

**Rehab -- or, "You will know, know, know"  
Against anarchist nihilism**

Chris Cutrone, for Platypus

*Principia Dialectica* has responded to our critique of their *détournement* of our "death of the Left" rhetoric with a noisy disclaimer.

<http://www.principiadialectica.co.uk/blog/?p=147>

But to hold up Guy Debord's "Situationism" circa 1968 against two centuries of the critical theory and politics of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lukacs, Korsch, Benjamin, Adorno, et al. -- to say nothing of the contributions to enlightenment of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber, Durkheim, Freud, et al. -- requires either a great deal of gall, or is meant only in jest.

We suspect the latter, and so seek, at the very least, to prevent the misappropriation -- really, abuse -- of Moishe Postone's work by such bad faith efforts as *Principia Dialectica*. -- *Otherwise*:

The title of the *Principia Dialectica* rejoinder to Platypus cites Amy Winehouse's 2006 song "Rehab," which sounds like a 1960s-era pop song, another piquant, if immediately dated and musty British appropriation and slick commodification of American culture. But, although Winehouse sang that she wouldn't "go to rehab, no, no, no," as it turned out, later she did!

[http://www.imeem.com/people/rcW6IG/music/MN12Opjd/amy\\_winehouse\\_rehab\\_amy\\_winehouse\\_rehab/](http://www.imeem.com/people/rcW6IG/music/MN12Opjd/amy_winehouse_rehab_amy_winehouse_rehab/)

This story does in fact speak to the principal intention of Platypus, to learn from the past and prevent its pathological repetition: The understandable desire to escape the past in a manic fit of ecstatic optimism is tragic to the extent that it is unrealistic and lands one precisely where one has sworn never to return; it is farcical to the degree that this is repeated -- over and over again.

Note to advocates of today's already obsolete early 1990s-era rehabilitation of Situationism and other post-1960s politics of anarchism, *autonomia*, "post-work," etc.: If you find yourself disagreeing with all or several of the most outstanding historical Marxist critical theorists and political actors listed above and/or the enlightened thought about modern humanity from the 17th-19th Centuries from which the best Marxists drew and developed their insights, you can be sure that you are in denial and not on any road to recovery.

Whether you like it or not, and one way or another, you will find yourself "back to rehab" -- in some form of political social democracy, liberalism, conservatism, or worse, or by being simply depoliticized and folded back into the rhythm of mainstream

existence -- or, in a dead-end of self-destruction, whether intoxicated or not. Debord's suicide -- motivated very differently from Benjamin's, Debord being more pathetic than tragic -- should stand as a warning to any and all of his wannabe followers.

For, going down this highway, you will sooner or later either render yourself entirely useless politically, or you'll end up dropping the attempt at emancipatory politics altogether -- as indeed Debord's Situationism had done already from the very beginning.

Platypus, by contrast, seeks to foster recognition by a new generation of thinkers and actors that there might be a point to developing and instrumentalizing ourselves for the possibility of human enlightenment and emancipation, and not complacently wasting ourselves away in a narcissistic narcosis of self-dosing on the gaiety of futility.

Note to young contrarian "rebels:" The "system" is going to consume you one way or another, no matter what you do, so it might as well be in ways that push the envelope of possibility and move oneself and others as far in the directions of human betterment and development of further potential as possible.

[http://www.imeem.com/people/Y4FovnK/music/8AotDeUF/pale\\_saints\\_halfife\\_remembered/](http://www.imeem.com/people/Y4FovnK/music/8AotDeUF/pale_saints_halfife_remembered/)

What *Principia Dialectica* says about class struggle, "proletarian" empowerment and capital is of course true: this is all immanent to and perpetuating of the "system." Where *Principia Dialectica*, as all anarchism, goes wrong (but perhaps instructively) is in their Romantic nihilism. But the system is our reality -- in and through it is the only direction in which our hope might lie.

The world doesn't need any more Hölderlins; as Hegel said, the "unhappy consciousness" is regressive, falls below the threshold with which it is tasked, and so cannot fulfill itself, but must overcome itself.

Debord's notes on cocktail napkins can't help us do that.

*June 14, 2008*

### ***Coda***

Anselm Jappe of the Krisis-Gruppe, in his 1993 book *Guy Debord* cites Debord's affinity with Lukács with the following quotation, "The only possible basis for understanding this world is to oppose it; and such opposition will be neither genuine nor realistic unless it contests the totality" [also in Jappe's pamphlet on *Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle*, Chapter 1 of his book]. *Principia Dialectica* turns to Jappe also for the concept of capital as the "automaton" or "automatic subject." The question, however, is not one of affirming vs. opposing the social "totality" and the proletariat as being already the "subject-object of history," but rather *transforming* the alienated totality of domination in an emancipatory manner, and the possibility of the working class *becoming* an actual subject

of social emancipation in the process of overcoming capital: Lukács was not *positing* something but politically *advocating* it, and we need to understand *why*. According to Hegel, one becomes a subject only in the process of self-overcoming/transformation. This side of such an emancipatory process, the proletariat remains an "object" of the "automatic subject" of capital, which is an expression of the industrial working class's alienated social agency in *value* production. What is missing from *Principia Dialectica* is precisely the sense of *history* -- for instance, why Lukács's book was titled *History and Class Consciousness*. The question is not what kind of subject the proletariat *is*, but what it *could be* -- in the activity of its *self-abolition*, in, through and beyond capital, on the basis of labor as a *socially mediating* activity that becomes a form of *self-domination* under capital, its alienated product. But Lukács recognized such revolutionary socialist politics as the "completion" of "reification," and so that this is not the end goal of emancipation but rather a *necessary stage* for the possible overcoming of capital. That, in the USSR, etc. and in Stalinist and social democratic and other nationalist-reformist working class politics in the 20th Century, the proletariat participated in the reconstitution of capital and not in its revolutionary overcoming, was the *result* of the failure of the 1917-19 anticapitalist revolution, not its *cause* -- or the original *animus* of the Marxism of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky. Debord's Situationism is just as much an adaptation to this failure as any other form of the "politics" of post-Marxism in the 20th Century. Debord and his followers went along with the lie that Lenin led to Stalin, with all the confusion this entailed. The goal is indeed the overcoming of proletarian labor -- the society of work -- as mediating and thus dominating modern human history. The question is: *How?*

June 21, 2008

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### Amy Winehouse, "Rehab" (2006)

They tried to make me go to rehab  
 I said, "No, no, no!"  
 Yes I been black, but when I come back  
 You'll know, know, know

I ain't got the time  
 And if my Daddy thinks I'm fine  
 He's tried to make me go to rehab  
 I won't go, go, go

I'd rather be at home with Ray  
 I ain't got seventy days  
 'Cause there's nothing you can teach me  
 That I can't learn from Mr. Hathaway

Didn't get a lot in class  
 But I know it don't come in a shot glass

The man said, "Why you think you here?"  
I said, "I got no idea"  
I'm gonna lose my baby  
So I always keep a bottle near

Said, "I just think you're depressed"  
Kiss me, yeah, baby  
And the rest

I don't ever wanna drink again  
I just need a friend  
I'm not gonna spend ten weeks  
Have everyone think I'm on the mend

It's not just my pride  
It's just 'til these tears have dried

[http://www.imeem.com/people/rcW6IG/music/MN12Opjd/amy\\_winehouse\\_rehab\\_amy\\_winehouse\\_rehab/](http://www.imeem.com/people/rcW6IG/music/MN12Opjd/amy_winehouse_rehab_amy_winehouse_rehab/)

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**Pale Saints, "Half-life, remembered" (1990)**

it's eating you away  
and some will never know its taste

biting off more than you can chew again  
you're just a child  
and all you know is  
that its sweetness brings you  
close to tears  
each time you can't resist  
and some will never know its taste

you're flying high  
oblivious to what it does  
it's eating you away  
and it moves much faster  
than you can view  
it's eating you away  
and some will never know its taste

[http://www.imeem.com/people/Y4FovnK/music/8AotDeUF/pale\\_saints\\_halflife\\_remembered/](http://www.imeem.com/people/Y4FovnK/music/8AotDeUF/pale_saints_halflife_remembered/)

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