

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Critique of Chrisso and Odeteo's BARBARIANS

Frère Dupont

Frère Dupont
Critique of Chrisso and Odeteo's BARBARIANS
2004

Retrieved on July 2, 2009 from fendersen.com
by the Co-author of Monsieur Dupont: *Nihilist Communism*
This critique is excerpted from a discussion at the Antipolitics
forum.

theanarchistlibrary.org

2004

I know Terry Jones (Monty Python) is not Karl Marx but his recent account of very healthy peasants in Medieval England tickled me (as did the recent evidence for successful Saxon skull surgery). Maybe I am jaded but I think the left idea of objective progress with reference to human bodies has been much overstated and compensates for material disaffection by recourse to the role of consciousness. I would reverse this I would say, let's stick with the miseries of the body. Maybe I am biased because I work in the NHS but there is an awful lot of sick people out there, dysfunctional/mentally unstable people and it seems to me that if capital is going to break down then it might be staged by the anti-historical body of the human being rather than the development of a 'justice' seeking consciousness. Many adult human beings now have absolutely no idea what is good food, nor any means for expressing the fat unhappiness of their bodies, sixty years ago people were healthier, this to me suggests totalisation of ruling class power. I think it is at the level of bodily experience where insurrection and the language of insurrection must and does most frequently occur, it is at this point I think where my ideas converge with those of 'primitivism', of course it is not a matter of living a more natural life (whatever that is) but of hooking up the pancreas to a microphone and letting it dictate. I think this is probably as far from the autonomist account (and from the history of revolutionary thought) as you can get.

Contents

1.	7
2.	9
3.	10
4.	12
5.	13
Part Two	22

ment actually the reverse — that the nature of the opposition determines the forms of capitalism?”

... I think this is quite tricky. It is perhaps the most philosophical assertion of the autonomists and refers to the process of alienation and thus to a supposed weakening grip on the world of the ruling class, maybe it goes back to Hegel's master/Slave dialectic. We could say that the ruling class are not happy. We could say that the 'character' of the working class is the material condition of the ruling class. We could say that the proletariat are included at the ruling class banquet in the form of a Banquo's ghost. It is a bit of a chicken and egg argument, yes the workers made the world and are 'present' concretely but they made the world under orders and are therefore present not as a specific identity but as an alienated force or mass, and that is no real presence at all. I would ask the autonomists, in what way do the working class have actual power over the ruling class? I would observe that it is the ruling class that is still the ruling class, that the workers struggles take place on the terrain entirely dictated by the ruling class, that the working class were created by the ruling class by the enclosure acts. I understand that the autonomists hold to a historicist view of society and so they see the objective outcomes of struggle to be in some way progressive, and...troploin...also expresses this kind of thorny path to righteousness attitude of some communists towards capital. I can't accept this, I don't accept the objective value of anything here, I don't think the institutions have been developed and are therefore ripe for the taking, I'm with C+O on this. I think the material conditions for communism have always existed. I cannot see revolution as being the culmination of the struggle of forces. Of course the struggle must continue, well it continues whether we want it or not, but I do not see the revolution as arising out of the struggle because I think the struggle itself reproduces the established order (maybe I am straying here from dialectics into an idea of ritual renewal).

tariat. We know it but most of us don't say it out loud that if the sentimental folk-sociopaths of Hamas or the romanticised 'Iraqi resistance' get their way then the struggle for the workers must continue because these constituted 'resistant' forces are wholly bourgeois in their intent — they are out to seize hold of a share in the national capital, for them it is still 1789. The elitist armed struggle, in order to maintain itself, must suppress the population that it 'represents', this is as true in Ireland as it is Palestine — a revolutionary hero is not someone who kneecaps joyriders, corners the heroin market, stones to death deviants, bombs cafes and school buses. I would suggest, as a response from the milieu, a more rigorous attitude to inhuman strategies and techniques. It is simply not good enough to explain atrocity committed in terms of atrocity endured, if our intent is to escape all this. The milieu must push past all these 'events' which are nothing but the negotiations of various elites in waiting and we should consider those in Iraq or Palestine or wherever who are being persecuted by their liberators because they refuse religion or because they are homosexual or because they want to live their own life. We cannot contact them in the ordinary sense but we should exist in a manner that they might find in us a stance that is neither 'for' the resistance nor 'for' America but is resolutely, at all times, pro-human both individually and in common. Anything else is just strategy.

Fourthly. On language. I have this idea of a collectively written handbook and survey of language techniques and tactics that have been developed by artists and activists and the like. It would be called something like 'the ordinary person's guide to de-control' it would help re-attach language to experience and help us express what we actually live through, perhaps we could call the project to 're-sensitisation.'

"the character of the ruling class defines the character of its opposition. Isn't the Autonomist argu-

Breaking out of political orthodoxy is a little like stepping onto a station's platform from a train that has not yet stopped, you're intention is to appear to the world as very much the city person, but you have misjudged the train's speed and end up with a sprained ankle like the innocent peasant you really are. How radical is the breaking away from leftism as proposed by Chrisso and Odeteo in the disordered insurgence?

By what authority do I ask the question? I have no authority, I am the opposite of those who are expected to speak on such matters. I am neither respected nor sought out. I am the joint author of the quite poorly written article your face is mysteriously kind (as hosted on the insurrection, organization Activism, and Anti-politics page) that is I am one half of the deceased 'group' Monsieur Dupont. Is that important? I think it is, as we trudge on, I think it is becoming more important. I begin with myself because I speak for myself, I do not say 'we' when I mean 'I', like C+O I too reject the 'subject' position. I begin with myself, as a fool, as the one who does not speak the same language, as the one who steps down from the moving train, as the one who is uncomfortable with the concept of 'solidarity' which has come to mean ideological patriotism. I begin with myself, and what I always ask in the midst of the gee whizz moment, whether that moment bears up the breakthrough in the battle against cancer or is realised in the publishing sensation that is 'anti-capitalism', what I always ask is: when everything appears to be changing, what is it here that has gone unchanged.

It is my character, in situations such as confronting this KKA web board (which I barely understand), where I feel most vulnerable, and up against it, that I am most disinclined to feel celebratory. I affirm nothing. I gaze along the shelf of what is available and I find I cannot make a positive choice from all the terms that are in play. I am for the break. I am for walking away from it. It = everything. When MD made its break from anarchism between 1999–2001, not many took notice. Times

were different then, other people were in a celebratory mood, it was the anti-capitalist ascendancy and others were feeling bullish, they talked of new subjectivities and different forms of struggle. In short, there was some strutting. Now, things are different, the milieu is in decline, there is fracturing, there is reflection, growings older, there is questioning and there is a call to break out of orthodoxy. Those who five years ago buried their differences in a popular front style are now breaking out the picks and shovels of outdated forbearance. No more heroes. Five years ago, you couldn't say a word against the Zapatistas, three years ago, the 'white overalls' were the darlings, and the 'social forum' was a new way forward. That was then, MD opposed all those things, we just couldn't see how they worked. Now we are all staring at the edge of it. we have all learnt that if you affirm anything under present circumstance, affirm it as a 'solution', then sometime soon you're going to find out it's at least not all it was supposed to be and more than probably it will turn out utterly complicit with what conditioned its appearance. Back then MD found nobody to talk to, anyway we went about it all wrong, we were as much part of it, caught up in it as anyone else. Now there are plenty of people to talk to but they're still not talking back.

To break with orthodoxy is to inhabit the wilderness, I have been wandering a long time. I ask myself, 'what of the breaks of others'? I am looking for a star in the east, a sign of something 'outside.' I am looking for a change in terms. I was looking for something in this writing of Chrisso and Odeteo. Have they really broken? Oftentimes the most bitter battles are waged over the most minor differences, the apparently radical breaks, the perceived heresies are nothing but mere controversies, minor quibbles that are driven to furious confrontation because of underlying unconscious motivations. C+O are really angry with H+N, they think there is clear blue water between them, maybe that's right, maybe not, but what else? What is it in C+O's text that breaks with H+N, what is it that is different, and what is

Thirdly. Bee in the bonnet time. Empire. If America is an Empire then where is its emperor? A seemingly trivial question but historically empires have been social forms of domination grounded in gratuitous manifestations of expenditure whereas the American economic machine is surely grounded in production? What Negri describes is capitalism not empire. Empires require that everything be made explicit whereas spectacular capitalism renders everything of itself secret (American troops are massing to take Falluhja and other towns in the 'Sunni Triangle', but we did not know they had lost them). If we are to modify the term Empire so that it must fit America then why not use another term, such as capitalism? — Isn't America expansionist, because it is driven by falling returns on its productivity, to seize hold of other capital so as not to impose further restrictions on its own proletariat and thus hoping to avoid open conflict with its workers? In this model America is driven not triumphalist, a victim of its economics and not in the driving seat. If there is an Empire in the modern world (and I discount even Britain here, because although it had an 'Empress' I think its expansion was determined by internal threats and that imperial trappings were more or less ideological, although of course they had some secondary impact), if there is an Empire that follows the proper definition then surely it is The House of Saud and its sphere of influence? In the struggle of America and Islam do we not see modern production squaring up against anachronistic expenditure? But this is not the main issue, the problem with the leftist account of 'empire' is that it automatically conjures up 'anti-empire', the cross-class political alliances of 'anti-imperialism' (let us not forget here that America is a self-specified 'anti-imperialist' nation). Of course we all sympathise with the underdog but that is not a pro-revolutionary position, if we drift into 'choosing sides' from the array of already constituted forces then we tacitly accept the totality of those forces which is why the left tends to mystify class struggle and conflate 'people' with the prole-

Part Two

... If dialectics is a tool then this is not the same as the totalising movement of reality. Dialectics as an ideational tool is no more than saying the object is not exhausted by its immediate appearance and much else, including a negative moment, or archaeological evidence of struggle, may be drawn from it. Anyone who owns a POETS day car/washing machine/TV will know dialectics in this sense (we know things/the world when they don't work, when the bus drivers are on strike). However it should be said here that there are other more aesthetic and therefore more lived approaches to the seemingly impenetrable given surface of our world, I think of the surrealists 'analogical thought', the situationists detournment, psychogeographical drifting and so on. Nevertheless, face to face dialectics predates Hegel by thousands of years, in some hands it becomes a means of baroque and beautiful hypostasis (Foucault, Adorno) and for others it is the veritable pointy stick (I like Benjamin's pokings). I feel I ought to say something else here...

Secondly, the question of insurrection as 'within and against' or 'outside and against'. I think we must not fetishise 'insurrection' in the way that 'situations' or 'happenings' or 'demonstrations' have become fetishised. Insurrection is not what the doctor ordered. I suppose by insurrection I am thinking of uncalculated events that immediately describe somewhere else, a nowhere that dictates its terms to the maps and charts of established human social relations. All I wanted to say here was that if resistance is constituted in the terms expressed, what is immediately apparent in our everyday life, what grates our soul, then insurrection is an event not constituted in everyday terms. The 'dialectical' understanding of 'revolution of everyday life' is surely the supercession, that is the abolition of everyday life and its struggles not its 'reclaiming' or 'self-management' as is so often the anarchist formulation.

it that is the same?

1.

The most important, and for me the most dangerous and exciting, position that C+O sketch out is their outright rejection of dialectics coupled with a nihilistic holding-out for a transformational power/event that must arrive from outside of all presently existing terms. This is exciting because it chimes with what I have been saying and it is dangerous because it contradicts much of their other assumptions in the text. The rejection of dialectics is initially a very basic position: if (1) the character of the ruling class defines the character of its opposition and (2) that opposition must of necessity engage with reality as described by the ruling class then (3) the subsequent modifications to the power of the ruling class and thus to reality are wholly determined by the original character of the ruling class. Dialectics is a politics of containment, of management, of capture, of inclusion of separate details into a system of general social relations.

Faced with the ideological capture of all oppositional terms, the reformulators of the dialectic (the autonomist marxists) argued against the unity of ruling class power, perhaps they used Hegel's Lordship and Bondage dialectic as their start-off point. Their reformulation goes something like: the ruling class only retains its power over a riven and more or less uneasy stability by accepting the irreducible otherness of other interests which in turn dictate some of the content of any given present reality. The reformulation continues: there are objective ruptures and collapses which overthrow the uneasy balance precipitating a new wave of conflicts between established and newly formed forces with each interest desperate to maintain its grip on what it has and to loosen the hold others have over it. When reality settles down again there is a new balance of power, a new def-

inition of power. In this way, the reformulation goes, it can be said that even the most oppressed sections of society have some power over how society is presently organised/can find their values reflected in objective conditions/dictate some part of the reform debate/determine reality by their actions and so on. For the reformulation the dialectic is fragmented at the level of government, little bits of oppositional force are found in the most surprising places, anarchist cops and town planners and the like — reality is a compound with capital and the limitations of commodification, set by other anti-commodity interests, being only one term.

The project of the reformulation is/was to unify the fragments into an explicit alliance against that which they all have common struggle naturally. The advocates of reformulation found themselves celebrating all forms of ‘struggle’, particularly the struggles of identity politics based on insurgent nationalisms, race, gender, age etc. All these antagonistic oppressed minorities had their own reasons for formulating themselves as a group but they were all (theoretically) unified in their antagonism with reality as it was constituted. The reformulation idea was that a magnified, intensified proliferation of difference on the ground would eventually dictate a new generality which must reflect that difference in a more ‘human’ form of governance — the resultant contradiction of interests between money and humanity within the most objective structures would finally cause a complete rupture and the money element would finally be ejected from the state.

Here C+O come along with their size eleven rebel boots and stomp all over the reformulation, ‘What are you saying’, they ask incredulously, ‘that the workers are masters of the factory?’ Ridiculous. The reformulation is nonsense, there is some small truth in the process by which power must rearrange itself around the interest of the most resistant sectors of society but that is not at all to say this resistance is thus included in the framework as an autonomous interest, not in the least, re-

groups and debate prosaic ‘issues’ when we could be quietly looking out the window looking at the rain?

I would therefore tentatively suggest a position of rigour might be constituted in an active disinvestment from the crushing optimism of social movements, that is from the beliefs of the believers (Burroughs on ‘square’ astronauts: ‘anyone who prays in space is not there’). In the place of a teleologically ‘means and ends’ movement I would propose a more disciplined and probably closed milieu organised perhaps as a Bakuninist fraternity. I understand that this runs absolutely counter to inclusionist conceptions and therefore must seem very alien but pray let me dig my own grave. The purpose of the fraternity would be to hold, like a gathering of gnomish grand masters, a simultaneous attitude of: 1. disdain for all present occurrences; 2. ready openness to a formless and undetermined revolutionary future; 3. willingness to block and expose false revolutionaries; 4. acceptance of the role of holding back milieu ideas from the world so as to only disseminate them when events dictated, that is when such ideas would find purchase.

It is my conclusion that the need for initial revolutionary agency has passed and that an objective crisis in capital itself, perhaps biological (MRSA, bird flu or some other epidemic) or geophysical eruption, or economic unravelling would provide the stage for what is to come. I have to say at this point that this is not my personal desire, cataclysm is the very furthest from what I would wish for us all and at the last moment I am sure I would panic, I’d be frantically bailing out our sinking prison hulk, hymn-singing, praying for some sort of leftist miracle and showing myself up to be just another cretin of the vast cretinous multitudes, but by then it will be too late, and isn’t it the inevitable, the no-going back, that we seek? This is where my wandering thoughts have led me. God save my fluttering soul.

cess' and how people are 'already' taking power. And it has been talking in this way for a very long time. The milieu is still too close to politics and political values, its ideas and its proposed exit strategies bear an uncomfortably close resemblance to political parties and religious movements. The value content of the message is perhaps very different but the teleological convergence of movement with world at the level of technique and structure identically reflects all other 'movements' not in power. At this level 'anarchism/free communism' is indistinguishable from street level fascism or spiritual enlightenment or green politics or religious fundamentalism. Substitute the value content and all social movements become objectively similar in terms of their containment by capitalist conditions. One week the community hall is filled with an anarchist book-fair the next its The Nation of Islam, thus the actualisation of the marketplace of ideas.

If the movement model was at all feasible as an agency for realising free communism then the milieu would have to be recruiting across the world ten thousand new people every week and holding their consciousness in a velveteen/iron grip so that these recruits wouldn't drift off or change the original purpose of the organisation. This is simply not happening and nor does the milieu hold enough capital so as to organise this soul receptacle, The Saviour machine. Is it really a surprise to find out that only bureaucratic hierarchy can direct the consciousness of millions of people? If this is not devastating news then why the pretence towards creating a mass consciousness? And anyway, we have now reached a point where our argument is so complex that it cannot be communicated, what with our obscure rejections of others so apparently similar to us, and then we find increasingly that there are fewer places where our ideas might be engaged and can we now be bothered to rehearse the whole rigmarole again for the benefit of this ugly sub-leninist bore before us in the room above the bar, as if he is anything like our ideal interlocutor, as if we had set out to gather in dull

sistant sectors are merely managed and contained, to be overturned later. In response to the reformulation of the dialectic C+O want to re-draw the us and them line, they say: there is the interest of capital and there is the interest of humanity. Where the line has been blurred in the reformulation: the welfare state, standard of living, political representation, technological innovation, all of which are made to stand in for objective progress, C+O want to re-contrast it and refuse it all. The welfare state is the bureaucratic management of weakness, ill-health, immiseration and disempowerment; improved standards of living are partial, relative and stand in the place of lost freedom; present technologies are appropriate only to the present, they have no objective relevance, as capitalist technologies advance so humanity recedes; and political representation is an alibi, a permanent deferral of actual power. Everything that has been won from the ruling class has been allowed only because more fundamental matters (land, freedom, time) have been lost. There is nothing here now that is worth carrying over — revolution must be an absolute break with present conditions, it is an instant archeologisation of all present details.

2.

You can imagine how my heart skipped like a mountain goat as I read this. But what is it for C+O that stays the same? If, as they say, C+O reject dialectics because dialectical opposition is, objectively, no kind of opposition, then what is non-dialectical opposition? Here we approach the dangerous implications of an anti-dialectical politics. First off, they oppose negotiational/dialogic opposition because it is both easily overturned by the dominant ideology and because it subsequently operates as a front for that ideology by posing as a radical alternative 'inevitably turning out to be that old 'left wing of capital', duh, why didn't we see that coming? All the rebels

turned out to be cops and leftism systematises that downturn in idealism, it recruits masses of individuals in order to objectively neutralise them. What are the implications of this? C+O do not say this, nowhere do they say this, but as MD we did say it: the rejection of left wing politics necessarily ends in a rejection of all politics, and formulates itself as a critique of all pseudo-solutions. Thus feminism, black power, nationalism and all identity based politics alongside all issue politics from antiwar to pro-environment are seen by the anti-dialectician to be paths back to the ruling ideology 'they are bogus, included, structurally affirmative. C+O did not go this far, I wonder why? To step down from a moving train is to risk spraining your ankles.

3.

It is like a theory unravelling. Who is to say, 'stop pulling the thread'? We are after the most radical, uncontainable position. So why should we stop when we can keep on going? C+O do stop short. I want to know why? Why do they praise the actions of the 'conscious' militant at the end of their piece. On what grounds do they validate the actions of 'violent' 'barbarians' when they have already stated that all opposition in objective terms is contained by the lordly dialectic? They cite an 'outside.' Ok I agree. But how does any one on the inside (and as C+O say, there is only inside) recognise what is outside? Who on the inside now can propose a solution, when all solutions are necessarily conditioned by, determined by, the inside? H+N propose their solution but C+O say they are wrong, H+N are included, they are part of it. The opposition is part of it, the opposition is a racket, Cammatte said that thirty years ago. How do C+O know they are also not part of it, especially when they have already proved theoretically that we are all, in fact, part of it? If change is to come from the outside, that

Having said all this, it is well to remember here the dead ends of the pro-revolutionary position. Firstly there is an absolute disconnection between the points 1. the current situation of the world; 2. the pro-revolutionary yearnings for another future; 3. the structural impossibility of pro-revolutionaries imposing their vision under current circumstances without reproducing previous ideological recomposition's of the basic capitalist social hierarchy. The milieu must always exist between the closing walls and ceiling of these relentless conditions. Should it go to the people? Should it withdraw altogether? Should it form secret bands and disrupt the social mechanism? These are not merely rhetorical questions and may be answered swiftly: to the first we should observe that transmitting a libertarian consciousness under present conditions has become impossible, this has something to do with 'information' and something to do with replicating existing hierarchies within the anti-hierarchical message; to the second, another question what is withdrawal, where in the world is there to escape to? Thirdly, the armed struggle is inherently elitist and any possible disruption could not equal in magnitude capital's own disruptions of itself.

It seems to me that what is important for the milieu right now, after two hundred years of defeat and recuperation, and also taking into consideration the milieu's present lack of capacity to effect change, is the pursuit of a rigorous position that may face the world without reproducing it. At present, and I say this following the European Social Forum's final metamorphosis into a shrivelled and dimwitted moth of capital (the day after it organised a national demo against the war of twenty thousand adherents 200,000 others 'welcomed' back the British Olympic team), at present the milieu has a tendency to reproduce existing political and social structures and then celebrate them as future solutions: here it talks about convincing more and more people of its message; here it talks about taking action; here it talks about alternatives; here it talks about its 'suc-

cause they believe they can overthrow present conditions they are wrong, in that belief they reproduce present conditions. But perhaps we may discuss non-strategic and non-informational forms another time.

* * *

If proposed political solutions are always contradicted by what is concrete in the world then what is it of the world now that may in turn contradict the world?

'Shall we emit fearful war cries?' 'That, I think, is optional.' — Belles of St Trinians

Firstly I'd like to say that my critique of C+O was not intended as a comment on their project, method, lifestyle or position. I wished only to point out how they could extend their ideas much further than they did in their paper and they could do so without in any way compromising their *raison d'être*. On the contrary, I think by increasing the content of their critique they might achieve a much greater consistency in their stance.

For the moment, what is required is a language that actually fits the experiences we have of our circumstances. It is though articulating our experiences that we might then feel confident we aren't lying to ourselves. It seems to me a good idea for all of us to be as consistent as possible at all levels, and I felt that C+O perhaps did not go far enough in the language of their critique. It was my opinion that C+O showed some nostalgia for certain political elements, elements which may or may not prove detrimental in future circumstances. For my part I think it is better to be rid of those delusions that we may be rid of now rather than be disappointed by supposed allies at the critical juncture just because of some hasty agreement to the terminology of others for the sake of 'solidarity'. It is better to be true to what we think now rather than attempting to second guess what will be appropriate in the future.

is if change is to be eruptive, in their terms, 'insurrectional', a break, undetermined, then all present and past acts and events, even the most radical, do not meet the criteria, were not 'radical' or 'outside' enough. By fetishising militancy C+O mistake the nature of what it is to be human. Militancy, consciousness, awareness, and as C+O say in their last line, 'will', are all dependent upon a specific optimistic, already enclosed vision of the world which states that if enough of us 'militate' we can improve this thing. In this they are in agreement with all other evangelical/recruiting mystification's of human agency. If we try hard enough, if we are resistant enough, we will break the chains of the world, we will find ourselves somewhere else. But all of history shows this not to be true. Up to this moment all human 'resistance' to conditions has further tightened the chains. There is no evidence to state that the 'outside' may be reached by effort of will, or by decision, or by any human agency, all possibilities for which have been enclosed for millennia within that which C+O term 'civilisation'. On what level does the militancy that C+O validate signify, to the self yes, we feel good to come off best after an encounter with the authorities, but to the authorities themselves and beyond them, to the existing structure, what value does any instance have? A burnt-out bank is a boon for builders, cleaning companies, cops, security advisers, property developers. A riot, like a forest fire, is good for business, cleans out the old, shock and awe. Capitalism makes capital out of conflict and disaster. Rioters and insurrectionists are not the most resistant elements in society, they are perhaps the most conscious, the most confrontational but they are also the most spectacular, the most self-conscious, the most prey to delusions of 'people power.' The insurrectionist is fine in his moment, and so many of them fall away exhausted, but they act only for themselves, they are not creating a better world, they are not at the front. They act for themselves, the extreme acts of a few will never be a substitute for the small acts of becoming human of the many. to acknowledge this, to accept the essen-

tially selfish and subjective nature of the 'black block' is not to say we must not resist. On the contrary, we must continue. It is only to say, that there is no necessary connection with the outside through our desire for it. It is likely that our resistance, in the end counts in favour of existing authority and against the possibility for revolution. All we can say with certainty is that we can recognise what is not outside. C+O recognise the insideness of H+N, and I can recognise the insideness of political militancy that doesn't mean any of us can identify the outside just because we want it.

4.

What is most worrying in C+O's text is that fragment of the already existing which it unquestioningly reproduces. Why, for example, does it talk of 'Empire', of civilisation, of barbarians. These readymade terms sit uncomfortably with the struggle to break free which C+O are attempting. The term 'Empire', to me, is a political euphemism. The left does not find it convenient to talk about capitalism because it always seeks alliance with pro-capitalist elements; somehow its vocabulary shies away from the word capitalism, it talks of globalisation or Empire as if these words express more conveniently how social relations are, they are more appropriate to the terms proposed as solutions, democracy, equality, national self-determination (terms that are opposed by imperialism but which are included, even manufactured by capital). But capitalism by definition is not explicit, it builds or takes over a superstructure which it manipulates and exploits, it operates by shielding itself, the interest of capital never appears as such, it is more than comfortable with the euphemisms and mystification's of the left. Empire is not capitalism, it is a political adjective, it does not describe the world only the left's project. In truth, there is no empire. Empires belong in the past when there were emperors. There are

jective and do not accurately articulate either objective or subjective conditions. I think these 'nihilists' were looking for a greater power, a bigger stick, a more tsar-like force to out-tzar the tsar, and in this way they became what you might have called 'strategic nihilists.' I find this to be a contradiction in terms, when I think of nihilism I think at the opposite scale, when I say I believe in nothing, I don't mean that I believe in something else that is going to give present society a crack on the head, i mean I don't believe (in anything). I try and think in terms beyond or outside of 'belief', I try to think and act in the human scale, I want things to be broken down into hand-sized pieces (that is not to say that I 'believe' that what I do is objectively significant or an example, it's just that I refuse the role of 'revolutionary' which presents self-action as the solution and thereby reproduces spectacular representations of cause and effect). In this way I reject 'strategy' because a strategic outlook implies hierarchy, it demands that the strategist sees things not as they are in themselves but as units functioning within the bigger picture. I absolutely refuse the bigger picture, I do not set my pieces against the pieces of my enemy, I reject the game entirely.

The only point where I do coincide with the means to the end 'overview nihilists' is in the debate on whether change comes by modification and reform or by break and eruption. The activist might ask, doesn't the reliance on an outside and unpredictable agency imply quietism and disengagement? I see no reason for this, those who resist present conditions resist present conditions and that's an end of it. It is what they do, there is no need to add on to this resistance a set of higher aims, which must in the end drag back 'resistance' into negotiation'. There is no teleology, there is no movement, there is no representationalism in the rebels actions, there is only the act of resistance itself which has no significance but for those engaged. They fight for themselves, for their sense of themselves and they fight because it is what they are driven to. If they fight be-

hold over society as society changes in response to power's initiatives. The question then for the critic of society's present configuration is: do I accept the objectivity of this movement? Many marxists and leftists say yes, they see the depths of what they call barbarism caused by capitalism to be the material condition for the highs of a post-capitalist society. I for one, don't accept this, I don't accept present technology or present state institutions, or for that matter present political ideas, to be objectively constituted, I think all of these are entirely subjective forms belonging to the ruling class. The second question for the social critic then becomes: what is my role in the dialectic? If we accept we are part of the problem and our solutions only flesh out the array of possible reforms that capital may take up when it comes under objective pressure (which I see basically as meltdown of resources, or the final collapse in humans of the will to live) and we accept that capital under conditions of emergency will ally itself with any 'reform' even state communism rather than contemplate its own non-existence (for example, many people remark that the period in modern times when British people were most healthy, optimistic and content in themselves was during the 39–45 war and what was known domestically as 'war-communism' but capital as a system survived it all intact) then we see the problem of engagement becomes acute.

So what does 'being against dialectics' mean? We cannot escape the world that is for sure. But equally, we cannot accept the world. I think this where nihilism comes in. Nihilism is the non-acceptance of current terms, it supposes that if there is to be communist society, in its most utopian sense, then existing social forms firstly have to be dismantled. Unlike the Russian nihilists that we know of, I am sure there were many other strands which have subsequently been erased, I don't praise, supra-human or objective forces, I don't think 'science' will overthrow the tsar, or that human beings must bend the knee to the tyranny of nature. I think these positions are rather pro-

no emperors any more — there are accountants. Empires are political entities designed upon a culture of expenditure, capitalism is an economic order of productive exploitation, the two belong to two separate orders and two separate epochs. Yes, the term 'empire' was reinvented by Britain as a respectable ideological cloak for the primitive accumulation of capital up until the 1940's but in fact there was never any such thing as the British Empire beyond ideology simply because capitalism as a form of domination exists in advance of empire. If a ruling class could 'choose' capitalism, it certainly wouldn't reject it in favour of empire. Empire is an explicit order of political domination whereas capitalism is secretive, discreet, hidden mode of exploitation. And the term is meaningless anyway as a general description of international relations because at the level of ideology, if not at the level of practice, all nation states are imperialist, that is all states from Iraq to Israel are expansionist but they are expansionist because they are driven by objective economic imperatives which they cannot acknowledge. Objectively America is only 'more' 'imperialist' than the proposed Palestinian state in that whilst both are economically driven to expand their control over resources america has the more weapons. As C+O say, all nation states are the same. The term 'empire' has no meaning beyond the leftist initiative of 'anti-imperialism' i.e. the nationalism of 'oppressed' states to which it seeks to ally itself. The term empire has no application for anti-stateists. So why do C+O adopt it? Why can't they say capitalism? At this point their terminology is defined by already existing forces, they are captured by H+O, they speak the same language.

5.

I don't like the use of the opposition of barbarism to civilisation. Barbarian is a word coined by the 'empire', nobody has

ever called themselves barbarian. For example, in my life all I wish for is land to live on and trees around me. The opposite to this is not 'civilisation' but the barbarism of present day capitalism which has captured me and binds me through my labour. Again, C+O seem determined by the language of others, they speak in words and formulations that are inherited and I wonder why. They do not say: work is like a set of clothes that does not fit, the shoes that pinch, the collar that chafes, the sleeves that impede, they do not talk of how, when faced with work, they have have an impending Sunday evening feeling, that nausea, that weak as a rabbit in a snare feeling, that sense of being wound in as if a barbed hook were embedded in the flesh. They talk like they are trying to conform to a scene, to an orthodoxy of references, specialised mannerisms, and measures to be applied, they appear to want to belong to a moral order that has set itself up as somehow separated from the rest of humanity. They back themselves into a position where they cannot speak of how they feel, of what people say to them in passing, they do not talk of their neighbours, of what they see with their eyes. They are, as far as their readers know, sealed into a monastery where only monkish controversies signify. Their language is not immediate, it is not 'barbarian'. They do not talk as they find it, they do not express themselves. What they do is re-utilise the exhausted language of politics, of theory, of dialectics.

At the beginning of this I said I was writing only as myself, the significance of this is that personal languages have no value to the left, which always must pretend that its subjective arguments are objectively ratified, the left has all the answers. But in refusing that language and the conformity it demands, I am as much discredited for the way I write as for what I write. C+O choose not to write from their experience. Like so many others they fall into line and, once again, adopt a rhetorical position of moralistic anger, of moral denunciation of someone else. They speak with apparent theoretical objec-

tivity which has been so long the preserve of leftist ideologues. In this, unfortunately, they reproduce existing forms of how it is to speak on the world. Classically, they end by citing themselves, by implication, as the example in opposition to what they reject. They pretend because they are driven by the language they use, that they know. They are the possessors of consciousness and are thereby elevated. They cannot bear the alternative, to speak as themselves, to admit to not knowing, to step down from a moving train. To discredit themselves in the eyes of the left, to show themselves weak, to appear isolated individuals and no more than what they actually are, to step back down into the seething pit of existence that everyone else experiences and talk from there. In their writing they have refused themselves as individuals and instead attempt to overcome the left by means of using the rhetoric of the left. Just as those who seek to seize the state are in turn seized by the state so C+O are in this text captured by the language and values that they reject. They become the emissaries of the emissaries. It is like invasion of the bodysnatchers.

* * *

What I should have said to clarify, is that 'being against' dialectics is not the same as saying there is no such thing as dialectics. I think there is such a thing as a grinding machine, a propulsive, progressive machine that is dialectics, yes dialectics is the means by which reality realises itself, alters itself. What I meant to say is that there is a difference between the reality of dialectics and the reality of individual human life, dialectics refers to the modification of power, it is how it transforms itself in response to changing situations. The discourse of dialectics argues that everything is already inside the machine and every detail of historical existence is both determined by past and present social relations and also plays a part in the reformulation of society, that is in the recalculation of power's