

Bob Black

Theses on Groucho Marxism

1979

Groucho Marxism, the theory of comedic revolution is much more than a blueprint for crass struggle: like a red light in a window, it illuminates humanity's inevitable destiny, the declassé society. G-Marxism is the theory of *permanent revelry*. (Down boy! There, that's a good dogma.)

1. The example of the Marx Brothers themselves shows the unity of Marxist theory and practice (for instance, when Groucho insults somebody while Harpo picks his pocket). Moreover, Marxism is dialectical (isn't Chico the classic dialect comedian?). Comedians who fail to synthesize theory and practice (to say nothing of those who fail to sin at all) are un-Marxist. Subsequent comedians, failing to grasp that separation is "the discrete charm of the bourgeoisie," have lapsed into mere pratfalls on the one hand, and mere prattle on the other.
2. Because G-Marxism is practical, its achievements can never be reduced to mere humor, entertainment, or even "art." (The aesthetes, after all, are less interested in the appreciation of art than in art that appreciates.) After a genuine Marxist sees a Marx Brothers movie, he tells himself: "If you think that was funny, take a look at your life!"
3. Contemporary G-Marxists must resolutely denounce the imitative, vulgar "Marxism" of the Three Stooges, Monty Python, and Bugs Bunny. Instead of vulgar Marxism, we must return to authentic *Marxist vulgarity*. Rectumification is likewise in order for those deluded comrades who think that "the correct line" is what the cop makes them walk when he pulls them over.
4. Class-conscious Marxists (that is, Marxists who are conscious that they have no class) must spurn the anemic, trendy, narcissistic "comedy" of comedic revisionists like Woody Allen and Jules Feiffer. Already the comedic revolution has superseded mere neurosis — it's ludic but not ludicrous, discriminating but not discriminatory, militant but not military, and adventurous but not adventurist. Marxists realise that today you have to look into a funhouse mirror to see the way you really are.
5. Although not entirely lacking in glimmers of Marxist insight, socialist (sur)realism must be distinguished from G-Marxism. It is true that Salvador Dali once gave Harpo a harp made out of barbed wire; however, there is no evidence that Harpo ever played it.
6. Above all, it is essential to renounce and revile all comedic sectarianism such as that of the equine Trots. As is well-known, Groucho repeatedly proposed sex but opposed sects. For Groucho, then, there was a difference between being a Trot and being hot to trot. Further, the Trot slogan "Wages for Horsework" smacks of reform, not revelry. Trot efforts to claim *A Day at the Races* and *Horsefeathers* for their tendency must be indignantly rejected; in truth *National Velvet* is more their style.

The burning issue confronting G-Marxists today is *the party question*, which — naive, reductionist “Marxists” to the contrary — is more than just “Why wasn’t I invited?” That never stopped Groucho! Marxists need their own disciplined vanguard party, since they’re rarely welcome at anybody else’s.

7. Guided by the Marxist leader-dogmas of *misbehaviourism* and *hysterical materialism*, inevitably the masses will embrace, not only G-Marxism, but also each other.
8. Groucho Marxism, then, is the *tour de farce* of comedy. As Harpo is reliably reported to have said: “In other words, comedy is riotous or it is nothing! So much to do, so many to do it to! On your Marx, get set — go!”

BORED AGAIN? Why not rattle your cage? I propose a dialog of the disaffected, a conspiracy of the equals, a politics of pleasure. Ours is the *anomic power* of negative thinking and corrosive laughter. The unruly amongst the institutionalised have only themselves — and possibly each other. Let’s confer. The choice is sedition or sedation. Any number can play.

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