

SPECTACULAR TIMES - CITIES OF ILLUSION AND OTHERS.

Extracts by D. BAYAT

"..... Knowing begins with the awareness of the deceptiveness of our common sense perceptions, in the sense that our picture of physical reality does not correspond to what is 'really real' and mainly, in the sense that most people are half-awake, half-dreaming, and are unaware that most of what they hold to be true and self-evident is illusion produced by the suggestive influence of the social world in which they live. Knowing, then, begins with the shattering of illusions, with disillusionment."

Erich Fromm.

In the Society of the Spectacle we live in a world of carefully constructed illusions - about ourselves, each other, about power, authority, justice and daily life. These illusions are both constructed and reflected by education, advertising, propaganda, television, newspapers, speeches, elections, politics, religion, business transactions and the courts. They are perpetuated by us from the moment we accept this as a valid view of the world. We don't have to agree with every detail - in fact, we are positively encouraged to argue and take sides over a host of prefabricated trifles - we simply have to accept this view of the world; to view life from the perspective of Power.

The Spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images.

Guy Debord.

It is important that you - the victim - feel that there is no cause and effect in this world, simply information. From here on there will be no release from the tension, only an ever escalating series of crises.

Lonnie Wolfe.

During World War II a bearded Chindit soldier, fighting with General Wingate's forces behind the Japanese lines in Burma, actually fell asleep while a storm of machine gun bullets splattered around him. Subsequent investigation revealed that this soldier was not merely reacting to physical fatigue or lack of sleep, but surrendering to a sense of overpowering apathy.

Alvin Toffler - Future Shock

Many people today have the appearance of shell-shocked soldiers. Communication is dogged with suspicion and misunderstandings; repression maintains a state of permanent crisis. The failed cures, the alternatives that were no alternatives, the broken promises, the sell-outs, all create a climate of cynicism and apathy.

Much of what makes people dissatisfied with their lives is their own moral poverty. They are encouraged on every side to be mean, petty, vindictive, spiteful, cowardly, covetous, jealous, dishonest, stingy, etc. That this pressure from the system removes much of the blame for these vices does not make it any less unpleasant to be possessed by them. An important reason for the spread of religious movements has been that they speak to this moral inquietude, inspiring people to a certain ethical practice that provides them with the peace of a good conscience, the satisfaction of saying what they believe and acting on it (that unity of thought and practice for which they are termed "fanatics").

The revolutionary movement, too; should be able to speak to this moral inquietude, not in offering a comfortably fixed set of rules for behaviour, but in showing that the revolutionary project is the present focus of meaning, the terrain of the most coherent expression of compassion; a terrain where individuals must have the courage to make the best choices they can and follow them through, without repressing their bad consequences but avoiding useless guilt.

Ken Knabb.

We need to reverse perspective, to stop seeing things through the eyes of power. By our propaganda, conversations and actions we must create situations which jolt people out of customary ways of seeing things; situations which make transparent the illusions fabricated by the Spectacle. But the Spectacle is also obsessed with documenting its own decomposition. Sociologists, journalists, (statisticians!) and other specialists recuperate critiques of the Spectacle.

Their chronicles of misery bog down our anger in statistics, reports, surveys, and assessments. The threat to the Spectacle is neutralized by the creation of a general mood of cynicism, resignation and apathy. A revolutionary theory which concentrates solely on mounting a critique of the Spectacle runs the danger of simply adding to this general cynicism and to the passivity and resignation which that cynicism engenders.

It is not enough to analyse the misery of daily life and its causes, we must speak our dreams and desires and provide examples of life as it could be.

We must start to build the world we want now - in our relationships, our interactions and interventions and in the way we conduct ourselves in our daily lives.

The only way to develop a revolutionary theory is to try to put it into practice, within the barriers that surround us and against the opposition we will undoubtedly face.

Revolutionary theory is developed on the basis of lived experience. Its goal is the total supersession of the commodity spectacle. A revolutionary movement based on an ideology is about as participatory as a "painting-by-numbers" kit. Revolution is a process - and it is a process that can be started now.

If it seems absurd to talk about revolution, this is because organized revolutionary movements have long since disappeared from the countries where the possibilities of a decisive transformation of society are concentrated. But everything else is even more absurd, since it is limited to what exists and to the various ways of putting up with it.

In our opposition to the Spectacle we have to avoid fragmentation. When fighting a particular oppression we must never lose sight of the fact that it is part of the total oppression. To fight on single issues in isolation is to fall into a carefully prepared trap - we cannot even win the argument. Whenever one problem is separated from all the other problems a solution really is impossible.

There are plenty of specialists on hand to take up these separated problems, mystify them and convince us that we don't really understand the difficulties.

Cynicism as inscribed in everyday culture today has the character of a permanent pre-emptive counter revolution penetrating to the heart of society and sapping the will to resist or even to struggle, by making the enemy into something universal rather than something particular, by cloaking it in vacuous generality, vagueness, omnipotence....above all, "obviousness".

Cynicism is the perversion of criticism. We should not try to defend criticism by saying it is not really "cynical"; rather we should criticise cynicism for not really being critical.

The antidote to cynicism is the transcendence of Realism which nourishes the creature we have to tame and directs one's gaze even further from the world as it could be. The possibility of transcendence does exist in reality itself. Courage, Sacrifice, Trust, Generosity bear witness to the way people's actual behaviour soars above the crippling and stultifying notions that pass for "reality".

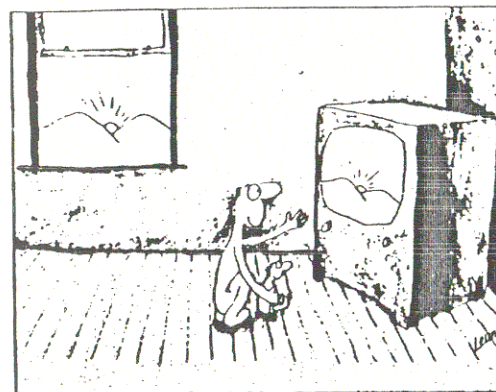
Cynicism deserves to be made an object of its own ruthless scrutiny, to make it disclose what it is meant to suppress. In the light of criticism, cynicism stands revealed as the very disease of which it claims to be the diagnosis.

With acknowledgement to:

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and

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When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of a hypnotic behaviour.

Debord

Believe in freedom.

