Andy Robinson
Thinking from the Outside: Avoiding Recuperation
2007

Published in Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed #64, Fall-Winter 2007

Andy Robinson

Thinking from the Outside: Avoiding Recuperation

2007

project, one can minimise the dangers posed by recuperation and gain the strategic space for effective emancipatory practice.

Contents

performance from the desire it serves is thus a loss of transformative energy, a recuperation.

It is by no means easy to tell if an initiative is recuperated or not, for while the conscious intent may be fairly obvious, the unconscious conversion of means into ends and tools into goals is something which can be discerned only indirectly. However, such unconscious intentionalities can often be deduced from the social relations an agent establishes in relation to a project. The actor's libidinal investments can tentatively be deduced backwards from their manifestation in social activity. In an activity valued for itself (thus, if hybrid, probably recuperated), the actor will tend to convert horizontal relations into vertical relations, to seek control over the activity, and to maintain it regardless of its usefulness or effects. The institution of the activity, its existence as a distinct social entity, is likely to be valued as a goal in itself and defended against the subversive potential of freedom. Hence, the orderliness, integrity and continuity of the activity or institution will be given a value over and above the flows it is meant (consciously at least) to serve, manifesting a different, reactive force that may be consciously disavowed but that can be discerned from the conversion of the activity into an institution and a spook.

The ethical outcome is that, to remain anarchist, an anarchist business operates as a means, as the tool of a flow leading out of the system, never as an end in itself. It may, in a certain sense, be working inside the system, using dominant forms and means; but it should remain outside on the level of intentionality and desire, never reducible to these forms and means, always treating them as strategic choices, as means to be used for a purpose and discarded should they fail to serve it. To be sure, the tightrope of the danger of recuperation is not taken away by conceiving it in such terms; one is still taking risks of recuperation by playing with the system's forms and means, though one is also taking this risk in a different way if one adopts a purist objection to any such play. While hierarchic institutions remain strong, it is not possible to take away the tightrope, the risk of recuperation; but it is possible to negotiate this risk in more or less creative ways, in ways that are more or less effective in sustaining the insurgent desire in exteriority. By keeping one's focus on the conscious and unconscious desires behind a

Deleuzian logic of escape — the line that flees from the inside, the space that emerges outside or (as in Hakim Bey's constructions), becomes an outside; the new barbarians who do not speak the tongue of empire and come against it *as if* from outside, even if from its geographical centres — as the root of what a non-recuperated resistance involves.[24]

Working inside, thinking outside

Which brings us back to the problem posed at the outset. When anarchists set up businesses, or engage in other activities taking advantage of the mainstream structure or working through it, this is a variety of hybridity — it is a use of a hostile public discourse to spread ideas from a completely different, incompatible discourse. It appears different from more obvious examples (such as appearing in court, negotiating with the state, or forming a hush arbor or a heretical sect), because the context is one of permitted activity and the activity does not involve subterfuge, as it often does in other contexts. But it is structurally the same. The ambiguity that arises when, for instance, a pamphlet criticising the existence of money circulates for a monetary price is similar to the ambiguity that arises when, say, a reactive religious terminology is used to carry an active libidinal content. The moment, however, that an anarchist identifies this public-transcript activity as the goal (unconsciously, if not consciously), s/he endorses the public transcript and is recuperated. The point about a public transcript performance is that it is driven by the hidden transcript behind it, the transcript that cannot gain full expression in the public field except as insurrection — the hidden transcript always being a barbarian force, a force that does not speak the language of empire, that cannot be synthesised into the system. This force is sustained in potentially recuperative contexts by means of the distance between agent and performance. The loss of the distance separating the

[24] "What Hegel, as an honest subject of the Prussian state, never takes into consideration is the possibility of a completely autonomous, sovereign, uncompromising opposition — a multiplicity that does not allow itself to be enrolled in any synthesis." Crisso and Odoteo, op cit.

Avoiding recuperation in anarchist businesses

Why an article on recuperation, in an issue about anarchist businesses? The reason is that the two issues are intimately interconnected. Anarchist businesses constantly run the risk of recuperation. To exist as a business, an anarchist group must, in many ways, work within and through existing dominant structures, both financial and organisational. This means playing the system's game to some degree — albeit for one's own purposes. If not done carefully, this can lead to the reproduction of the very practices one tries to escape, as the systemic form imposes itself on the subversive content. And many of the flaws of anarchist publishing businesses — the dangers of editorial despotism, of market- or funder-led parameters, of the formation of cliques, of simply being reduced to ineffectuality by the repetitive routines of publication — can be viewed as problems of recuperation, problems that have beset many anarchist publications over time.

Of course, anarchist groups can also exist as *non-businesses*, as prefigurative or gift economies, as groups with no formal existence, as encroachers on proper spaces (squatting for instance). But there are some things it is easier to do using structures already in place. Part of the problem is that the system and its allies have in fact seized control of most of the social field. It is thus often difficult, maybe impossible, to work entirely from the outside. So this article sets out to explore an issue central to the operation of anarchist businesses — how (if at all) can one work within the dominant system (or some part of it, such as the publishing market), without being recuperated by it?

Recuperation and intentionality

From a Stirnerian position, or that of a *bricoleur* looking for tools, there is nothing wrong with using the system against itself, with using the master's tools so to speak. If something serves one's purpose, it is a gesture of Stirnerian egoism to pick it up and use it. A problem arises, however, because in using the system's tools, one may be strengthening it in some way — reinforcing its claim to be the only game in town,

giving it the appearance of legitimacy, contributing in some way to its apparatuses (as when anarchist books contribute to the profits of mainstream booksellers). Structures and tools have their own personalities, which can influence the user. An informed tool-user is thus faced with a dilemma over whether, in using this tool at this moment, s/he is really serving her or his purpose or the purpose embodied in the tool.

Working inside the system in any way immediately creates difficulties, not least the dangers of recuperation, reformism, and selling-out. These dangers have a structural form — the turning-against-itself of desire, the conversion of an active force, which uses the external world as a series of tools or partners in dialogue, with a reactive force, which comes to value the fixed forms of the external world as goods in themselves.

Anarchists draw boundaries all the time between recuperated and hybrid actions, but the problem is that the boundaries are ill-defined and under-theorised. Most anarchists would not, for instance, refuse to defend themselves in court, or to accept legal defence, in the event of being accused (especially wrongly accused) of an action. Most would give evidence that could be used to exonerate another anarchist. Yet most view voting in an election as a step too far — even in an extreme case, where for instance a few dozen votes could mean the difference between a standard statist candidate and a full-scale fascist, or where some candidate promises minor reforms that could make life easier for anarchists (repealing repressive laws for instance). Why is it assumed not to be possible, and legitimate, for an anarchist to vote strategically, without illusions that positive change can come from the electoral system? Why is this ruled out in advance? There are, of course, general theoretical reasons for opposing voting — it grants legitimacy to the system; it can be taken to imply consent; it pretends to be an exercise in freedom, when in fact it isn't; it can't have a real impact on the fundamental problems. But these general reasons would equally apply to appearing in court (replacing the word "freedom" with "justice," and the last sentence with the recognition that acquittals of activists do not in themselves create a fair world). So why the difference? Part of the reason, to be sure, is that leftists *do* encourage voting, and do so with extensive illusions, even while claiming the opposite. Not voting would seem to be a purist exercise, a kind of narcissistic identification-by-exclusion. But

Mexican social movements and which sometimes tamed indigenous dissent? The answer, I think, is that the Zapatistas enter into dialogue and hybridity, but do so as a distinct agent, from the outside so to speak. This exteriority is crucial to their avoidance of recuperation: their dialogue with leftists and the state does not recuperate them because they do not become part of these forces; they retain a separate intentionality that they bring to the dialogue or *encuentro*. This exteriority is maintained even in dialogue; indeed, in a situation of radical exclusion, it is the *precondition* for dialogue, for the recognition that a previously invisible and voiceless perspective even exists.

This exteriority from the power-apparatus — from all power-apparatuses — is definitive of the subversive force of radical and anarchist movements, and it is in the conversion of this nomadic exteriority into an interior category (however pure, specialised, or mediated this category might be) that the roots of recuperation can be found; as long as it operates as interiority, anything can be made safe for the system. The reductive or Hegelian logic of the system is crucial here.[23] The system operates by turning external moments — forces that oppose it, resist it, or remain outside it (not to mention those that constructed it in the first place, which are its own conditions of possibility, the contingent roots of its historical emergence) — into derivative or secondary moments of its own internal functioning, elements that can logically be traced back to it. In this way, almost anything can be brought back inside the system by being given its own niche, axiom, or representation within the spectacle. Against this Hegelian logic, one can counterpose a Situationist or

[23] "One of Hegel's peculiarities, that for which the shrewdest functionaries of domination should remember him with gratitude, consists in his understanding that unity — to which every form of power aspires — would appear invincible if, rather than basing itself on the exclusion of the multiplicity — i.e., the opposition — it found its realization in the assimilation of the latter . . . [I]f this unity doesn't suppress the multiple, it doesn't realize it either, since it is limited to domesticating it in order to place it in the service of the initial thesis . . . Hegel was an important philosopher of recuperation: power becomes stronger if, rather than closing itself in its castle and putting dissidents to death — blind intolerance capable of fomenting social hatred — it welcomes their innovative ideas and even puts them partially into practice, after proper sterilization, with the aim of reinforcing its own legitimacy." Crisso and Odoteo, "Barbarians: The Disordered Insurgence," www.geocities.com

own agency as secondary to a transcendental entity or limit (Ward exhibits restraint only in style, and Bey not at all). So exteriority emerges as the definitive feature of a non-recuperated theory.

Exteriority in practice: the Zapatistas

The Zapatistas are an example of a movement that straddles this divide, playing with both radical otherness and hybridity for strategic effect. The situation of the initial uprising, and of the continued adversarial relation with the Mexican state, is a situation of voicelessness of a typical kind, the "invisible Indian" as one scholar puts it, in which indigenous voices are excluded from Mexican politics or subordinated in its patronage structures[20]. There was also a typical recuperative process underway: the Mexican state's recognition of the "uses and customs" of indigenous peoples allowed the formation of elite-centred patronage nodes integrated into the PRI structure.[21] But still, the basic situation was one of voicelessness and invisibility. Hence the radicality of the initial Zapatista break — its emergence as an event symbolising a deep rupture, a Fanonian moment. And on many levels this break is continued in Zapatista practice: the Zapatistas refuse to endorse parliamentary candidates, Marcos has repudiated the party form in his famous cry to shit on the vanguards, and negotiations with the state have occurred in an external way, between two distinct agencies. But on the other hand, the Zapatistas also make use of Mexican nationalist discourse, alliances with popular social movements, inclusive *encuentros* (often including party activists and leftists among others),[22] and a dialogical process with the Mexican state, exemplified in the now-defunct San Andres Accords. How, then, do the Zapatistas avoid the recuperation that has afflicted many

[20] Nicholas P. Higgins (2004), *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

[21] See Higgins, chapter 4.

[22] See for instance Ramor Ryan, "A Carnival of Dreams and the Brazilian Left: A journey into the heart of the Amazon, denuded multitudes and a Zapatista *Encontro*," flag.blackened.net

there may be other reasons. Maybe the electoral system is particularly prone to produce unwanted outcomes, in a way the court system is not. Maybe if someone votes, they are more likely to feel loyal to certain rulers and to fail to resist them when needed. If someone votes for a candidate who promises minor changes, it would be hard not to feel sold-out if they don't deliver. Or maybe it's that there's a slippery slope from an "anarchist who votes tactically" to leftist electoralism. Maybe it's that the impact of one vote is so small that it is insufficient to offset the considerable dangers. But in any case, it's somewhat paradoxical. I'm not arguing that the different reactions are necessarily wrong and I'm not saying that anarchists should rush out to vote or should stop defending themselves in court. But the point is to think through *why* the difference exists, and *whether* it has a firm basis in the assessment of the situation.

So how to differentiate recuperation from valid tool-use? It is crucial here to consider the question of intentionality. In every living thing, there is a projection-outwards, an agency; the sentient being relates to the world through its desires, through its meaning in a broad sense (in humans, this includes through its unconscious meanings and its social and symbolic constructs), and it reconstructs the world in line with this construction, seeking to create a world where its desires are realised — its "will to power" in a Nietzschean sense, not necessarily a will to dominate others but a reconstruction that makes the world in part its own, that "speaks with its own voice." Each intentionality contains its own perspective, which is not necessarily false, but which uses certain concepts or attachments to make sense of the world — some aspects of the world stand out more than others, because related to one's desires or one's conceptual frame.

Of course, it is not this simple — there is also the problem of the connection between intentionality and world, the possibility that a false or flawed perception might create a constant gap between intentionality and world. This is one of the reasons for Situationists' hostility to many kinds of (pseudo-)radicalism — the repetitive adoption of certain forms of agency was taken to preclude radical outcomes in advance. A leftist militant or (in a recent reconstruction) a liberal single-issue activist might consciously intend to bring about change, but they are still recuperated

because their agency, in reproducing the system, places an insuperable hurdle between their intent and the sought outcome.[1] Or, one might say, there is a contradiction between intent and intentionality: the conscious intent is radical, but the unconscious intentionality blocks it; it contains attachments to systematic aspects of the status quo (division of labour, specialisation, identity, organisation, elitism) that insert themselves between the conscious intent and its realisation, distorting the action to render it harmless to the system. A recuperated project is thus one that loses its transformative intentionality.

It is therefore crucial to ask: can I/we be sure of myself/ourselves not to lose radical exteriority in intermixture? And here one finds the genesis of purism: a purist is someone who lacks the courage of her/his convictions, who is pretty sure that s/he will not withstand the intermixture, who realises unconsciously that s/he is only a step or two off slipping back into conformity and who thus exaggerates differences to create a zone of safety. Though it may not be so simple: sometimes one may have well-founded worries about the resilience of one's fellow actors. Then, of course, there's the question of how confident one *should* be about one's resilience. There is always the possibility that unconscious moorings are not as firm as one might wish; and structures, architectures, interpersonal settings, all have unconscious impacts on the self that are not always calculable in advance. So the question becomes strategic. It is not simply a matter of saying in advance that certain practices are recuperative and others not.

Theorising recuperation

Three similar but distinct theories of recuperation can be compared. The best-known is probably the Situationist version. In Situationist theory, recuperation is counterposed to *détournement* — the turning-aside of the line from its externalising progression. To avoid recuperation, the

[1] See for instance Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, chapter 12, library.nothingness.org and the recent application to single-issue campaigns in anon., "Give Up Activism," www.eco-action.org

or morally right uses, and the resultant imposition of voicelessness on another. He is not suggesting that children's rebelliousness is morally equivalent to the adults' fundamentalism, nor that the answer is more restraint all round. His response is *social* (in the sense of Kropotkin's "social principle": horizontal, autonomous, dialogical) — not moral.

Finally, for Bey, the whole point of autonomous agency is to open up spaces of rupture. "[T]he *up-rising* suggests the possibility of a movement outside and beyond the Hegelian spiral of that 'progress' that is secretly nothing more than a vicious circle . . . In this sense an uprising is like a 'peak experience' as opposed to the standard of 'ordinary' consciousness and experience. Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day — otherwise they would not be nonordinary. But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life."[19] The space of the uprising may well be temporary and in a sense hybrid, but it is a radical outside, and its differentiation from the ordinary life of the system is the reason for its existence. In this analysis, the transformative possibilities of partial and temporary liberated spaces are explored to the maximum.

The three theories are similar, but display crucial differences that illustrate something vital about the boundary between hybridity/partiality and recuperation. Bey and Ward both embrace partial, hybrid, everyday resistances that reclaim spaces without shattering the system. They both see such spaces as part of a challenge to the system's pervasiveness, as insurgent spaces — though how they see the system's destruction proceeding may be rather different. I'm tempted to say that Bey and Ward are calling for the same thing, but whereas Ward tones down his rhetoric to appear respectable, Bey glosses the same ideas in an unapologetically radical way, using provocation and extremity to aesthetic effect, and Bey is rather clearer about the relationship between such partial challenges and the system's disruption and overthrow. How do they differ from Connolly, and avoid his return to the logic of the system? Ultimately, they are theorists of exteriority, or better still, theorists writing from outside; they do not attempt to solve the system's problems for it, but rather, to solve problems defined from another intentionality, and they do not ultimately start from a standpoint of restraint that places their

[19] Hakim Bey, "Waiting for the Revolution," www.left-bank.org

provocatively of "poetic terrorism." His proposals for action — especially his most famous concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones — are similar to those of Ward, but are conceived as acts of insurrection, as breaking down the hegemony of the system by creating liberated spaces that challenge its power. By aiming for the excess in reality over its inscription in the system, or of the "territory" over the "map," Bey seeks to explode the appearance of totality and bring about a proliferation of chaotic multiplicities.

What is the difference between the politics of desire of the three authors? Connolly goes as far as he can — as a statist — in the direction of freeing active desire; but ultimately his emphasis is always on limits, on questioning *one's own* fixities, on restraint and forbearance.[16] Such attitudes may be useful in mediating horizontal conflicts in an entirely horizontal world, but in a world dominated by hierarchic systems, they detract from the sharpness of antagonism. The unconditionality of a Fanonian antagonism is anathema from this perspective; it would appear equivalent to a fascist or fundamentalist position. The result is not far from the traditional functions of Christian morality, and the "ideological function of morality" analysed so effectively by Tony Skillen — to displace social problems from the social system that is their real origin, onto individuals, who are blamed for not coping with the effects of these problems or for being the wrong kinds of people.[17]

Ward, too, calls for refiguring certain radical conflicts as horizontal by questioning the privilege of dominant assumptions. For instance, he discusses the conflicts arising from resource-use conflict between children and adults on poor housing estates in horizontal terms, stressing the need for inclusion and dialogue and a recognition of the intentionality involved in children's reappropriation of urban spaces as spaces of play.[18] This is similar to Connolly's dialogical reconfiguration of social conflicts. But here the emphasis is rather different. What Ward is rejecting is the dogmatic construction of the in-group's preferred uses as natural

16 William E. Connolly (1999), *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 37.

17 Anthony Skillen (1993), *Ruling Illusions: Philosophy and the Social Order*, London: Ashgate.

18 Colin Ward, *The Child in the City*, London: Bedford Square Press 1978/1990, pp. 89–90.

trick is to keep the line moving outwards, even when it bounces off the walls of the system. A line turned aside must be kept running outside, or else a new line started. "To survive, the spectacle must have social control. It can recuperate a potentially threatening situation by shifting ground, creating dazzling alternatives — or by embracing the threat, making it safe and then selling it back to us."[2] This is linked, too, to the immediacy and totalism of Situationist theory. Immediacy, because *détournement* is an expression of direct desire; recuperation often works by means of delayed gratification, partial satisfaction, the supplanting of actuality with images. Totalism, because a revolutionary break for the Situationists meant a break with the totality of capitalism; a failure to reject the totality amounts to recuperation (obviously this identification of a single totality is more of a problem once micro-social oppressions are considered).

Autonomist Marxism has a similar theory, going as far as to theorise the whole of capitalism as recuperative. Workers' labour is creative, amounting to an active force; capitalism is built through the capture and exploitation of this creativity, turning it aside from its intentionality (of communism or the common) and turning it against itself, thus keeping the subjective force of labour objectified by capital.[3] On this account, labour is communist when it resists the imposition of the commodity form, and recuperated when it accepts the sale of labour-power as a commodity. While usefully theorising the importance of dissident creativities for sustaining the self-transformations of the system, and the extent to which what life the system achieves is built from what it steals or destroys, this account misunderstands the capitalist work-economy, where workers' activity is not simply exploited but is also constructed

2 Larry Law, 'The Spectacle: A Skeleton Key,' London: *Spectacular Times* (no date).

3 Take for instance the following: "Thus struggles against the alienation of wage labour must be recuperated by the left, represented by it, and rendered compatible with the continued objectification of the workers by capital accumulation. And during the period when the refusal of work was manifest, the primary role for revolutionaries was to attack such recuperation, to distinguish the working class as subject from its representation." *Aufheben*, "Kill or Chill? Analysis of the Opposition to the Criminal Justice Bill," part 1, "Sign of the Times: Monetarism, the Crisis of Representation, and the CJB," www.geocities.com

as non-creative, as subordinate. Between the *refusal* and the *abolition* of work lies the problem of theorising social activity outside the confines of the wage-labour system: the question of whether a working-class subjectivity focused on production can be separated from its estrangement in the commodity without a rejection of the primacy of work in life, and whether a non-alienated workplace (*place of work,* as opposed to *space* for creativity and play) is either possible or desirable.

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari have a theory of overcoding and axiomatics, in which escaping flows are re-inscribed in the system by means of being assigned a code or an axiom (as in niche marketing and identity politics for example).[4] This theory is important also, in understanding the basis for thinking about *what* escapes and is recuperated. For Situationists and autonomists, creative activity tends to be identified with labour; hence, their critiques cannot be followed through into a rejection of the work-system as a whole — refusal of work always remains in a tension with power to the workers. It is the *replacement* of work with desire as the basic creative force that opens the possibility for a more radical critique — and also for theorising more clearly the difference between hybrid and recuperated formations.

An anarchist intentionality is thus an exterior intentionality, defined by the exteriority of the desire that motivates it in relation to systems of hierarchy and control. And the maintenance of intentional exteriority (at both conscious and unconscious levels) is the lynchpin of avoiding recuperation. This conclusion will make more sense if discussed in relation to specific instances.

Purism or hybridism?

In part, the issue comes down to a question of purism or hybridism. A purist approach insists on keeping separate from any possibility of contamination with the Other, maintaining a strict and rigid boundary. In contrast, a hybrid approach seeks to undermine the purity of a hostile

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, London: Continuum, 469–7; see also *Anti-Oedipus*, London: Athlone 1984, 240–62.

Theories of everyday resistance

To further examine the boundary between recuperation and hybridity, let us compare three authors whose work centres on the formation of subjectivities and agencies outside the system (as opposed to direct frontal challenges to it): William Connolly, Colin Ward, and Hakim Bey. Connolly is a radical theorist within academia, and is attached to the perspective known as "radical democracy." His work calls for the development of subjectivities that resist the resentment built up in mass societies (through the construction of fixed identities, blaming problems on scapegoats, and promoting religious and other fundamentalisms) by means of ethical action on the self. Much of this is indirectly relevant to activists; but ultimately I would say Connolly is a recuperated figure. He accepts the primacy of the existing social structure and its signifiers; his ultimate allegiance is to democracy, and he looks to the state for protection.[15] He is seeking to solve the social problems of the system, not to overcome it; his radicalism is thus supplementary to the system, rather than antagonistic to it. Colin Ward, once a controversial figure within British anarchism, worked to make anarchism respectable among academics, especially within sociology; his doctrine of "evolutionary anarchism," stressing the growth of horizontal social movements within the existing society and celebrating movements such as squatting and tenant activism, was sharply counterposed to the Marxist-inflected revolutionary anarchism of the then-dominant left-anarchist groups. Evolutionary anarchism is limited as a doctrine, but in many ways Ward prefigured the later emergence of post-left anarchy, stressing the micropolitics of everyday life. Despite rarely sounding it, Ward's approach is a revolution in everyday life, exemplified by the idea of freedom expanding to the point where it strains at the chains that bind it, ultimately shattering the system through its proliferation. Finally, Bey is very much an insurgent figure, speaking openly of smashing the system and writing

[15] See for instance, the following sample quotes from William E. Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil,"*Political Theory* 21:3, August 1993: 'it is often necessary to establish general policies' (383); 'Fortunately, there are still laws to restrain dogmatists from acting on these impulses' (388).

at the very origins of colonial authority."[11] It thus creates a density to everyday life, impenetrable to colonial power — an otherness that cannot be brought within an absorbing dialectic.[12]

On the other hand, there are situations where a pure or radical antagonism becomes the defining stance of an opposition movement. This is particularly common in the kinds of anti-colonial movements discussed by authors such as Frantz Fanon and Ward Churchill. In these cases, a subordinate group is denied any possibility of voice in the system, but is constantly subordinated to its violence, treated as Other within the system. In such contexts, there is no common ground between included and excluded, and antagonisms become sharp and abrupt. A similar sharpness of antagonism typifies the relationship between included and excluded in contemporary control societies according to Alfredo Bonanno, who reconfigures the idea of class struggle around "the division of classes between dominators and dominated, between included and excluded."[13] Labelled as anti-social or inhuman, the radically excluded have little possibility for using the system's categories against it; they are in a permanent condition of social war. In these cases, it is the radicality of the exclusion that necessitates the sharpness of the divide — though sometimes, the total rebellion of the excluded is itself a kind of dialogue — at best, a "no" to the system that attempts to be everywhere; at worst, a simple return to reformist demand by insurrectionary means. Even in the worst case, one should not underestimate the importance of such demand for survival and dignity, and the transformative potential of the unconditionality of survival and dignity when pursued by the radically excluded.[14] This kind of radical antagonism is certainly a part of everyday resistance, but the hybrid type is probably more common, and attempting to generate radical antagonism in a context where it is not structurally constructed runs the risk of purism.

---

11 Homi Bhabha (1994), *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, p. 95.

12 Bhabha p. 97.

13 Alfredo Bonanno, "For an Anti-Authoritarian Insurrectionalist International," www.geocities.com

14 Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) is a good example of a group straddling the line between radical demand as a means of survival and the construction of exterior agency as a means of resistance.

Other by means of combinations and intermixing that break down the rigid separation. Underlying the choice between these approaches are two further questions. First, is an anarchist ethic a matter of simple differentiation, of something existing within the system of signifiers, choosing one option over another, or is it an ethic that breaks down the differential categories of the system? Second, are hybridities — in general or in particular cases — a means by which anarchism is contaminated and watered-down or destroyed from the outside, or a means by which this outside is itself watered-down and destroyed? The first question is philosophical, the second very much practical.

On the philosophical question, the answer is easy. In fact hybridity need not be seen as a threat. Anarchy is a force of flow, and flow can survive and flourish on intermixing. It is, rather, apparatuses of fixity that are threatened by intermingling and ambiguity. Wherever a flow enters into a hybrid assemblage without losing its affirmative energy, it is the structure, and not the flow, that is weakened. Further, the purist drive is itself reactive, expressing subordination to a spook — the spook of the category of *anarchist* or *activist*, constructed the same way as any other identity: a social role based on exclusion. The purist activist is no different from a politician or a priest; they hold up a certain role as the bearer of salvation, all the time moulding their own desires to fit the role and castigating others for being too liberated (or "not liberated enough," in the paradoxical stance of "forcing to be free"). In anarchy, there could be no roles, as there would be no rigid categorical boundaries, no hierarchies of meaning, no subordination of desire to representation. I say "would be," for it is not clear that anarchy of this kind has really been created, even among anarchists.

Thus, one threat gives way to another — the desire to remain outside, to avoid complicity, can lead to a structural imitation of the system, the construction of a fixity, an apparatus of exclusion. Precisely in its repetition in inverted form of what it opposes, purism tends to reproduce the structures it is against, either because it imitates them as its Other — the way for instance, armed groups can turn into miniature state-like armies — or because it needs what it opposes to define its own identity. "An armed gang?" ask the Italian insurrectionist defendants. "Too

poor a thing: it would not have been able to contain our excessive intentions. Too narrow a thing: it would only constrict our uncontainable explosions."[5] The purity of such otherness cannot contain the flows that escape the system's inscriptions; ultimately it remains trapped in such inscriptions by its self-reduction to the system's categories.

Exteriority in everyday life

The strategic question is more complicated. A lot depends on how confident one can be in one's power as an actor.[6] In a hybrid setting, where two intentionalities collide, there is a clash of forces, a kind of mutual predation. This gives rise to questions of which intentionality is succeeding. The answer would be very simple if the clash were of antagonistic forces, but it is more about the survival capacity of an ethic and a set of attachments, about whether each force can survive the intermixture without losing itself in the other; the resilience, so to speak, of an ethic.[7] If an ethic is firmly established in one's attachments and beliefs, it should be resilient — it should be able to withstand all kinds of intermixtures, hybrid actions, alliances, dialogues, and "sly civilities" intact, provided the intentionality for entering into these is its own.

How do oppressed peoples unable (for the time being) to escape tyranny nevertheless construct worlds of their own? Research about slaves, peasants, workers, prisoners, suggests a constant pattern. First a new discourse is constructed in spaces that are cordoned off from the wider society, a "hidden transcript" inaccessible to the masters.[8] Second, the public discourse — the discourse imposed as public performance by the masters — is inflected and subverted in ways that import little bits of this hidden transcript, sometimes visible only to the oppressed, sometimes forcing small modifications that rewrite the official discourse.

5 "Uncontrollables," www.geocities.com

6 Power in the sense of "power to," not "power over" — the ability to produce the effect one desires to produce.

7 Not to be confused with a morality.

8 See James C. Scott (1992), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Third, the hidden transcript bursts into public at moments of crisis and insurrection, when the public transcript becomes unsustainable. Its previous covert existence is thus hardly in vain; through such means, the script is written for the performance to come. James Scott's work on the peasantry is awash with discussions of these issues. In Vaneigem's *Movement of the Free Spirit*, the same phenomenon is discussed in relation to medieval European religion.[9] The terminology, rituals, and schemas of the dominant religion were given a different, subversive, content, which made them harder to track and suppress. In slave societies, one central form of hybrid resistance was the hush arbor, a space created in the interstices of the slave society for the expression of alternative conceptions and nascent resistances.

Erving Goffman's *Asylums* contains a remarkable example of a prisoner who stands to attention and "yes sirs" the guards, even while hiding a plank behind his back that will be used in an escape tunnel. "An inmate meeting and passing an officer without causing the officer to correct the prisoner's manners appears to be . . . properly accepting of his imprisonment. But . . . such an inmate may be concealing under his coat a couple of bed boards to be used as roof timbers in an escape tunnel." In such a case, the inmate is not the person the guard sees, and is not fully trapped within the life-world supposedly imposed in prison. "The inmate is fixed . . . but his capacities have migrated."[10]

It would be hard to typify such practices as recuperated; they remain carriers of an alternative intentionality, of an insurrectionary desire that exceeds the limits of the existing system. But they involve on the surface what appears to be recuperation — what indeed, is often deliberately made to seem as recuperation to the powerful. This is what Homi Bhabha calls "sly civility" — playing the civil citizen in front of the powerful, but in a sly way, so as to pull the wool over their eyes while also carrying out plans to resist. "Between the western sign and its colonial signification there emerges a map of misreading that embarrasses the righteousness of recordation and its certainty of good government. It opens up a space of interpretation and misappropriation that inscribes an ambivalence

9 Raoul Vaneigem (1994),*The Movement of the Free Spirit*, New York: Zone.

10 Erving Goffman (1961), *Asylums*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 171.