

ues

Imagine going into a restaurant and sitting at a table. Now imagine that the restaurant is in a city, in a country that is governed by the people who live there and that country's resources are shared equally with other parts of the world in such a way that means that the notion of the nation state has been dissolved to make way for a form of co-operation that functions at a global and local level whereby each person has direct influence over their own affairs (without coercion by external forces) and the functioning of the society - "a highly organized form of society, organized on the basis of organic units, organic communities - the workplace and the neighbourhood, and from those two basic units there is derived, through federal arrangements, a highly integrated kind of social organization that is national and international in scope. Decisions are made over a substantial range, but by delegates who are always part of the organic community from which they come, to which they return, and in which, in fact, they live." In the restaurant, as you sit, absent-mindedly waiting for someone to bring you a copy of the menu, you wonder how it is that such a system came to exist: how is it that human relations could become so distorted by money and power that some should be forced to cook and serve food to others, to fill their glasses and clear their plates, to wipe the bread crumbs off the clean linen, to hover in the periphery waiting for the slight movement of a hand?

For the sake of a discussion, assume that all art-works, whatever form they might take, can be commodified and therefore referred to as art objects.

In the process of the appreciation of an art-work, how are we being manipulated? If a function of the state is the transfer of public money into private hands, for example the Olympics, what purpose can be served by a big solo retrospective in an oil fired power plant? How are we being manipulated? If a fashion is, like the desire to drink milk, a product of a public relations industry, how do we, honestly, measure the significance of that art object. Stand in awe. Fear.

Worship. Revere. Compete. Crumbs.

What effect does the notion of an art-work's exchange-value have on the production and perception of art?

This cannot be an exhaustive study, more like a simple thought experiment with silly words.

"The word value, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called "value in use", and the other "value in exchange"."

What does your work do? Is an art object praised by its usefulness? An art object's exchange-value is decided upon both undistorted by personal feelings or bias and based on a person's emotions and prejudices. A person might consider an art object to be of merit because they like it and because of its prominence on the market (and their expectations for how that appraisal will change according to the general desirability of the thing and the profile of its creator).

And these personal feelings and emotions are, like the desire to smoke a cigarette, malleable. And these products can be sold and consequently profited from. Therefore, we can be manipulated into buying them. A diamond may be regarded as having no practical use and, outside of the market framework, therefore disregarded - but it retains its potential for aesthetic value and so remains marketable.

Try to imagine an object that has no function but retains exchange-value without relying on aesthetic desirability. Try. Imagine an art-work that claims to have no purpose or aesthetic value. If such an art-work could be realised, objectified, it would certainly be of some consequence - if only due to its scarcity - and therefore potentially of value (that something which cannot exist has been brought into existence would surely demand some reverence).

"It is often held that 'use-value lies outside the sphere of investigation of political economy' (Karl Marx) meaning that, from the economic point of view, the fact that someone has a desire which some object satisfies is the ultimate fact. The structure of the desire itself, and its merit, depth, and moral or spiritual significance lie outside the economist's purview. Thus an apple has use-value, so does a work of art. But the desire for an apple is based in physical need, that for a work of art in a conception of aesthetic value."

This understanding of an art object's use-value as being wholly subjective ignores, amongst other things, the control mechanisms of the market. This imagined art-work that is without function or beauty can still be of value to the market because its use-value and

thereby its exchange-value can be, like the desire to concern oneself only with one's own well-being, manufactured.

These manufactured desires influence the production and perception of art objects and the perception of their value in use and value in exchange.

It is possible, then, for this useless, undesirable art object to exist, maintained only by its perceived importance within the framework of the market.

Undoubtedly, such objects do exist and are ubiquitous, given the ubiquity of the market.

It is the process of spiritual transformation inherent to emancipation and genuine social revolution that requires intellectual activity. "Nothing promotes this ripeness for freedom so much as freedom itself. This truth, perhaps, may not be acknowledged by those who have so often used this unripeness as an excuse for continuing repression, but it seems to me to follow unquestionably from the very nature of man. The incapacity for freedom can only arise from a want of moral and intellectual power. To heighten this power is the only way to supply the want, but to do so presupposes the freedom, which awakens spontaneous activity. ... Those who do not comprehend this may justly be suspected of misunderstanding human nature, and wishing to make men into machines."

Our everyday experiences of understanding, thought, and reasoning are intellectual responses to the world. An art-work presents a small part of that requirement. In a world of shared resources and co-operative societies the fictitious aggrandisement of some

particular object over and above another might, perhaps, be of little consequence. Without an exchange-value or profit motive what incentive exists to glorify and treasure an art object? What quantifies worth beyond aesthetic judgement? Perhaps function, perhaps use-value. (How can a society that values an art-work based on its benefit to society, alongside its aesthetic desirability, foster the form of creativity that engenders and is engendered by contemporary art?) What emerges out of this organic community where an art-work is regarded by its use-value? If that part of the human desire to create that leads to the production of, what is referred to as, 'contemporary art' persists - I assume and hope that it will - then perhaps what an art-work does to benefit society will be recognised as more significant than those peculiarities that are celebrated by the market.

"How far does the success of libertarian socialism or anarchism really depend on a fundamental change in the nature of man, both in his motivation, his altruism, and also in his knowledge and sophistication?

It not only depends on it but in fact the whole purpose of libertarian socialism is that it will contribute to it. It will contribute to a spiritual transformation - precisely that kind of great transformation in the way humans conceive of themselves and their ability to act, to decide, to create, to produce, to enquire - precisely that spiritual transformation that social thinkers from the left-Marxist traditions, from Rosa Luxembourgh, say, through anarcho-syndicalists, have always emphasized. So, on the one hand, it requires that spiritual transformation.

On the other hand, its purpose is to create institutions which will contribute to that transformation in the nature of work, the nature of creative activity, simply in social bonds among people, and through this interaction of creating institutions which permit new aspects of human nature to flourish. And then the building of still more libertarian institutions to which these liberated human beings can contribute. This is the evolution of socialism as I understand it."

Quotes within the text are taken from, respectively, *The Relevance of Anarcho-syndicalism* - Noam Chomsky interviewed by Peter Jay - July 25, 1976 (edited slightly); Adam Smith quoted by Roger Scruton in *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, 1982; Ibidem (though not quoting Adam Smith); Wilhelm von Humboldt quoted by Noam Chomsky in a public lecture titled *Government in the Future* - New York Poetry Center, February 17, 1970; *The Relevance of Anarcho-syndicalism* (again, slightly edited). Certain terminology is derived from *The Collins Paperback English Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, and *Word Origins* by John Ayto.