browsing round the shops.

and all those shopping blues will disappear in the colourful fun of the Champs Elysees with its parade of shops

..... you can get down to the real business of leisure time — consuming.

Urbanism

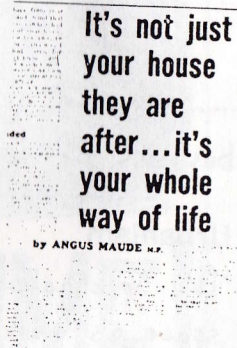
The Spectacle fills not only time but space as well. It is our environment.



KELVIN TILFOURD

The control of our environment has been taken from us and put into the hands of specialists — architects, planning committees, developers, etc. Their object is to organise the environment into more manageable structures — office complexes, factory towns, civic centres, supermarkets, hypermarkets, "country" parks.

The result is that huge areas of land are now totally devoted to work and profit with no regard for the genuine needs of the people living there.



It's not just
your house
they are
after...it's
your whole
way of life

BY ANGUS MAUDE

Telford didn't just happen.

It was set up specifically to provide businesses with the ideal environment for growth.

full lives
carefully nurtured industrial estates where advance
factories are ready for occupation. A skilled
workforce with firm roots in hard work awaits you.
And a superb communications network spreads
branches throughout the UK and abroad.

work better. shopping centre

One disappointment is that the local population seem to make no attempt at all to look like the people in the architect's drawings.

Shopping in Church Street is pleasant — it must be one of the country's showcase stretches of pedestrianisation and if it were not for the gratuitous dowdiness of the British shopper you'd be forgiven for thinking yourself in High Street, Europe.

DAVID SANDS
'Shop Property'

The 500 sites are regarded as having the potential of a Flixborough disaster. The chemical plant at Flixborough on Humber-side exploded in 1974, killing 28 people. The safety executive will not publicly identify the sites, it says, because of security and because legislation prevents the giving of commercial information to third parties.

Privately, some executive officials acknowledge their fear that, were the list to be publicised, residents near the sites would press for the installations to be closed down. They are also concerned that there would be a public demand for other smaller sites to be regarded as major hazards—and the executive does not have enough inspectors to cope.

In the mistaken belief that it is "their" street or "their" town, they seem to think they should have some say in the activities of local industry.

Rapid transit systems allow the workforce to be drawn from a wider area. It also allows for centralisation of production, standardisation, monopoly and control. But no matter how rapid these transit systems are - we never seem to catch up with ourselves.

"In the Global Village everything seems to be happening at the other end of town."

Frederic Raphael

A curious effect of the development of rapid transit systems is that as the distance between communities closes, the distance between individuals within those communities widens.

"I've got friends all over the world. I don't know anyone down this street - but I've got friends all over the world."

Tony Hancock
"The Radio Ham"

The physical division of our environment serves to reinforce the separation of human activities. Industrial estates, leisure centres, shopping precincts — specific areas and specific times for specific activities. Once the time and place appropriate to a particular activity has been established, we can safely be allowed some say in how that time and space is consumed. Such "participation" just gives us a greater say in the construction of the world of our own alienation.

The sub-division of space is just the concrete manifestation of what has already happened to time.

The divisions of
time and space
make it easier.....

Most of Mrs Thatcher's speech was a defence of her philosophy that creating wealth was not merely expedient but morally good. Work was good. It was not only a necessity, but a duty and a virtue.

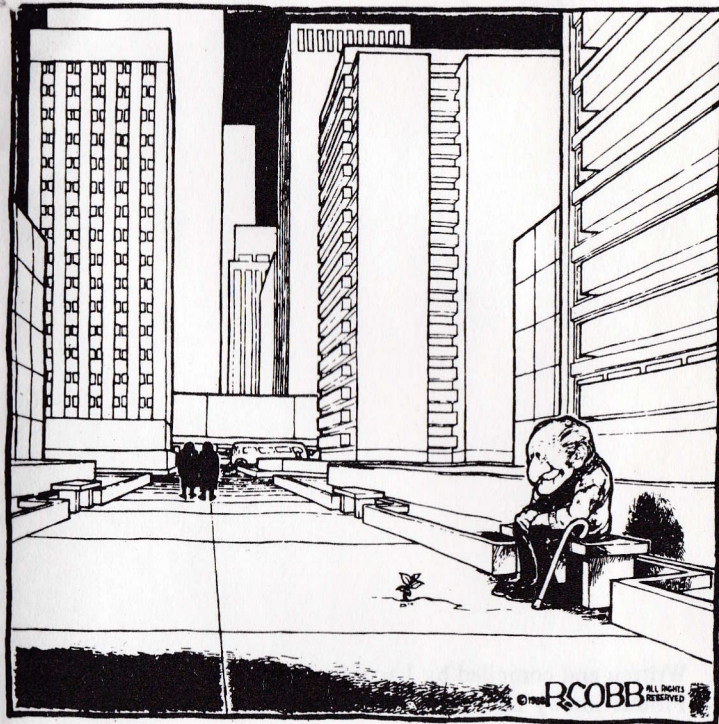
..... to reinforce
the values of the
Society of the
Spectacle.

Another book that provoked the wrath of Mrs Gabler's committee had included a sympathetic discussion of Robin Hood. The Texas ladies had about as much sympathy for Robin as the Sheriff of Nottingham. They viewed his thieving on behalf of the poor as "an attack on morality."

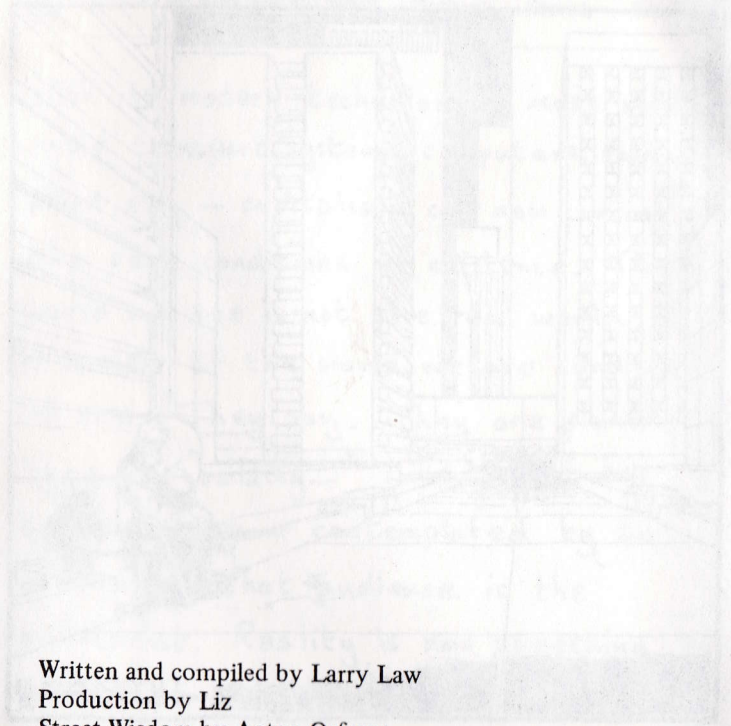
Ironically, the first side effect of Urbanism is the disintegration of those values.

A "wargame" was conducted by the Department of Health and Social Security a year ago on the basis of an interruption to all benefit payments.

How long would it be, the game's central question ran, before moneyless people became desperate and ransacked their local shops? The answer, which Lord Soames will no doubt be considering in his bunker, was three weeks.



to be continued.....



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