

SOME NOTES ON THE REPRODUCTION OF HUMAN CAPITAL



by Robert Cooperstein

What is truly horrifying about Count Dracula is not that he drains away the blood of his living victims, for that in itself would constitute naught but just another, albeit un- usually unsettling, method of murder. If Dracula horrifies, it is because he steals life without killing, transforming his victims by a process of gradual addiction into UNDEAD predators, into living corpses like himself, who, thus initiated in his vampire army, engage in a total war against the STILL-LIVING.

SCOPE AND METHOD

The following remarks will pertain for the most part to the child's immediate position within the familial situation, and not to his more extensive relation with the spectacle in its entirety. An expanded critique would consist of an up-to-date account of the family, private property, and the state. Nonetheless, even though he encounters wherever he turns this world's miserable publicity, it makes sense here to focus on family life because it is the mediation through which the child is introduced into the totality, especially in his younger formative years. The family, tentatively defined as any collection of individuals who on a daily basis support and maintain one another in a state of mutual survival, is an essential ingredient of capitalist society. Briefly, it is that first factory of alienation that renders-all subsequent degradations possible, while at the same time the sum total of these degradations make the family possible. It must be stressed that the family is not at the center of this process, nor could the capitalist tree be cut down by amputating one of its branches, for it would merely grow back in another form. But while it would be erroneous to base a critique of the totality on one of its details, it would be equally erroneous to neglect it; all of daily life is colonized and all of daily life must be criticized.

The family keeps pace, although usually behind, with all the developments in the production sphere proper, updating its mode of repression in keeping with all the new techniques that work themselves out on every terrain of social life. For example:

1. When the bourgeoisie in the twentieth century reluctantly decides to abandon direct physical violence in dealing with a rebellious

proletariat in favor of more sophisticated forms of thought control, with a time lag the family declares itself opposed to beating their recalcitrant children (morality works better);

2. While capitalism attempts to raise productivity by improving the conditions of work, as part of a larger program to dissimulate any remaining contradictions between leisure time and ordinary work, Montessori-style preschools, which improve the efficiency of learning by transforming play into work come into age;

3. A little bit after the psychologists of industrial relations decree that managers must integrate workers in to the organization of their own alienation by granting them a vote in the economic decision, parents proclaim a "children's liberation front" which announces that "children are people too."

In other words, if the requirements of capital accumulation in the modern epoch give the family both its *modus operandi* and *raison d'eire*, then the abolition of the family is just one part of the program to abolish capitalism. Just one part.

THE DRACULA EFFECT

Voyer in "Reich: How to Use"* shows the functional identity of character structure and value-mediated social relations, which is to demonstrate that character is subjective capital through the use of which the alienated individual produces falsified social relations with others. Since it is an indubitable law of capitalist development that capital must accumulate, growing up in the spectacle requires the progressive intensive and extensive accumulation of character. The vital spontaneity so visibly present in young kids, so much diminished in older ones, and so visibly absent in adults, is the irrefutable proof of it. Growing up is a gradually increasing and forced addiction to value deformation. "Forced" because the dictates of simple self-preservation in the familial cold war obligates the child to adopt the weapons of his enemies who have already mastered the techniques of value warfare; "gradually increasing" because as in any cold war, the maintenance of the balance of power requires an armaments race in which each contestant must continually improve his weapons (the family attains the moment of *détente* when it substitutes the trading of covert

* Available from Bureau of Public Secrets

hostilities for more open attacks, physical or otherwise); "addiction" since the child must swallow ever-enlarged doses of value in order to remain in the same position *vis-à-vis* his parents, even as it cumulatively drains away his vitality. Value deformation is a remedy which enables the child to bear the illness while aggravating it. It should be remembered that as he comes of age this war of provocations becomes less and less unilateral, which is to say that the child comes to equally characterize his adult masters.

The implements of value warfare, first appropriated in the familial environment, will be found useful later on everywhere, including in the child's relations with his first playmates. Value spreads exponentially.

THE ONTOGENY OF VALUE

Humans had always attributed the characteristics of living beings to inanimate objects, which is to say that for them, things lived also. In the current epoch, this primitive animism, like all the old mysticisms, must give way before the new requirements of alienated production; specifically, it mutates into a developed inanimism: the characteristics of inanimate objects are now attributed to humans, which is to say that neither do they live. In other words, the relations of individuals to the others appear not as direct social relations between living individuals, but as what they have become in reality, material relations between persons and social relations between things. The institutionalized ownership of children appears as a particular form of this phenomenon.

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An infant does not (indeed, can not) differentiate himself from the totality; he is all and all is he, he is the subject-object of his existence. He is also absolutely dependent upon others for even the slightest of his endeavors. The supersession of this situation, the form of which varies according to the form of social production, demands the emergence of consciousness of self (the differentiation of self from exteriority) and with it the beginning of individual autonomy. The infant must become aware of a relation to an exteriority with which he had initially experienced only an identity. Which means relations with both the individuals and more narrowly defined objects that constitute this exteriority. Hence the moment in which his subjectivity first emerges is also the moment in which he first enters a conscious

social relation usually with his parents or other responsible adults.

In the spectacle, parents own children*, so that this first social relation takes the form of the commodity relation. What could be so evident and yet so sinister with respect to its implications? Later on all thingified social relations will appear to be "natural," and value will seem to be "the human condition." Subjectivity is born already alienated the individual, indeed, comes to separate his being from the totality but only as a separated being, separated because as an object of possession he cannot simultaneously be the subject of his own desires. The alienation of subjectivity can be understood as the process by which an individual is forcibly indoctrinated with the consciousness of self as object, as well as the result of this process. It is no wonder that an infant who experiences the commodity social relation first will spend the rest of his life - sincerely or otherwise - trying, to "relate" to others. The more persevering will come to criticize spending.

In spectacular ontogeny, the individual never (or only with the most extreme difficulty) supersedes the subject-object identity that he knew as an infant, then natural, now perverted; the only change that occurs on this level is the progressive differentiation (which is an imposed separation) of his: own personal-thingness from that of others, each organizing his own particular fragmented totality in which he inhabits his character as a person-thing. He is a subject-object among others. Nor does he supersede his initial condition of absolute dependence upon responsible adults; since growing up entails an ever-expanding introduction into an entire complex of social conditions designed to render the individual passive, learning to "take care of oneself" reduces to moving from a state of absolute dependence on particular adults to a state of absolute dependence upon the generality. Capitalist social life is the vast container in which helpless individuals circulate as point-masses in an aimless and endless random Brownian movement, occasionally colliding with either the walls of the container or with each other, only to bounce off and fall victim to a mutual repulsion, because these are the collisions of separate and separated realities.

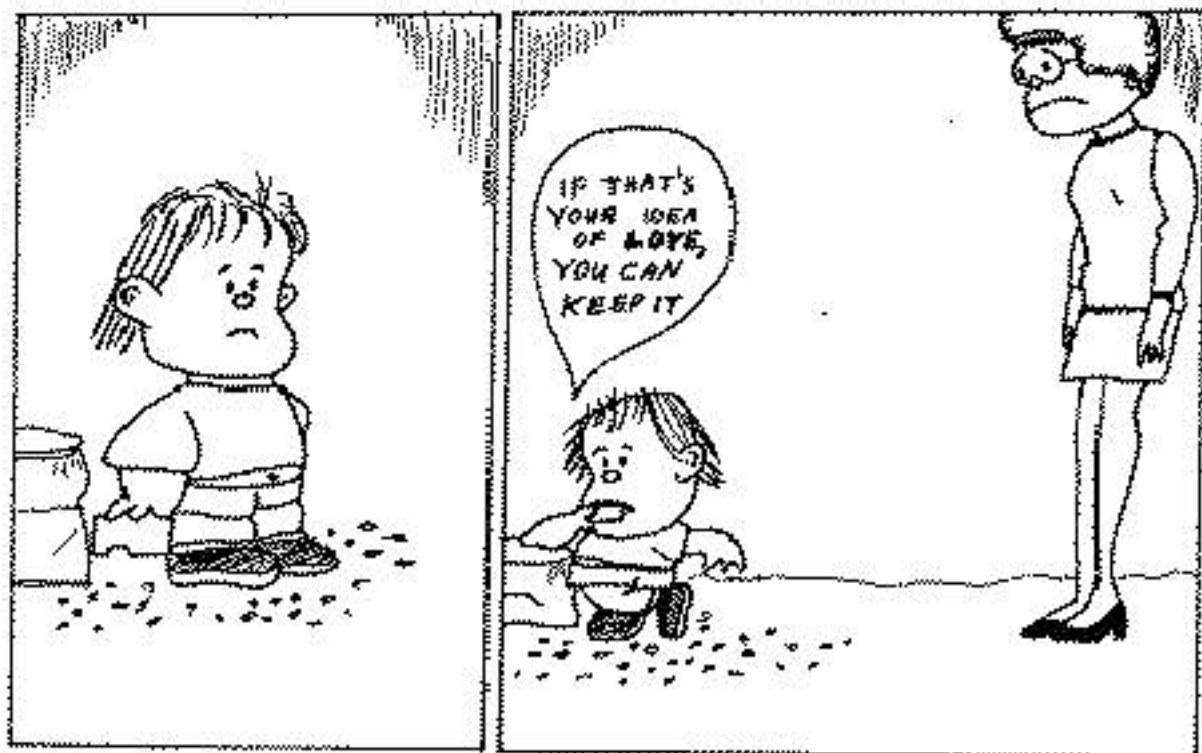
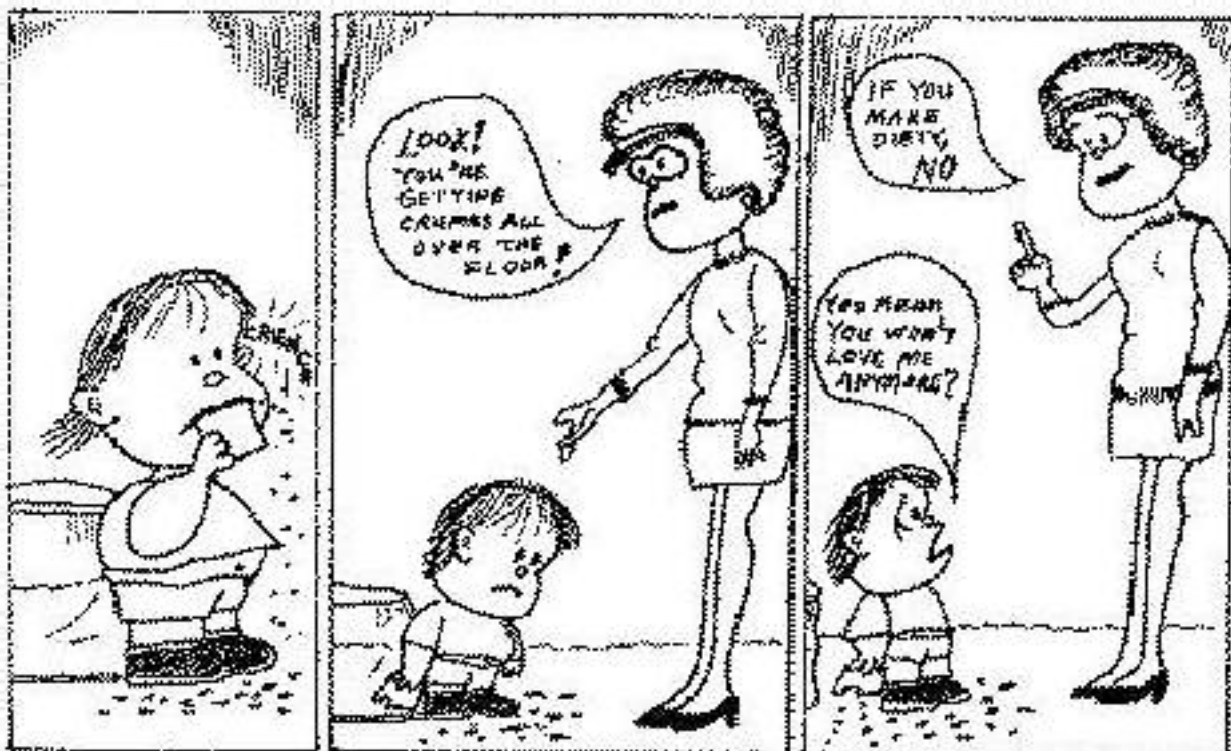
* See following section entitled "Production and Consumption of Humans".

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And so it comes to pass that even before a kid learns to talk he learns value, so that in the course of his development his behavior must become more and more exchange-motivated. Because a thing-possessed must have no internally-generated desires which could threaten the jurisdiction of its owners, such independent desires are systematically deformed into dependent needs; no matter how unconsciously, adults teach value because through it they establish and maintain their property rights over a child who, like any resigned slave, needs the authority of his masters (fortunately, children rebel also). By means of a Pavlovian procedure (Q: "Mommy, can I have another piece of cake?" A: "What do you say first...") he learns to express himself through the exchange of his self in return for another's, while in the same movement spontaneity gives way to premeditated chronicities, passive responses to exterior dictates. After having served their time in the family ("the first factory of alienation") most mature individuals will hardly question the institution of wage-labor, even if they somehow dislike work. In fact, if growing up means learning value, then a grownup is someone who is old enough to enter the visible labor market.

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It's not so much that parents frustrate desires. Not only is a frustrated desire not in itself spectacular, it is the very stuff of which practical creativity is born. They destroy and deform them. The difference is between modifying the exterior to realize one's desires and modifying them to realize the exterior.



THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF HUMANS

The production of humans differs from almost all other commodity production in that it is still the direct production of use-value. This was obviously true in the past wherever parents in a state of dire material poverty required the production of humans as a means of human capital accumulation, in order to supplement the family income (with respect to industrial child-labor, the condition being that the parents could still extract surplus value from the child even after the capitalist had taken his share; on the farm this did not apply, child-labor was directly exploitable). Furthermore, children could assure economic security later on in the form of a lifelong pension to the parents when they would have become economically obsolete. These motivations for human production are still prevalent in the poor countries, and locally in more developed countries.

In the spectacle, direct material necessities only rarely engender the reproduction of children, which nonetheless remains an economic decision; here the difference being that the use-values attributed to children take on different forms, often in the sense of developing attitudes formerly possessed in an embryonic form in less wealthy epochs. The following is a list of some of the economic reasons for which humans are produced, or why parents seek to own children:

1. as a source of consumable entertainment, like TV;
2. as a shared possession, a kid, serves to preserve an otherwise unstable, because miserable, relation between the parents, whose survival instinct compels them to stay together "for the sake of the children" (and of the state as well, which will take any measures necessary to preserve the family: divorce laws, free marriage counseling, family planning centers, etc.);
3. as a trap by means of which one parent can compel the other to form a survival relation in the first place he having recognized the enormous offensive power of this weapon: child as shared possession, as detailed in #2;
4. as a vehicle of conspicuous consumption: the attributes of the child

(his cuteness, good looks, spontaneity, vitality, precociousness, etc.) are conferred upon the owners, in the same way that money can confer personal wealth upon qualitatively poor people, as detailed by Marx;

5. as a means by which the parents can use self-sacrifice in order to escape the practical task of rectifying otherwise unbearable conditions - that is, parents can realize their own unfulfilled desires vicariously: unwilling to live for themselves, they decide to "live for the children" as a compensatory substitute;

6. as a proof of normality: a childless couple will be thought strange (even in the ecological era where 2.1 children will suffice), and the ownership of a nuclear family is still a vital business asset ("business" must be broadly interpreted since all social life is a business);

7. as a means by which one can preserve his property in perpetuity, even after death (this is true whether property is defined as material possession proper, which is to say having, or as the ownership of an organized appearance, or appearing) to the extent you can pass on to him your material wealth and/or character traits, the child eternalizes your existence. (Producing an heir is the spectacular analog of going to heaven.) (Just as the modern corporations occasionally sacrifice short-run profits in return for their long-run security, so the parent bears a child which is expensive in money terms but priceless insofar as it can confer immortality.);

8. as a proof of virility or fertility: those who are creatively sterile and orgasmically impotent can exhibit and consume the child as the living image of their potency;

9. as vehicle upon which one who has had his love, care, and affection rejected everywhere else can practice such: the infant can not reject love if only he can be made absolutely dependent upon it - this is the pet syndrome (born of loneliness, children are raised as dogs).

Capitalism has always resolved the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value in favor of the latter. Hence even if humans are not directly produced for sale in a visible market, their use-value in itself is that of a depository of exchange-value, a subjective money which can buy social recognition, survival, etc., all the returns to human reproduction listed above. Moreover, the slavery of old might

reappear, albeit in a more rationalized and humanized form, as the reconstitution of the right to bear a child as a marketable asset; the economists have already detailed the plans. Prospective parents are to be issued coupons with which they can either bear children or sell their rights to another couple, which for example is infertile or perhaps desires to produce more than its fair share of 2.1 children per couple. (The social planners find, the coupon system by which commodities are rationed in wartime quite suited for turning the "population problem" into a population market.) Another more imminent device to ration and control the baby market will be in the form of tax disincentives, the elimination or reduction of child exemptions in income taxes. As always, in short, the legal codification of property rights serves to sanctify pre-existing *de facto* relations of production, in this case, of human reproduction.

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Sometimes parents will desire to produce children for non-economic reasons. Perhaps the possibility of uninhibited play with them, i.e., they "like" kids, but even then this borders on the economic when, perchance, this serves as a compensatory substitute for the inability to play with other individuals, which is to say, the abandonment of the practical task to radicalize existing social relations. And sometimes, of course, there are bound to be accidents, due to the failure of contraception, or a moral opposition to contraception and/or abortion. In these cases, even though he is not born of economic motivations, the infant will be raised as a commodity anyway.

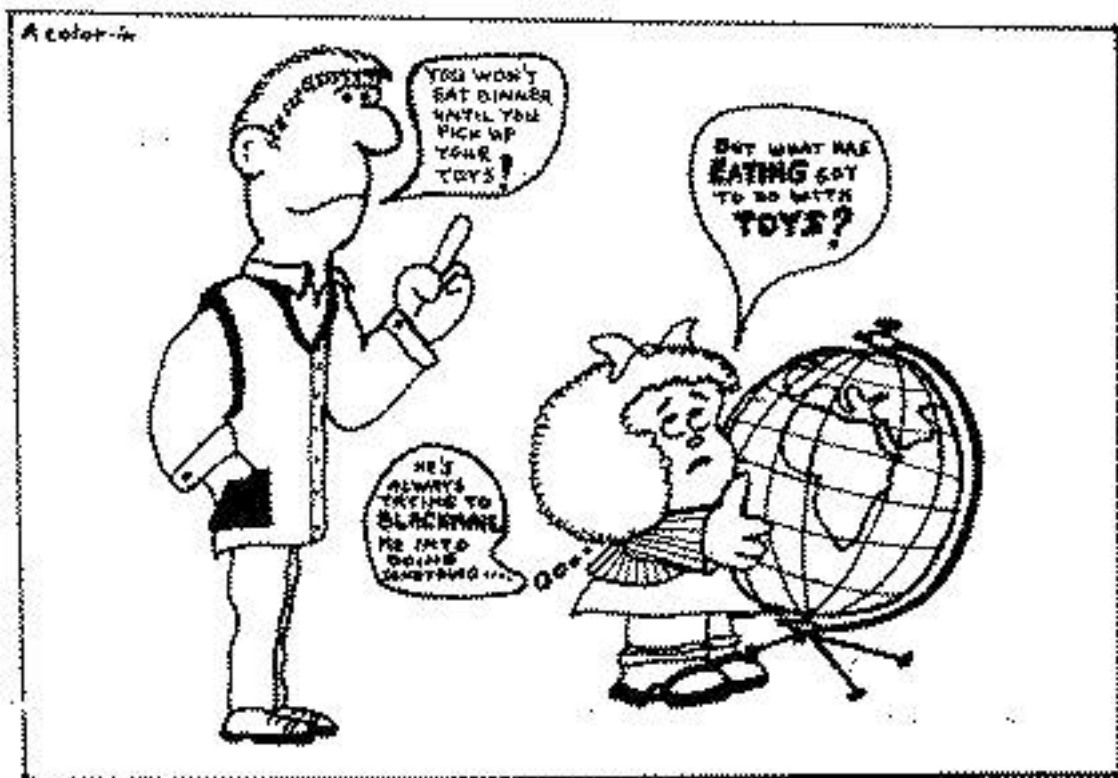


THE PERSPECTIVE

It will be probably quite difficult to subvert children directly, insofar as their owners determine the entire range of their daily experience, including among, their technique of control an absolute censorship over their choice of comrades and publicity. The critique of the child-as-commodity will come to him primarily through the agency of value-conscious adults, and to the extent that they are able to view their relations with children from the perspective of the totality of capitalized relations of production. A failure on this level, even on the part of those who sincerely want to raise "free children, can only serve to reform the family. It must be reiterated: there is no "good" family *qua* family. Furthermore, the "free" child can only exist as a mental construct so long as the reign of capitalism denies the existence of the free individual, who inhabits this world only as an unrealized possibility. The slogan, "children are people too" must be reappropriated and put in the service of the work of the negative by stripping by those who are willing to begin this task by practically redefining themselves as people, which, of course, is not separate from practically opposing the spectacle.

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Ours is the first epoch in human history in which humans are not obligated to reproduce, neither due to directly material economic necessity nor the bygone in- separability of making love and making babies. If they persist. in reproducing economically, a particular expression of this epoch's economic production in general that only serves to accentuate the pressing urgency to reinvent the bases of all social relations. The suppression of value entails a global warfare against the undead which will constitute for the more fortunate ! them an ordinary shocking back to life.



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