

# Culture & Nothingness

David Van Deusen



1999-2001

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part I: The Dawn of Nothingness</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Part II: The Instinct to Rebel</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Part III: The Rise of Capitalism</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Part IV: Authoritarian Communism As An Incomplete Resistance</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Part V: Capitalist Colonization &amp; Neo-Liberalism</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Part VI: Radical Commodification &amp; Consumerism</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Part VII: The Anarchist Rebellion</b>	<b>18</b>

# Introduction

“The bow bends; the wood complains. At the moment of supreme tension, there will leap into flight an unswerving arrow, a shaft that is inflexible and free.”

— Camus, *The Rebel*

We stand at the threshold of a new millennium.<sup>1</sup> In itself this is no more than an arbitrary marker of time. But, the actual circumstances, both psychological and material, both social and political, denote this arbitrary time as one of the most dynamic in history. The age of wo/man has come face to face with itself through its exhaustion. Both realism and nihilism have been unmasked as the oppressors that they are. Fascism has proven itself homicidal and suicidal in its dark absurdism. Authoritarian communism has reached the apex of its empire of free slaves and has collapsed under its inherent hypocrisy. Finally capitalism is facing its own death not from its failures, but from its success. What stands at the threshold is the world of the rebel; the age of anarchism. But the realization of anarchism must be justified by the means through which it is achieved, and this achievement must be arrived at consciously by a free people. Those of us who are already awake must not only sound the horns, but learn the melody that will best express the full aspirations of the people who stand to be liberated. The music will inspire the millions, and together we will establish a brother and sisterhood of humankind. The walls will fall.

What now concerns us is a proper understanding of what it means in the modern age to carry forth the anarchist revolution (which by definition is a qualitative revolution), what is the necessary direction of contemporary anarchism, what relation does it hold in hold in modern society, and what are its means and ends? The anarchism of the new millennium is a far cry from the early proclamations of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Nor are the experiences of revolutionary Ukraine (under Nestor Mahkno) or Spain (1936–39) directly relevant in the modern neo-capitalist state. Its propositions as with its approach must adhere to the times. The revolution is not purely a question of economy, nor is it set on a fixed single course. Rather, the revolution must be more than quantitative, and must be respective of the possibility of many roads and many conclusions. The road to revolution can no more be expected to rest on a single set of tracks or to arrive at the same station. On the other hand, its final destination, although at variance, will reach the common land of dignity, freedom, equality, and justice. So what can be said about this revolutionary trajectory that does not relegate it to what it is not? Many things, as long as they are all viewed as probabilities and suggestions among a pallet of others. It is with the above in mind that I will now proceed in this modest essay. To begin with I will discuss the historical-cultural roots of oppression and rebellion, the modern context in which society is situated, the contemporary forms of anarchism which are evolving to meet this challenge, and the cultural process by which revolution occurs. It is to the former that I first turn.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2017 note from the author: A version of this essay was first published in *Kinetic*, an Ohio underground newspaper, in 2001. No longer possessing a copy of this publication, I cannot recall what city the paper was published out of. I first started to work on this essay in 1999 (shortly after the Battle of Seattle), while living in Seville, Spain. Further revisions were made while living in Marlboro, Vermont, in 2000.

## Part I: The Dawn of Nothingness

“I watched with glee while your kings and queens  
Fought for ten decades for the gods they made.  
—The Rolling Stones, ‘Sympathy For The Devil”

The history of human society is, in part, a history of two great conflicting cultures: that which rests upon the recognition of the inherent value of existence, and that which is in reaction to a perceived nothingness. Existence and nihilism; the great matriarch and patriarch of all the world’s culture. The later more rightly must be understood as the foundation for an anti-culture. For its underlying nothingness must ultimately strip unabstracted reality from its modes of expression. Therefore, social history is fundamentally a struggle between culture and nothingness. However, the former originally gave rise to the later through its capacity for imaginary creation, and now the later must give way for the conscious realization of the former.

The human capacity for creative expression allowed wo/man to develop narratives which constitute fables, whose metaphor has the ability to unleash other creative faculties through a process of reflection. For an undeterminable amount of time these fables remained as a legitimate expression of natural existence. They constituted creativity and sparked imagination. This creative capacity also allowed humans to manipulate their environment in order to alleviate a degree of natural oppression and alienation experienced in relation to the elements. In select regions this led to the agricultural revolution and the establishment of permanent settlements. Towns, then cities formed.

With the formation of these cities the tribal chieftains became more separated from the population. Here they began to take the form of a nobility class. This occurred in direct relation to the growing complexities of urban development. In turn these new complexities acted as the motivation for the formation of a bureaucracy. This marked the formation of a class responsible for the administration of the nobility’s directives. Together the nobility and the bureaucracy constituted the upper and lower levels of the greater ruling class. One can imagine this ruling class, isolated from the still prevalent cyclical existence of the people and effectively insulated from organic humanness within the walls of their fortresses, began to sense a new form of estrangement. Here, cut off from their roots, perhaps this class grew anxious. The human existence which their chieftain and common ancestors intimately knew likely became more and more an inaccessible memory. It is conceivable that natural existence itself became estranged. Within the citadels life may have lost its inherent value in the murky waters of abstraction and isolation. This would have sparked existential fear, and thereby the first true nihilists would have emerged onto the field of history. In this void this class may have observed the urban structures of their developing cities, their own power as a ruling class, and posited that if nothing exists in an ultimate sense, that is if nothing possesses intrinsic value, then they must make value. This tendency may have been complicated by the recognition that those old common fables could and must serve a purpose toward this end. For if meaning must be forced, and particularly by the hand of the ruling class, then certain devices would have to be utilized in order to guarantee the utmost control

of the population. If and when this point was reached the people could rightly be understood as different creatures than their former chieftains and their aides. The people would have still enjoyed that close bond with the earth. They would have lived in cyclical time and accepted the value of natural existence as an unconscious fact. Thus moves which denounced the basic understandings of these people would result in undesired tension. Here the ruling class would be wise to develop a sly path. They could have found a dark purpose for those common fables whose truths were no longer understood by the rulers. They would have the means and motivation to twist them into abstraction by forcing an unnatural literalness upon them. They could have used them as justifications and tools of their control over their former equals. Religion was created. In a word, the position of God and State was solidified as ignorance, oppression, and nihilism incarnate. Dogma was born.

Perhaps these tyrants lost their connection with unabstracted existence through their insulation as a cosmopolitan ruling class; their royal tapestries obscuring the stones from which their walls were built. To combat this abstraction more abstraction could have been employed. Efforts may have been engaged to unify a perceived nothingness by the means of the iron grip of their ego unleashed. If they could perceive no meaning, then meaning would have to be imposed. This morbid task, once begun, dictates a project which cannot be accomplished in any short time or even in the course of a few centuries. To attempt to forge a unity of pseudo-existence through will necessitates that such unity reach everywhere in order for it to constitute itself as a quasi-reality. This quest would have to be expansionist and totalitarian from the moment that it was conceived. It had to place itself everywhere and in doing demand unwavering obedience from all people.

Granting these premises, at first the ruling class would have utilized these fables as tools to their own elevation and semi-consciously as fortresses providing insulation from their demons. They created codified religions out of these fables and here stupefied the masses into the dazzling hell of existential distortion. They created a religion to give moral sanction to their psychotic campaigns. They embarked upon a misguided attempt of achieving a forced unity of content and fake immortality of its source (themselves). And with this, the great masses of the earth would have been blessed with the countless horrors of never-ending imperial wars and untold suffering brought forth through the construction of great monuments; wars paid for by their blood and monuments constructed by their coerced labor.

These wars were, and are, inevitable. For a forced unity must manifest itself everywhere for it to appear to be true. It cannot tolerate obvious external contradiction. This means the continuing subjectification not only of the domestic farmworker, craftsman, and emerging mercantile population, but also foreign peoples who may or may not still be engaged in an organic hunter-gatherer social structure. This ongoing subjectification must be understood as primitive imperialism. Likewise, the construction of monuments was, and is, unavoidable as a smokescreen against the underlying emptiness and mortality of such escapism. In these ways the multitude of humankind was handed a future of sweat, pain, and death tailored to appear as greatness.

During the formative years the ruler put their faith into their illusion and tried to believe this construction was real, but that belief was only partial. The ruler still maintained access, though limited and repressed access, to their original motivations. Nevertheless the underlying motivations were repressed through the continuing distraction of materialistic hedonism and ritualistic illusion. But, at least at first, these forms of self-hypnosis and foolery were only partially effective; they were not yet complete.

With the rise of class divisions in a post agricultural/more urban society, although the predominant culture had already been transformed into anti-culture, this monster was still tethered by memory. It was prevented from achieving the elevation which its totalitarianism demanded. It could not yet take on the full illusion of existence. But, as the generations passed by, their original purposes were forgotten. The lie became the truth, and the truth heresy. The false idols then began to stir. Freed from the shackles of their makers they began to take on an eerie life of their own. They demonstrated self-moving qualities through, yet often beyond, its one time masters. With this the illusory monster became animated. All was bent to it: the economy its blood; the ruling class its arms; the state its sword; art its clothing; religion its soul; the masses its slaves. It moved beyond the control of its parts. The makers unequivocally threw themselves at the feet of the distortion they brought into being, and believed. They dedicated themselves to it. They indoctrinated and killed for it. They gave it life.

In turn the people were increasingly prevented from experiencing life without abstraction. More and more everything was seen through the grid of this construction; a construction whose manifestation implies nothingness; a construction which is nothingness masked by a narrative and made up in the clothing of an Emperor King of metaphysical proportions. They were alienated by abstractions. In this, countless facets of life within the borders of these civilizations became subordinated to this grand fallacy. Art occasionally was able to poke a hole through this death shroud and allow bits of existential light through, but all too often art only served to reinforce this illusion. However, its totality, fundamentally being false, was never able to surmount that ultimate grip over its slaves.

## Part II: The Instinct to Rebel

“There’s nothing in the streets  
Looks any different to me  
And the slogans are replaced, by-the-bye...  
Meet the new boss  
Same as the old boss.”  
– The Who, Won’t Get Fooled Again

Wo/man’s instinct to rebel continually eluded capture and persisted as a fugitive in a false world. In this capacity it acted as the ever present reminder of something more substantial. For the alienation from complete experience barred upon humankind like the weight of the world upon Christopher’s shoulders. The underclasses, however they might be defined at certain moments in our long history, sought ways to counteract or dispel this unseen weight. The anti-culture had to continually struggle to maintain its dominance.

At first struggle was effectively limited by the anti-culture diverting popular animosity towards the particular ruling class. The people were made to believe that the problem lied in the particular regime. They did not yet see that the particular regime was only the temporal facilitator of a broader system of oppression which operated through them, but also beyond them. Thus their mental energies, insofar as politics was concerned, were squandered on interchangeable functionaries acting the part of absolute ruler. This animosity was prevented from maturing by fluctuations in the make-up of the ruling class hierarchy. For the ruling class inevitably developed competing factions all vying for the leadership position. Here the illusion was reinforced since that the changing of the guard tends to relieve popular tension by shifting its focus. The people rejoiced in the death of the old oppressor. Hope was put in the new oppressor.

These internal and external conflicts continued alongside technological advances. Any society which makes a holy shrine out of abstracted super ego is bound to achieve success within the cognitively contingent fields. Actually, technological progress was due in part to imperialism. For technology was a necessary weapon towards expansionist goals. It needed better arms to establish itself over the others. It needed better productive methods to produce the necessary weapons. Transportation and navigation became more developed in order to link its projections and to accumulate more power through wealth. In turn its mobility brought it into contact with foreign ideas which it was able to synthesize into its own. It accumulated all that allowed it to expand. This development sparked an economic sub-dialectic, the kind that Marx, Engels, and Bakunin recognized (and which they assumed to be primary).

The predominant anti-culture (under usual circumstances) requires the functioning of an administrative ruling class which itself requires the state apparatus. Likewise, the ruling class requires a monopoly over the means of production. Therefore, as technological advancements accumulated, the means of production also evolved in kind.

As this trend historically developed, a new class emerged out of the old order and constituted itself somewhere between the lower and ruling class. This class grew in political power as the

developing economy inherently favored it. It developed a conflicting class interest opposed to the ruling class. In addition it differed from the old guard in that its primary concern was defined by that which gave it substance. It was brought into being by developments within the economy and in turn this class became neurotically enthralled with capital accumulation. For them, the old distorted fables which to that point constituted the justification for and general parameters of the social construct, held little interest. They desired to strip away the fat and go right for the raw wealth. Here a struggle ensued where this new class came into open combat with the old order in a bid for control over the means of production. Eventually it asserted itself as the new rulers and subsequently modernized the economy in such a way that technological progress not only continued, but grew exponentially. The rising economic dialectic necessitated more than the ascension of a new faction to the heights of power: it necessitated the emerging of a new class altogether; the bourgeoisie; the capitalists.

This insurrectionary class was also subject to the subconscious pressures of alienation brought on by the anti-culture. In this they attempted to frame their struggle in revolutionary terms. They justified their actions as a liberating deconstruction of the old order, which to them may have appeared as the liquidation of the illusory base of society. They killed the holy sanctioning of the nobility and in its place constructed a more seemingly tangible unity; the unity of capital. However this too was, and is, a false unity in that it must imperialistically project itself as an abstraction over and against natural lived experience.

With capitalism, the underlying nihilism of anti-culture managed to persist by deflecting potential elemental change by way of subterfuge. Just as in older times the particular ruling class of a particular state was made into a scapegoat, it now placed all responsibility upon particular religious and economic modes which were present at the time of rebellion. Its basic foundation was neither liquidated nor even seen. It simply absorbed the revolt and in doing made it its own.

This new social order replaced religion with the economy. Although this immediately resulted in the bolstering of the anti-culture it was a progression in that it brought the underlying meta-foundations of the broader social fabric closer to the surface. The anti-culture became more tangible. Its justification was no longer placed in the inaccessible fortress of heaven. Its justification came to clearly rest in the world. Production and profit became its sacraments. And here the misery of the under classes no longer could be as easily deflected by stories of Job. The nature of their misery slowly became apparent. The myth became transparent.



## Part III: The Rise of Capitalism

“The men at the factory are old and cunning  
You don’t owe nothing, so boy get runnin’  
It’s the best years of your life they want to steal..”

—The Clash, Clampdown

As the anti-culture moved into its later phase of industrialization/capitalism it shifted its mode of operation to that of a seemingly different type. Its functions became more tangible as the totality of God and State more or less were substituted for Economy and State. The primary mode of homogenization ceased to be that of religion and overt political empires and was instead sought through universal commodification of material goods (both raw and refined) as well as labor itself. This forced an abstracted unity which was inherently bent to serve the greed driven interests of the new ruling class. To the bourgeoisie went the spoils and privileges of nihilistic servitude.

These new modes of anti-culture expression managed to develop alongside certain more archaic forms. Political empires and religious zeal were still utilized as tools of micro and macro world manipulation when the new ruling class viewed them as both convenient and effective. However, these feudal holdovers no longer represented the direct priorities of the new oppressors, and thus increasingly gave way to the economic language of capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

This particular system liberated the surf only to place him/her within the confines of a new slavery known as wage labor. For as long as the basic social goods were effectively transformed into commodities, and as long as these commodities were further transformed into capital, the masses were forced into compromising life situations in order to obtain the totalitarian representation of this new form of anti-culture; namely capital —money. In this society the ruling class maintained a functional monopoly over capital and was thus able to control its movement in such a way as to coerce the under classes into various self-denying relations in order for them to subsist. Individuals were recruited into demeaning circumstances of factory life and were thereafter compelled to waste their potential on the sick goal of producing wealth for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. For many the dawn-till-dusk of agricultural labor was replaced with the sixteen hours of factory drudgery. The anti-culture proved its potency and its ability to evolve with the times.

This phase of cultural nihilism was inevitably met with fierce resistance from the increasingly self-conscious exploited classes. Without heaven to confuse the matter in shades of divinity, the masses began more clearly to observe the nature of their own oppression. The instinct to rebel found an objective foothold in the contradictions of capitalist production.

---

<sup>1</sup> Here it must be noted that this tension between capitalist modes of anti-culture and religious modes of anti-culture still persists today. While capitalism, or more accurately neo-capitalism, is the dominant world system, the older, more archaic forms revolving around various religious fundamentalisms still linger and struggle. Even so, the religious fundamentalism of today is not a return to the past, but instead its a last attempt to resist the forces of the present. Neo-capitalism, and not religious extremism, is the dominant force of anti-culture today.

Here the political movement of authoritarian communism took form. The worker observed the impoverished existence of his/herself and that of the under classes generally juxtaposed to the extravagant wealth of the ruling class. It was further moved by this contradiction, more so than during feudal times, due to the neurotic emphasis put on capital (wealth) by the ruling class of this new era. Capital (as the universal representation of commodities) was, and is, the great binder of the forced (and fundamentally false) totality of nihilistic unity. This marks a radical divergence from the former modes under feudalism in that the prior era maintained a promise of human equity in the religiously defined afterlife.<sup>2</sup> Thus material discrepancies in class and individual living standards did not hold the obvious importance that it does in the age of capitalism. In short, the motivating factor of poverty was obscured in former times due to the religiousification of anti-culture under the vise of an equitable God and ultimately equitable afterlife. Under capitalism the justification and concrete modes of the anti-culture were placed solidly upon the earth. The real poverty of the under classes were then freed from the confines of metaphysical speculation and were in turn allowed to act as powerful and direct motivating factors. The under classes during this era began to develop a vocabulary of rebellion which aimed at the transcendence of their worldly suffering.

---

<sup>2</sup> This essay does not seek to speculate on the ultimate truth of said afterlife. Rather what concerns us here is an understanding of how these beliefs were contextually used to serve the purposes of the ruling class and the anti-culture to further systems of control in the here-and-now.

## Part IV: Authoritarian Communism As An Incomplete Resistance

“If a victory is told in detail, one can no longer distinguish it from a defeat.”

—John Paul Sartre

The later phases of classical capitalism was marked by the rise of authoritarian communist movements of resistance. Although such forms of communism clearly represented a threat to the particular modes of the anti-culture (capitalism), they failed to truly shake the foundation of meta-society on a fundamental level. At best authoritarian communism was, and is, only capable of alleviating certain portions of material deprivation and of pushing the proverbial envelope somewhat closer to an existential reckoning by way of illuminating its own shortcomings through historical developments.<sup>1</sup>

Under communism the bourgeoisie is replaced by the Party; the commodity and capital replaced with hierarchical political ideology. A continuing anti-culture still represses unabstracted lived experience, and still seeks to impose a perceptual grid across natural reality. This must be understood as symptomatic of a continuing presence of the underlying social nihilism (i.e., a continuing social paradigm founded upon a philosophical nothingness). This is the case in that the historic ideology of authoritarian communism implies a tight practical hierarchy which can only be justified if it is forced to impose itself against a perceived something. In this case authoritarian communism claims that something is in fact a lingering capitalist consciousness which is still prevalent following the political revolution. Such a capitalist consciousness is a projection contra a perceived nothingness, which in itself represents an underlying nihilism. This nihilism must ultimately act as the grounding for such a social/psychological construction. Any projection which is motivated by such assumptions must itself assume its base prepositions. Likewise, any ideology, no matter how quantitatively divergent, which attempts to place itself over such a consciousness must become a new perceptual grid through which value can be proclaimed. This is the necessary end result of any successful system of such total aspirations. In this sense any forced communist consciousness must also be understood as a strike out against a perceived nothingness. And any program motivated by such factors must be understood as a new development in the continuing manifestation of the ongoing anti-culture. In short, the something that such a communism seeks to assert itself over only retains the relevant power over mass consciousness that such an ideology assumes if it is believed to in fact exist as a legitimate and organic expression of reality as such; in other words, if it is assumed not to be an answer to a perceived nihilism, but as a fundamental historic mode of human social expression.

If on the other hand this something (capitalist consciousness) is viewed as a superfluous social construction based on a perceived nihilism, with the effect of alienating the human experience

---

<sup>1</sup> This is not meant to degrade or downplay the reality that anarchism also emerged as a mass movement at this time. However, it was authoritarian communism which won revolutions, not anarchism. The age of anarchism would have to wait for conditions to be right for itself to come into its own.

from a more desirable organic existence, then it would not be necessary to reconstruct a new communist consciousness among the previously indoctrinated masses. Rather, with such a realization, it would only be necessary to deconstruct the false precepts which prevent the oppressed from accessing a more organic and meaningful natural reality in order for that more fulfilling social consciousness/existence to become both accessible, practical, unabstracted, and ultimately tangible. To deny this is to imply that capitalism (or feudalism for that matter) retains a more fundamental meta-social position than its underlying nihilistic underpinnings allow for. To argue such a point is to reinforce the basic nihilism which underscores all oppressive social systems.

Even under authoritarian communism a belief in the fundamental non-platform of nihilism remains the underlying factor in social, political, and economic organization. Unabstracted natural experience still remains elusive and a general alienation, if not material poverty, remains as the collectively felt tethering of the masses. Nothing persists. Unabstracted existence is repressed. The anti-culture continues.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent 72 years of authoritarian communist rule in what became the USSR and (later) the surrounding region is a prime example of how anti-culture nihilism is able to absorb such a threat, and manage to persist. Much may have changed under communism, but a complete liberation was not found. Nevertheless, the rise of the authoritarian communist movement marked a progression towards popular rebellion in that the exploitive properties of nihilism were made more obviously apparent. Stripped of the capitalist sanctity of class superiority and capital, the anti-culture was forced to forge ahead increasingly in its naked brutality towards the goal of complete homogenization; i.e. the perceptual conquest of nothingness and the final domestication of existential fear.

## Part V: Capitalist Colonization & Neo-Liberalism

“The totalitarian-ideological class in power is the power of a topsy-turvy world: the stronger it is, the more it claims not to exist, and its force serves above all to affirm its non-existence.”

—Guy Debord, *Society Of The Spectacle*

Where authoritarian communism failed to take the political reigns, the anti-culture began to shift its particular modes of operation in order to stave off developing insurrectionary threats. At first this was done through a process of political and economic imperialism which allowed for the continuation of the capitalist system (though be it in a modified form). For as the various domestic under classes of the primary capitalist states became increasingly rebellious in the face of their experienced repression, the particular ruling classes of particular states recognized the need to redirect their economy in such a way as to diminish internal oppression in exchange for increased external exploitation. With this the ruling class was able to lessen domestic strife and thus decrease rebellious sentiment while maintaining its profit margins by squeezing much more out of foreign populations. Of course this move, while somewhat addressing the issue of domestic poverty, did little to address the issue of domestic mass alienation.

This trend continued to develop, and was slowly modified in such a way that its obvious oppression of foreign peoples became more and more subtle in order to stem the developing tide of colonial rebellions; i.e. wars of national liberation. Occupying armies within the boundaries of an overt political empire were replaced with flowery worded economic treaties which managed their rape and plunder under the cover of wine and roses. This marked the age of neo-liberalism and is (of course) the paradigm of the present age.

Neo-liberalism alone is inadequate in ultimately turning back the revolutionary tide. Even under such conditions the domestic gap between the haves and have-nots as found within primary capitalist states is huge and growing. Natural animosity still exists between the under classes and the ruling class. Thus the anti-culture is driven to further lengths in order to provide for its continued dominance.

In this capacity anti-culture continues to confuse the focus of the domestic rebel and obscure the vulnerability of its system by attempting the modification of its particular incarnation in such a manner that the oppressed are compelled to actively take part in their own oppression. In this the commodification of society reaches new heights in its imperialistic quest for dominance.

## Part VI: Radical Commodification & Consumerism

“Here comes Johnny Yen again  
With the liquor and drugs  
And the flesh machine  
He’s gonna do another striptease  
Hey man where’d you get that lotion?  
I been hurting  
Since I bought the gimmick...”  
—Iggy Pop, *Lust For Life*

With radical commodification, the most trivial things acquire an abstract value. The abstracted values themselves acquire abstracted value. Objects and ideas are put on the selling block and are spoon fed to the masses regardless of practical utility. Technology becomes bent towards this end. A process of commercialization takes hold which is indicative of the radical commodification process. In this capacity commercialization must be understood as indoctrination aimed at propagating popular belief in the commodification of objects and ideas. In this spirit commodities are made increasingly useless, but at the same time they are made increasingly available to the poor and working class. Here they serve as a distraction from reflection (a reflection that is at this time the nemesis of the anti-culture). When one product becomes boring and/or lacking personal and social utility, a new one is made available which promises to be the allusive supplier of the fun, happiness, and basic needs which the formerly acquired product failed to deliver. And again, where that product is unmasked as the lie that it is, a new one surfaces; *ad infinitum*.

Consumerism is the most contemporary attempt of the anti-culture to reassert itself in a form which: 1.) deflects popular discontent through a quantitative metamorphosis of the social/political/economic particularities of the modern age; and 2.) attempts to subvert popular discontent while fostering a false unity by turning the oppressed classes into willing accomplices in the ongoing crimes committed against them.

In the first case this new capitalism shifts the obvious brutality of classical capitalist exploitation by rearranging itself into a more subtle form. At times it incorporates the trade unions of the developed world into its ranks in such a way as to allow basic reforms which improve the conditions of wage slavery while never addressing the fundamentally degrading relations between boss and worker, capitalist and slave, nihilism and existence.<sup>1</sup> Profit is still pursued against the general utility of society, if only in a less crude form. The workers in the primary capitalist states are thrown crumbs in the form of limited healthcare, limited wage increases, and limited executive representation. In turn this strategy allows the under classes to accumulate more spending

---

<sup>1</sup> This is not to imply that trade unions are devoid of revolutionary potential. It is only to say that the task of radicalizing such forces is made more difficult by continuing onslaughts of anti-culture subversion.

power<sup>2</sup>, which is utilized again towards the profiteering goals of the economic ruling class of the modern bourgeoisie. For the bourgeoisie can now radically upgrade their profit margin in terms of mass consumer products. The capitalist maintains and in fact increases gross capital accumulation by manipulating both ends of the economic system – production and mass consumption.

In the second case, this system attempts to co-opt the under classes by creating false needs which the anti-culture alone is able to fulfill.<sup>3</sup> These commodities are directly made to exist as representations of itself; as emissaries to the perceived world on behalf of the anti-culture. They are monopolized by the system and then distributed in mass as shallow rewards for popular subservience. Their very emptiness is a mark of their reliance upon an anti-culture. Their actual non-utility is testified to by the mass of indoctrination which is required in order to convince the people of their need. Commercialization, itself a commodified industry, is the form which this intense indoctrination materializes.

With this the under classes are put to the task of producing these items, indoctrinating for these items, and then are allowed access to these items in exchange for their physical and mental labor. Of course actual attainment necessitates an unmasking of the general boringness inherent in them, and therefore, new false needs are immediately developed and then transferred to the masses, through the masses, by way of newly developed commodities. Products remain “new and improved” as long as they do not reach the saturation level of distribution. When this occurs a new “new and improved” item is unveiled through the propaganda machine known as advertising.

This process resembles that which the anti-culture uses to deflect popular discontent during feudal times by which the shifting of the makeup of the ruling class blunted insurrectionary sentiment by way of a shifting of the focus of animosity. The primary difference here is that the under classes are now compelled to take a step by step active part in their own subterfuge as petty mental laborers and producers. Here the under classes are actively convinced that happiness can only be obtained through commodity acquisition. The unmasking of the emptiness of one commodity does little more than open the space for the emergence of the next commodity. The discussion is framed within the parameter of the anti-culture.

With the realization of this form of nihilistic social construction, anti-culture is made both more complete than at any prior historical period, and also more vulnerable to fundamental disclosure and eventual rejection. The former is true in that anti-culture now has begun to colonize the very inner reaches of human dreams, relations, and desires through its commodification of the non-essential, non-work related, intensely personal, and private spheres (i.e. leisure, entertainment, personal identify, social identity, love). While it is true that this was also done during previous times through religion, this modern incarnation must be understood as more complete in that it now has managed to objectify and therefore materialize itself through the individual temples of four billion (potential) believers. Without the question of mysticism to bring structural notions into occasional question, as sometimes occurs in a religiously based society, it can now more formally codify itself in a system which integrates its material constructs with the subjective state of one’s inner thoughts. All is commodified and calculable in a formula which reduces everything to the abstract materiality of capital – money. Ideas themselves become re-

---

<sup>2</sup> Although real wages have been diminishing in much of the developed world for some decades now (but so too has the retail price of unnecessary consumer goods).

<sup>3</sup> Of course other social/economic systems are technically capable of producing such products. However it is only an absurd system which would consider actually doing to at the expense of so much more.

duced to a commodity and in such become both objective and assimilated within the framework of anti-culture.

As anti-culture becomes more prevalent it also becomes more fundamentally vulnerable. No longer are the masses (within the developed capitalist states) primarily motivated towards a revolutionary disposition due to poverty. Now they begin to become agitated by social discrepancies and an intense personal and social alienation brought on by this encroaching nihilism. Where once a person could retain meaningful degrees of freedom within the framework of a more organic private life, the emissaries of commodification and navigators of objectification have more than begun their missionary tasks colonizing this new terrain. Where during the times of Marx the individual began to feel less than human through the oppressive conditions of their coerced labor, they now come to feel less than human at all times. And with this, something has to give.

The weakness of this system of anti-culture is that it can only maintain its proclaimed metaphysical completeness and perceived social legitimacy if it is manifest at all times in all relevant places. However, such an anti-culture, though representing a quasi-social reality beyond the acute control of its ruling class, cannot fully disarm the capital based irrationalities of its constructs (that being the ruling class). This ruling class, cast from the absurd values of this system, consistently refuses to relinquish their practical monopoly over capital which its elevated status relies upon. And because of this glaring fact, the poor and working class cannot reach an economic position where the process of consumption, which radical commodification and commercialism relies upon, is adequately maintained on a secure, constant, and all pervasive level. Systematic gaps necessarily occur among these classes, and with these the systematic subterfuge of consumption of false needs/commodity acquisition cannot consistently cover up the absurdity and lack of social utility which this form of anti-culture dictates.

An increasing number of poor and working class persons can be expected to call this system into question as such gaps of process occur. Also, the very pervasive nature of this process of commodification-consumerism increases the mental pressures of the lower classes by intensifying alienation. Many people can be expected to reject such modes of anti-culture in exchange for a supposedly more liberating, socially equitable, humanly fulfilling, and less psychologically stressful means of social existence. Admittedly, in some cases this will take a repressive and/or reactionary path (i.e. authoritarian, fundamentalist religious, and/or fascist subcultures). But such false roads prove themselves time and again as both socially inadequate and often brutally repressive. They will become transparent and be seen as the dead ends that they are. And here the alienated and exploited masses can be expected to be brought back to the allure of a potential society both free of the oppressive modes of the particular form of present anti-culture, and of the very precepts which give such a nihilism its historic context and imperialistic sanction.

This developing trend aimed at the grassroots eradication of neo-capitalism can be further expected to develop along basic lines which challenge the precepts of alienation in that it is to a great extent motivated by alienation. With this it is forced to challenge the very basis of anti-culture in that it is the subtle underpinning of such which gave rise to the context in which their collective misery stands. Furthermore, the under classes are now more able to realize this underlying fact in that they cannot as easily be confused by religious suppositions (as during feudal times), nor can they be as easily pacified by cosmetic changes among the makeup of the ruling class upper echelon (also during feudal times), or even quantitative changes in the basic goods of social subsistence (as under authoritarian communism). Now the poor and workers within the primary capitalist states are, in part, motivated to action against the standing order



by the very process through which they are forced to perceptually experience their life. It is their alienation which drives them and separates them from something their instinct to rebel continually alludes to.<sup>4</sup> The actualization of themselves as individuals and as a class, and all the lost potentiality which their insurrectionary sentiments point to, become the goal which their emerging desires are aimed at. Not a thing remains sacred; not the artificial hierarchy of social constructions, not the fear of nothingness. With this, all notions of social progress become fair game and open to dissection. All that can ultimately stand is that which proves itself non-alienating and free; that of the realization of a world of inherent value and the social role of humans as sentient beings also free to pursue that which their own potentials allow for as fully actualized persons through cooperation and material equity.

---

<sup>4</sup> Economics still contributes to this revolutionary process, but now alienation becomes a more meaningful force.

## Part VII: The Anarchist Rebellion

“Got to give us what we want  
Gotta give us what we need  
Our freedom of speech is freedom or death  
We got to fight the powers that be!”

- Public Enemy, Fight The Power

The modern manifestation of the anti-culture is backed into a corner that it will find increasingly hard to operate from. Due to internal contradictions its particular manifestation seems incapable of maintaining the status quo while at the same time allowing for the necessary shifting of form into that of a homogeneous consumer society. The talons of bourgeois greed are sunk too deeply within all facets of the anti-culture to allow for a transition to a more equitable consumerism; one that could ‘socialize’ the illusion of meaning through a constant process of consumption. Hence the anti-culture appears vulnerable to radical approaches from the ranks of existence minded revolutionaries.

In a word, commodification and consumerism fail to address its weakness as a super-alienating force within the developed world’s non-ruling classes, while also failing to provide adequate levels of basic social plenty for the masses in the under-developed world. As such, it would appear certain that fundamental revolutionary breeches are presenting themselves. Specifically it is apparent that those revolutionary challenges to the status quo are of a fundamental level and specifically of an anarchistic variety. For anarchism alone represents the directly democratic and equitable process by which a hierarchical ideology is not again forced upon natural lived experience. It is the revolutionary position that, among other things, the social aspect of the revolution is viewed as more fundamental than the political. Thus anarchism serves as the living movement towards a redefining of social relations in an unabstracted form. This movement has already begun.

One has to look no further than the development of counter-cultural communities among relatively large sectors of the poor, working classes, and de-classed populations throughout the more developed capitalist world from the post-World War II era to present. It is within these communities that people have been coming together in order to forge a more natural existence which seeks to challenge the historical confines of hierarchical social models while coaxing a more fluid and organically creative means of expression from their own endeavors. Here all historical precepts have come into question in order to uncover the roots of alienation, oppression, and inequity that the affected seeks to dislodge. Sometimes slowly, sometimes meticulously, and sometimes in a moment of brilliance the shackles of nihilism are being rooted out and uncovered. New, or rather more natural processes of social relations are being experimented with within the growing boundaries of this emerging counter-culture. This development is revolutionary by both necessity and nature, and, although at times misguided or ineffectual, represents a path for humanity which is both materially equitable and non-alienating. It is fluid rather than dogmatic

and affirming to the actualization of those involved rather than oppressive and hierarchical. It is inherently anarchistic.

This revolutionary path must address the very basic foundations of anti-culture if it is to gain the momentum necessary to topple the walls of social alienation. It cannot become a mockery of itself by advocating quantifiable change at the expense of qualitative revolution. It must demand all in order to gain even an inch regarding those social and psychological factors which presently make a person experience themselves and others as a cog rather than the free intricacy that they are, or at least could be. And here the banner has already been raised. And with such, the politics inherent within the counter-culture must remain steadfast in maintaining its natural position as *contra* anti-culture. It must remain vigilant so as not to become co-opted by its other, thereby becoming itself a closed dogma. It must remain a dynamic interchange of persons and ideas, anti-authoritarian while also unafraid of the unknown. It must know its enemy and boldly seek ways to ruthlessly vanquish it, while itself not becoming a new crutch for the fearful to limp on with. It must exist as a liberator opposed to false precepts; one which functions as the inalienable aspect of a freedom loving people — not as the coordinating system of blind slaves. It must not rest on its laurels or become content as a closed clique. It must remain open and thereby exert an influence throughout the ranks of the broader under classes while all the while engaging in multiple level combat with its historic nemesis; the anti-culture. It must unmask the facilitators of oppression and reveal the foundations of alienation. And finally, it must fight against its enemy wherever it is found with the weapons of ideas, living examples, and, when necessary, arms. It is through this struggle that we will reach the higher levels of the social support and growth that we require for our eventual and inevitable victory.

In summation, every moment of unmasking is a moment of culture. But such a moment does not constitute a complete culture insofar as its source is semi-conscious. The rise of capitalism, the rise of radical commodification marks the hour before dawn, and the mind lies somewhere between sleep and dream; between possibility and expectation; servitude and freedom. Culture, in its truest sense, is awake. It is a consciously creative process. But even while the mind sleeps it feels the tension of thousands of years of repression. It twists and turns in its uneasiness and grasps for its lost grounding. Here it formulates rudimentary tools for its struggle. Like the prisoner it constructs a shank, but does not yet realize its true oppressor. Rebellion is this shank. At first the shank is applied to its fellow prisoners; later to the guards; but never to the great warden of all the jails of the word; never to the anti-culture. It is only through bloody trials and tribulations that the warden is finally seen behind the proverbial curtain of poverty and the state. And then, “all that is holy is profaned. All that is solid melts into air, and man is at least forced to face, with somber senses, his true condition in life.”<sup>1</sup> And what is revealed “behind the common dark of all our deaths”<sup>2</sup>, is the great Dracula figure; the anti-culture. The mind at last is awake, and the rage of centuries flows through its veins. The tyrant is expelled, if not killed, and the pent up creative aspirations of countless lifetimes are unleashed upon the real world. Culture constitutes itself in relation to natural unity, social relations are liberated and the age of anarchism has arrived. The epic comes full circle; wo/man is back home, a little but older, a little bit sadder, but a whole lot wiser, and free. History does not come to an end, but passes into the unknown.

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Cody*.

Anarchist library  
Anti-Copyright



David Van Deusen  
Culture & Nothingness  
1999-2001

David Van Deusen (Co-Founder of The Green Mountain Anarchist Collective)

[en.anarchistlibraries.net](http://en.anarchistlibraries.net)