

Critique of Spectacles

Black & Red

November, 1968

Certain kinds of DEMONSTRATORS wait until the capitalist system creates a situation, address themselves to the wrong audience: the capitalist press, the police, the government, businessmen.

They want revolution from the top. The Leaders—corporate and military—are going to institute a “more human society.”

THEY MAKE A SPECTACLE.

Rubin and Hoffman are outstanding in making spectacles. The whole world is their audience. They define the contents of the play, the time for the performance. They’re original. When they begin to live, THEY’RE DESTROYED. Rubin and Hoffman ARE BEING ELIMINATED BY CAPITALIST SOCIETY. The demonstrators who copy Rubin and Hoffman ARE BEING COOPTED BY CAPITALIST SOCIETY.

The copyists are not original authors: they’re duplicators; they don’t perform original acts, but copies of original acts. THEY MAKE COMMODITIES FOR SALE ON THE SPECTACLE MARKET. And first of all they sell themselves.

They prove to themselves that they’re alive (when in fact they’re not). The purpose of the whole show is to show themselves and the cops that they’re revolutionaries. They perform the spectacle for themselves: THEY’RE THE ACTORS AND THE AUDIENCE.

By mimicking revolutionary action, they merely prove that the capitalist system is able to absorb ANYTHING which is not revolutionary, which does not totally challenge it.

Instead of building a revolutionary mass movement they perform a revolution. They make theater. And it’s not even good theater. Good theater can be recognized by who’s in the audience. These actors have no audience. So they act out their plays for cops.

They make revolution a commodity. The more aggressive, the higher the price. They do what everyone has always wanted to do. They do what the capitalist society could not tolerate if everyone did it, but which it can tolerate when a small group of actors does it. AND THEN THEY SELL IT. People want to see it, and pay high prices for the spectacle.

IT’S POLITICAL STRIP-TEASE.

It’s precisely what capitalist society needs.

This “revolutionary” builds a movement to support him in the performance of his spectacle. And his followers “live” when he performs. If he can build a large enough following, all the alienated of capitalist society will flock to see THE ONE who built a “revolutionary movement.”

And just in case they MIGHT create a situation which becomes dangerous to capitalist society, they've already prepared the repression. They've made the cops familiar with all the militants. BECAUSE THE COPS ARE THEIR FAVORITE AUDIENCE.

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