has made survival, adaptation, and co-existence a mode of domination and annihilation, there can be no compromises with contradictions—only their total resolution in a new ecological society or the inevitability of hopeless surrender.

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Andre Gorz Rides Again—or Politics as Environmentalism
Ecology and the ecological imbalances of our time open a sweeping social horizon that profoundly challenges every conventional theory in the ideological spectrum. The split between humanity and nature; the notion that man can dominate nature, a notion that derives from the domination of human by human, the role of the market economy in developing technologies that can undo the work of natural evolution in only a few generations; the absurdity of dealing with ecosystems and food webs in hierarchical terms—all of these issues and tenets raise immense possibilities for developing a radical social ecology that transcends orthodox Left ideologies at one extreme and the crudities of sociobiology at the other. A serious theorist would want to explore these issues and would want to use them reconstructively to foster the reharmonization of nature with humanity and of human with human, both as fact and sensibility.

As fact, the attempt to achieve a new harmony between humanity and nature would involve an exploration of the uses of ecotechnologies as the technical and creative means for recovering humanity’s metabolism with nature in a non-Promethean way. I refer to the use of new methods of food cultivation, ecological sources of energy (solar, wind, methane, and the like), the integration of craft with “high” technologies, fulfilling forms of work or of work as play. It would involve an exploration of the decentralized, confederal, ecocommunities and forms of direct democracy that a new society would seek to create. As sensibility, the attempt to achieve a new harmony between humanity and nature would involve an exploration that opens the fascinating discussion of a nature philosophy as the basis for a new ethics, of feminism as the basis for a new sensibility, and of the commune as the new form of human interaction and the arena for self-development.

The ecological project conceived as a project of a radical social ecology would thereby provide the bases for a rich critique of prevailing ideologies—bourgeois and socialist alike—that would
transcend the traditional “radical” critiques of political economy. It would open the way for a discussion of new forms of organization (for example, the affinity group), new forms of struggle (direct action, conceived as the praxis of self-management, not merely the occupation of nuclear power plant sites), new forms of citizenship (self-activity, viewed as forms of self-realization). The ecological project, so conceived, would provide the social gymnasium for shedding the sense of powerlessness that threatens to reduce the public sphere to a bureaucratized substitute for all forms of human consociation.

Critique and practice would thus merge to form a coherent and consistently revolutionary perspective. This perspective would open a thoroughly radical critique of such crucial problems as patriarchalism, urban decay, corporate power, hierarchy, domination, pollution, technocratic manipulation—indeed, a multitude of issues that acquire meaning and authenticity in the light of a libertarian, yes, anarchist, interpretation of social ecology. Most precious of all to such a theorist would be the coherence and revolutionary consistency one would be expected to attain as a result of the theoretical and practical possibilities opened by a radical social ecology, particularly one that has a revolutionary anarchist focus.

Given these sweeping implications, Andre Gorz’s Ecology as Politics turns out to be a very disappointing book—indeed, a highly disorienting one. Apart from the ideas Gorz pillers quite freely from the works of anarchist theorists of the past and of the American New Left, the book contains very little that is new or interesting. It was to be hoped that French readers, at least, would have acquired a fuller knowledge of these ideas in their original form, with emendations and possibly newer interpretations by Gorz. But Gorz is content not only to repeat them (with minimal or no acknowledgement) in a cursory, often tattered fashion. He does substantially worse: he debases them and divests them of their roots, of their coherence, of their internal logic and their revolutionary thrust. Ecology as Politics is not only an intellectual pastiche of ideas whose theoretical pedigree is utterly alien to that of Gorz’s; the book is an example of bad ecology as well as bad politics, often written in bad faith with respect to the real traditions on which Gorz leans.

What makes Gorz’s book particularly distasteful is its attempt to refurbish an orthodox economistic Marxism with a new ecological anarchism. Almost every page sounds a false note. To critically review a volume of some 200 pages with the detail that it requires would yield a work two or three times the size of the original. To illustrate the magnitude of this problem, let us closely examine Gorz’s “Introduction,” which presumably presents the theoretical basis of the book. Although this “Introduction” is scarcely more than seven printed pages, the piece acquires particular interest when one looks beyond its pretension to sweep and scope. What lies under the carpet of Gorz’s theoretical ponderosity is an appalling amount of intellectual confusion—and an interesting glimpse of Gorz’s methodology, notably the sectarian Marxist orthodoxy that always subverts the author’s sense of “vision” and “discovery.”

From the outset, the “Introduction” begins to crumble into semantic confusion. Its purpose is to distinguish “Two Kinds of Ecology” (this is the actual subtitle of the “Introduction”). But as it actually turns out, Gorz is really concerned with two kinds of politics. To the ecologist who can use a viable politics, this might be a laudable endeavour if Gorz were intent on discussing politics as ecology, that is, to determine how politics can be developed in ecological terms. But actually, this is not Gorz’s claim. He is trying to tell us something about ecology itself as it relates to social questions—to explore its special qualities and how they interface with society. And it is precisely here that the book begins to fall apart, for it becomes apparent that Andre Gorz knows very little about ecology, or, more precisely, “ecological thinking” as he puts it. There are in fact two different kinds of “ecology”—notably, ecology and environmentalism—but Gorz is basically oblivious to the difference. When Gorz speaks of “Two Kinds of Ecology” he is actually talking of two kinds of politics—bourgeois politics and his own. That ecology has very little to do with the distinction he means to develop becomes evident when, scarcely a few lines into the “Introduction,” we are somberly advised that “Ecological thinking still has many opponents in the (corporate) board rooms, but it already has enough converts in the ruling elite to ensure its eventual
acceptance by major institutions of modern capitalism.” (My emphasis — M.B.)

While loose formulations of this kind might have been tolerable years ago, they become totally obtusatory today. To describe the kind of environmentalistic thinking that goes on in corporate “board rooms” as “ecological” is to set back the clock of ecological thinking and the ecological movement historically. The attempt to rescue the term “ecology” from “board rooms” and from writers like Gorz has been long in the making. Ecology, particularly conceived as social ecology, contains very radical philosophical and cultural implications. These center around the non-hierarchical nature of ecosystems and the importance of diversity as a function of biotic stability. Extended to society, they suggest the need for non-hierarchical social relations and a non-hierarchical sensibility to achieve a truly harmonious balance with nature and between people. What Gorz means by “ecological thinking” in the “board rooms” is in fact what should properly be called “environmentalism,” the largely technocratic strategies for manipulating nature. Taken as an academic discipline, “environmentalism” is essentially an instrumental body of techniques that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology once taught as “sanitary engineering.” Like Barry Commoner, who consciously eschews the word “ecology” for “environmentalism,” Gorz is mindful that he is advancing a politics that is environmentally oriented, not an ecological sensibility that is meant to yield a political orientation. To distinguish ecology from environmentalism and to explore the social thrust of ecological thinking as distinguished from the merely technical strategies of environmental thinking would actually compel Gorz to confront the serious challenges a radical social ecology raises to his own mode of thinking—notably, socialist “thinking.” For the real conflict that faces the Left so far as society and the natural world is concerned is not between a specious form of bourgeois “ecology” and socialist politics but between a libertarian form of social ecology and an economistic, technologically oriented form of socialism—in short, Marxism. And this, as we shall see, is not what Andre Gorz seriously intends to do. Ecology, in effect, is reduced to environmentalism all the more to spuriously fuse Marxist “thinking” with the ecological issues of our time.

Accordingly, Gorz proceeds to underpin his own environmentalist “thinking” by asserting that capitalism, far from being faced with an ecological impasse that can tear down the entire biosphere, can actually “assimilate ecological necessities as technical constraints and adapt the conditions of exploitation to them.” Ironically, this formulation is not only “sanitary engineering with a vengeance” but even bad Marxism. If any serious ecological conclusion is to be drawn from Capital, Vol. I, it is from Marx’s compelling demonstration that the very law of life of capitalist competition, of the fully developed market economy, is based on the maxim, “grow or die.” Translated into ecological terms, this clearly means that a fully developed market economy must unrelentingly exploit nature to a point (which even Marx could not foresee) that is literally regressive geologically and biologically. Capitalism, in effect, is not only polluting the world on a historically unprecedented scale; it is simplifying all the ecosystems of the planet, turning soil into sand, the oceans into lifeless sewers, indeed, threatening the very integrity of our sources of atmospheric oxygen. If one were to follow the logic of this tendency to its very end, capitalist—and hierarchical—society are utterly incompatible with a viable biosphere. What limits the ecological validity of Marx’s view is obviously not his revelation of capitalism’s “law of life” but rather the “progressive” role he imparts to capitalism’s “success” in supposedly achieving the technical domination of nature. This Janus-faced aspect of Marx’s writings is what throws them into conflict with an authentic ecological sensibility. Gorz, by contrast, sidesteps exactly what we must learn in the contradictory position of Marx, namely, that the very technical achievements of capitalism, far from assimilating “ecological necessities as technical restraints,” are governed by a “law of life” that technologically lacks any form of “restraint.”

Having twisted himself into a pretzel, Gorz proceeds to raise a hammering demand: “Reform or revolution?” Shall we have “one” kind of “ecology,” a reformist one that resolves our disequilibrium with nature by means of technology? Or shall we have another kind of “ecology” that resolves our disequilibrium with nature by means of revolution? As it turns out, these fiery demands are mere platitude. If Gorz is correct and capitalism
can adapt to “ecological necessities” merely by developing pollution controlling devices (and this is what Gorz means by “technical restraints”), why not have a series of nice, orderly, genteel reforms instead of a messy, possibly bloody revolution?

It is at this point that the seemingly “semantical” distinction between ecology and environmentalism acquires considerable significance. If, as I personally suspect, Barry Commoner is really a closet Euro-Communist who, at heart, is committed to centralized economic planning, he rightly prefers to designate himself as an environmentalist rather than an ecologist. The concepts of social ecology stand at odds with his basically orthodox Marxian views. By rejecting his social theories as ecological, Commoner quite consistently can retain his refurbished Marxian views under the socially neutral term of “environmentalism.”

Gorz, whether he is clearly mindful of the fact or not, does precisely the same thing. And it is not what is most viable in Marx's writing that Gorz chooses for the theoretical underpinnings of his views, but what is largely moribund or, at least, most questionable. In Gorz's view, capitalism threatens to produce a profound social crisis not as a form of ecological disequilibrium and breakdown but rather as a form of economic disequilibrium and breakdown. If one is to take Gorz's “Introduction” seriously, ecology can be regarded simply as an exacerbating factor in a much larger economic crisis that faces capitalism. If one peers behind the rich verdure of Gorzian “ecology,” one finds the most dismal cobwebs of orthodox Marxism. For, when all is said and done, what Gorz really argues in his “Introduction” is that capitalism, by introducing such “technical constraints” as pollution controlling devices increases the “organic composition of capital,” that is to say, the ratio of constant capital (machinery and raw materials) to variable capital (labour). Inasmuch as labour, in Marxian economic theory, is the source of all value and hence of all profit, this changing ratio yields the horrendous result that “either the rate of profit declines or the price of products increases.” Hence “price will tend to rise faster than real wages, purchasing power will be reduced, and it will be as if the cost of pollution control had been deducted from the income available to individuals for the purchase of consumer goods.”

* The suspicion that Gorz is concerned not with ecology or even with environmentalism but with politics, specifically with economics, not only emerges with stark clarity, but even his economics turns out to be highly dubious. Its crudity is matched only by its simplicity. To Gorz, price rises are the result not primarily of oligopolistic or monopolistic manipulations of the market, but of diminishing profits due to increasing capital costs. As it turns out, this is precisely the argument that the bourgeoisie itself uses against environmental controls. For Gorz to ignore the profound structural changes in modern capitalism such as price-fixing in order to rehabilitate Marx's most dubious theories in the so-called “free market” era of the last century reflects poorly not only on Gorz the environmentalist but on Gorz the economist. The essays that follow the “Introduction” in no way redeem these crudities. On the contrary, as we shall note, they echo the most preposterous shibboleths of bourgeois media propaganda.

In any case, to talk about “ecology” when one actually means environmentalism is no mere word-play. It means that one reduces ecology to environmentalism so that social ecology can be replaced by something else in Commoner's case, by a closet form of Euro-Communism; in Gorz's case, by a very naive form of Marxian socialism that rests on economic reductionism. It is worth emphasizing that Gorz's economization of ecology is not a mere episode in his book; it is really its underlying theoretical basis and leitmotif. Scratch Gorz the ecologist and you find Gorz the environmentalist. Scratch Gorz the environmentalist and you find Gorz the vulgar Marxist.
and you find Gorz the reformist. To a great extent, this
summarizes the basic content of the entire book.

Until Gorz concludes his “Introduction” with a survey of his
“utopia,” the remaining portions of the piece are largely decla-
lations that have been stated with greater clarity and coherence in
other, more original works. That limited growth under capitalism
would produce unemployment and misery, as Gorz solemnly
avers, is painfully obvious. Even the bourgeoisie, in its denun-
ciations of the environmentalist movement, has said as much.
That certain goods (say, ocean liners, castles, ski slopes, and
space ships — Gorz, in fact, focuses on such trivial and delectable
items as Mercedes Benz and swimming pools) must either
remain scarce or be shared by everyone due to nature’s cruel
material limits hardly requires emphasis. Gorz’s grandiose
ethic — “The only things worthy of each are those which are good
for all” — is so trite that it has the earmarks of a Benthamite
philistine. Yes, Bentham was right: the good is the greatest
happiness for the greatest number — which did not prevent Marx
from viewing Bentham as a moral cretin.

Gorz’s capacity to debase a subject to the level of sheer
absurdity, however, finds its most telling expression in the con-
cluding portion of the “Introduction”: his “utopia.” And what,
pray, is Gorzutopia? With breathless ardour we learn that
Gorzutopia will focus on the “production of apparently indestruc-
tible material” (hopefully, an “indestructible” Mercedes Benz, if
not a solidly built swimming pool), “collective dwellings” and
collectively used transport, lots of bicycles, “major industries,
centrally planned,” that are meant to meet basic requirements of
people without regard to styles, local “public workshops” that will
be well-equipped with tools and machines for every individual to
use, and a salad of other proposals that are promiscuously drawn
from the gardens of Peter Kropotkin, Paul Goodman, and other
anarchist theorists without the slightest reference to their
intellectual pedigree. None of these people are noted in terms of
the broader body of ideas for which each one speaks, the
tradition that each one represents, the continuity of these ideas
into recent anarchist theories and reconstructive proposals. That
we are saturated with Marx goes without saying, even if the brew

has begun to turn sour — and, of course, with a generous amount
of Gorzian eclecticism.

Is all of this possible in a market economy, cries Gorz? “No!”
he resoundingly replies, “for such a ‘utopia’ corresponds to the
most advanced, not the most primitive, form of socialism (one is
prone to ask what Gorz means by this delicious contrast: hippie
tribalism or the “primitive” anarchist “rebels” from whom Gorz
pillars most of his ideas for a utopia M.B.) to a society
without bureaucracy, where the market withers away, where
there is enough for everyone, where people are collectively and
individually free to shape their lives, where people produce
according to their fantasies, not only according to their needs.”
We will leave this explosion of “primitive” Fourier-esque rhetoric
aside and merely note, for the moment, that Gorzutopia acquires
its appropriate seal of approval by closing with the following
quotation: “in short, a society where ‘the free development of
each is the condition for the free development of all’ (Karl Marx,
The Communist Manifesto, 1848).” (My emphasis — M.B.) Thus
the halo of the Master is placed over an effluvium of intellectual
goulash that would make even so scrupulous a theorist as the
author of The Critique of the Gotha Program, a brilliantly
unrelenting piece of criticism, disclaim his acolyte.

Now all of this may be spicier fare for certain Parisian
gauchistes and the more naive adherents of Commoner’s
Citizen’s Party, but it is utterly tasteless to anyone who is even
minimally familiar with radical social ecology. Quality production,
libertarian collectivism, and other Gorzutopian appropriations
from “primitive” socialists and anarchists aside, one is stunned by
the paradoxes that coexist in Gorz’s “vision.” How in the name of
intellectual coherence can Andre Gorz dream of a “society
without bureaucracy” whose “major industries” (no less!) are
“centrally planned”? Note well that Gorz does not speak simply
of planning or even coordination or even of regionalism — but of
centralization. Will these “major industries” be centralized by
mindless robots, by “good vibes,” by stoned hippies or will they
be centralized by agencies (read: bureaus) which are staffed by
bureaucrats? How will this planning and centralization be
executed — by mutual love, by the high moral probity so nobly
exhibited by the Russian Bolsheviks, or perhaps by a harsh
system of obedience and command which Engels invoked in his insidious essay "On Authority"? Gorz is at pains to tell us that we must learn to live without Mercedes Benz and swimming pools for each family, but he tells us virtually nothing about the administrative structures around which his utopia will be organized.

If Gorz's evocation of a "society without bureaucracy" whose major industries are centrally planned seems incoherent, his image of a "market (that) withers away" produces outright heartburn. One senses that the withering away of the market is not far removed from such ominous formulations like the "withering away of the state" — and sure enough, Gorz does not fail us: the formulation does appear in the book! If it should come to pass that in Gorzutopia the "market withers away," it is fair to assume that Gorzutopia will after all contain a market from its very inception. One can reasonably invoke Marx's searching analysis of the emergence of the market, its immanent capacity to undermine all forms of reciprocity and mutualism, finally its triumph over every aspect of economic life. One does not have to be a Marxist to accept the enormous catalytic role Marx imputes to the value and market relationship, any more than one has to reject anarchism to mock Proudhon's "People's Bank," patriarchal family relationships, and contractual theory of social relations.

It was to be hoped that if Gorz planned to outline the most "advanced... form of socialism," he would not do so with the most primitive theoretical equipment. Surely, he would know — we hoped — that markets in a technologically "advanced" society, burdened by a savage historical legacy of ruthless profit-seeking, parasitic exchange, and cruel egotism, would make the withering away of the market as preposterous as the withering away of the state. All of which raises the really fundamental issues of Gorz's "Introduction": is Gorz actually posing an authentic choice between reform and revolution? Or must one always look beneath Gorz's rhetoric and ask the embarrassing questions that follow from the internal logic of Ecology as Politics: environmentalism or ecology? Centralization or decentralization? A market economy or reciprocity and mutualism? State or society? An inextricable variant of Marxian orthodoxy or a consistently libertarian theory? Centralized power or decentralized coordination? These questions and others haunt the entire book with their contradictory alternatives, pedagogy, and internal logic. Neither Gorz's intentions or rhetoric, however well-meaning their intent, can remove the intellectual confusion they are likely to foster in a reading public that is already plagued by more sinister publicists than an Andre Gorz.

Having taken up the first seven pages of Ecology as Politics with a modest degree of care, it should be obvious to the reader that it would be impossible to bring the same degree of detail to a critical analysis of the other essays. I shall thus confine myself to the more outstanding "idiosyncracies" that mar so much of the book. Yet for all my selectiveness, I cannot help but note that the very first paragraph of the first chapter immediately ensues us in sheer nonsense. Thus, the chapter opens with the resounding remark: "Growth-oriented capitalism is dead"; so too, for all practical purposes, is "growth-oriented socialism." "Marxism, although irreplacable as an instrument of analysis, has lost its prophetic value."

Now all of this is really a mouthful, and apparently it takes very little effort for Gorz to utter it. Unfortunately, "growth-oriented capitalism" (has there ever been any other kind?) is not dead at all, not even metaphorically. To the contrary, it is alive and kicking. It is not even "dead" in the Marxian sense that it has ceased to exercise a "great civilizing influence" historically (to use Marx's formulation in the Grundrisse), a view that Karl Polanyi brilliantly challenged decades ago. Furthermore, since Marxism "as an instrument of analysis" has never advanced any theory of socialism but one that is also "growth-oriented" (see Capital, Vol. 111, The Grundrisse, and many smaller works by Marx), we encounter another Gorzian paradox: either Marxism is very unsatisfactory "as an instrument of analysis" or one of its most important conclusions — the historic, indeed, progressive role of growth and the expansion of "needs" — is basically unsound. Finally, in all fairness to Marx, the Master never assigned a "prophetic value" to his theories. In fact, he explicitly rejected as "utopian" any project for describing the contours of a future communist society. So Gorz's remarks begin with nonsense and they conclude with nonsense. Again, the false note that rings in
virtually every page of Götz's book is sounded at its outset. What Götz really seems to believe, when all the rhetoric is discarded, is that Marx's "instrument of analysis" is "irreplaceable."

It may be well to pause and examine this argument since it rears itself in ghostly fashion with every defense of Marxism against its most fallacious theoretical conclusions. The Marxian corpus lies in an uncovered grave, dismembered by gases and festering with molds and worms. Its once rich sweep—the project of a scientific socialism, historical materialism as a base superstructure theory of social development, the call to proletarian insurrection, the ideal of a centralized planned economy, the strategy of developing revolutionary workers' parties in industrially advanced countries of the world—all have turned into a sickly, fetid jelly. But lest we face up to the decay of the Marxian project and draw serious lessons from its tragic destiny, we are inevitably reminded by Marxists and Marxists that the "instrument of analysis" survives, indeed, is "irreplaceable." Marxism, in effect, is a success as a method however much it is a failure as a theory.

Why such an "irreplaceable" method should yield such impoverished results remains inexplicably unclear. Indeed, the crucial relationship between methodology and reality raises far-reaching philosophical questions which can hardly be discussed at any length here. It is difficult not to note that the decline of philosophy itself from an interpretation of the world into a mere "method" of "analysis" has been the subject of brilliant critique by the theorists of the Frankfurt School, notably Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. One may justifiably turn this critique against Marxism itself, which has increasingly been turned by its acolytes into an analytical instrumentalist methodology rather than a theory of actual social change. That Hegel's dialectic, too, was reduced by Marx to a "method" may very well tell us a great deal about the instrumental dimension that vitiates much of Marx's own work, but at least he clothed it in a reality that followed intrinsically from his use of that "method." If Marxism, too, must now be reduced to a "method"—that is, a mere technique of analysis deprived of its social substance or ontological content—we can fairly ask what this trend means for the corpus of its social theory.

In any case, this instrumentalist strategy for exorcising Marxism's logical theoretical results hangs like a shadow over the entire corpus, a shadow which even the most skeptical neo-Marxists have not dispelled. The orthodox Marxian sects, of course, have no problems whatever. The corpus is not seen as an irreparable failure but merely as the victim of a conspiratorial "betrayal" by "petty bourgeois" intellectuals or, to borrow from Lenin's rich political vocabulary, by "social patriots," "traitors," and "renegades" to undo the method, the theory, or both. Nevertheless, the fetishization of a "living Marxism" as a "method" persists—reinforced by intense peer pressure among radicals in the academy, a peer pressure that morally degrades its victims as well as its high priests. Indeed, utterly alien theories like syndicalism, anarchocommunism, and utopian socialism, not to speak of Freudianism and structuralism, are grafted on to Marxism in a persistent race to catch up with—rather than "lead" in—such exotic issues of our time as ecology, feminism, and neighborhood self-management.

Which still raises the question: what is this remarkable "method" that has survived a century of failure, "treachery," and misadventure? Stated quite bluntly, it is Marx's method of class analysis—a social and historical strategy for determining the conflicting material interests that have increasingly asserted humanity's "domination" of nature by means of technological growth, expanding needs, and the domination of human by human. To Marx, what makes this method so powerful is that it removes the "ideological" cloak, the "general process of social, political and intellectual life" (to use Marx's own formulations), that conceals the production relations which people enter into "independent of their will," the totality of which form the "real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." ("Preface", A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy)

What is decisive in any discussion of Marx's "method"—as distinguished from the Marxian corpus—is Marx's more fundamental theory of a superstructure-base interpretation of society. Without this superstructure-base theory, Marx's "method"—his "class analysis"—is simply meaningless. In short, the "method" is meaningful only if it reveals the material interests that underlie "social consciousness," that is, only if social consciousness is
seen as the derivative, however broadly and indirectly, of production relations. Culture, social institutions, family relations, ideologies, and the like can only be clearly analyzed if their ultimate economic foundations and more specifically, the material and class interests they serve, are revealed. Herein lies the power and practicality of Marx’s “method.” As it turns out, the much maligned Marxist sectarians, however shrill and repellent their denunciations, are very much Marxists indeed. More so than the “neo-Marxist” critics (and presumably Gorz may be included among the latter), they insist on “revealing” the “underlying” material or class interests that ecology, feminism, and other such “ideologies” conceal – the real “base” which Marx’s “method” discloses. One cannot accept the “method” without accepting the superstructure-base theory that underpins it.

Gorz’s real dilemma here is that he wants to have his cake and eat it. Marx’s superstructure-base theory has been the target of such powerful critical analyses, be it at the hands of Max Weber in the early part of the century or the Frankfurt School in more recent decades, that its validity is completely in question. More currently, even such “superstructural” phenomena as the State have been designated as “technologies” so that the concepts of “superstructure” and “base” have become too interchangeable to be distinguishable. Aside from the fact that modern society is clearly a capitalistic one — and we can reasonably add the “socialist” world to this category — the class analysis developed by Marx for the modern world hangs by a thread. Doubtless, Gorz would scarcely want to remove himself from the charmed circle of such superb social critics as Weber and the Institute for Social Research, but neither can he retain his prestige as an authentic Parisian gauchiste without the appropriate genuflection to Marx. That neither the “neo-Marxists” or Gorz have carried their analyses of Marx’s “method” down to its reductionist roots as a superstructure-base theory has done nothing to remove the peer pressure that surrounds the entire issue of Marxism as a whole. That a “method” which hangs in the air without any ontological content, social reality, and intellectual validity is little more than rank instrumentalism, will hardly persuade the “neo-Marxists” to apply their own critique of bourgeois instrumentalism to Marx’s.*

Gorz’s *Ecology as Politics* thus incorporates problems that are not even evident to its own author. Not only is ecology confused with environmentalism, revolution with reformism, centralization with decentralization, a “withering away of the market” with a hortatory denunciation of market society (I leave aside Gorz’s ability to accept a “withering away of the state”), but a resolute rejection of Marxism is completely tainted by a tacit acceptance of its theoretical core: the superstructure-base theory of society. Had Gorz confined his book to a mere journalistic account of the ecological crisis, it might be regarded as naive but well-meaning. But since *Ecology as Politics* engages in theoretical “summitry” as well as newsy chit-chat, it becomes laughable at best and grossly obfuscatory at worst.

The remainder of the book is largely journalistic. Unfortunately, as one might expect, it is no less contradictory in its treatment of facts as it is in its treatment of theory. Gorz judges everywhere he can and rarely does he advance his views in a forthright and unequivocal manner. To be sure, one might excuse his contradictions by regarding each essay or “chapter” as a step in his development from Marxian orthodoxy toward a hybridized version of libertarian ecology. But as Hegel caustically observed of Schelling: why must he conduct his education in public? For what we witness is not how Gorz arrives at a clear libertarian outlook (one he has yet to achieve even in his latest book, *Adieu au Proletariat*) but how painful such an ordeal must be — not only to the author but to his utterly confused readers.

That Gorz seems to dislike capitalism is the only certainty with which we can function. For the rest, almost everything that follows the “Introduction” is messy or simply muddled. A few examples should illustrate what I mean:

**Item:** “It is impossible to derive an ethic from ecology.” (pg. 16)
**Fact:** Perhaps no field these days holds more promise of an

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* Albrecht Wellmer’s *Critical Theory of Society* does, in fact, point to the “instrumental dimension” of Marx’s writings and subjects it to valuable criticism. But Wellmer’s criticism, unfortunately, stops short of an outright rejection of Marxism as a social theory and essentially falls within the orbit of Jürgen Habermas’s critique rather than a consistently libertarian one.
ethics than ecology, as Hans Jonas and other searching thinkers have suggested. Gorz, here, simply doesn’t know what he is talking about if only because the problem of a nature philosophy is beyond his competence.

**Item:** We must beware of “centralized institutions and hard technologies (this is the technofascist option, the path along which we are already halfway engaged)” (pg. 17)  
**Fact:** But only a few pages earlier (pg. 9), Gorz has told us that our “major industries” must be “centrally planned.” What are our “major industries” if not “hard technologies” and how can they be “centrally planned” without “centralized institutions”?

**Item:** “The total domination of nature inevitably entails a domination of people by the techniques of domination” (pg. 20).  
**Fact:** That Gorz has simply pillared this sentence with curious modifications from recent American anarchist writings hardly requires discussion. What is interesting is that, even when he uses it, he does so erroneously. Humanity can never achieve the “total domination of nature” if only because it is part of nature — not physically above it or beyond it. For humanity to achieve the “total (no less — M.B.) domination of nature” would be equivalent to lifting oneself up by one’s bootstraps—a nice metaphor, perhaps, but a gravitational impossibility. What Gorz apparently means to say (as I have some fifteen years ago) is that the notion of dominating nature derives from the domination of human by human—a formulation that reverses the Marxian one that the domination of man by man stems from the need to dominate nature. This is a crucial reformation that requires considerable discussion. Gorz confuses the notion with an illusory reality. What the notion has in fact produced is the increasing simplification of nature, the increasing reduction of the organic to the inorganic—a crisis that may well render the planet insupportable for a complex species like human beings.

**Item:** “All production is also destruction” (pg. 20).  
**Fact:** “All destruction is also creation” (Mikhail Bakunin). Or for that matter, Hegel.

**Item:** “Marx demonstrated that, sooner or later, the average rate of profit must decline...” (pg. 22)  
**Fact:** Utterly false! Marx leaves this question completely open—and, if anything, he speaks of a “tendency,” not a certainty. Gorz should at least consult Maurice Dobbs’s essays on the subject and the disputes that surround it before he plunges into areas in which he patently has limited knowledge...

**Item:** “When air, water, and urban (!) land become scarce (pg. 25) the exhaustion of the most accessible mineral deposits (pg. 25) ... the obstacles to growth have become substantive ones (pg. 27) ... the increasing scarcity of natural resources (pg. 27) ...” etc. ad nauseum. In short, Gorz has brought into the entire media myth of a shortage of energy and mineral resources.  
**Fact:** There are probably some six trillion barrels of oil in the ground today and even the most extravagant estimates of petroleum reserves have proven historically to be underestimations. Actually, not all of this geological largesse is accessible to us, nor is it likely to be historically. What is far more significant for this period and possibly for the next two generations are not the “ substantive limits to capitalism but the structural ones. As Peter Odell, energy consultant to the British government observes: “The so-called ‘generally accepted oil shortage’ is the outcome of commercially oriented interests rather than a statement of the essential realities of the oil resources of the world.” That the “bonanza” oil field like the Texas and Oklahoma ones of the 1920s and the Near Eastern ones of the 1960s are limited may well be true as things now stand, but a mass of material can be adduced to demonstrate that current energy and mineral shortages are the result of oligopolistic market manipulation and controlled petroleum production for price advantages. Indeed, if we were to believe the “official” estimates of various governmental agencies (based almost entirely on oil company reports), we should have exhausted our oil reserves in 1925, 1950, and now, 1980-90. There is no serious evidence that the latest estimates are authentic or based on real facts other than those which the energy industry wants us to believe. For example, the Oil and Gas Journal placed the world’s “proven reserves” outside of the so-called “socialist world” at 72 billion barrels. Recent evidence now reveals that some 230 billion barrels of oil discovered prior to 1950 somehow failed to appear in the 1950 estimate. This game has gone on repeatedly and seems to find no echo in Gorz’s book.

Much the same is true of metals and minerals. Estimates of declining lead, zinc, bauxite, cobalt, manganese, chrome, and
similar resources have flooded the press, but much of the data is
specious at best and deliberately misleading at worst. Traditional
mining operations are largely privately worked and fears of
shortages serve the interests of price-fixing operations, not to
speak of crassly imperialistic policies. Even some of the most grim
predictions of the Brookings Institution’s John Tition are tinged
with irony. If the reader finds his predictions “disconcerting,”
Tition notes, many important mineral resources are increasing at
an even faster rate than they are being depleted and an
acceptable substitute can be found for virtually every diminishing
mineral in use today. Which is not to say that capitalism can
plunder the world forever. But the greatest danger these
practices raise is not depletion but simplification and the limits to
capitalist expansion are ecological, not geological.

One can go on indefinitely comparing and contrasting Gorz’s
remarks in one part of the book with contrary ones in another
part. The fact is that Gorz simply does not know how to deal with
the meaning of the word “scarcity.” That “scarcity” is a social
problem, not merely a “natural” one, is something he has learned
from Marx. But how “natural” it is and how “social” it is confuses
him completely — as it has the ecology movement generally. To
clearly explore these distinctions and their dialectic would have
been the most important service Gorz could have performed in
the entire book. Instead, Gorz the Marxist dissolves almost
completely at times into the crudest environmentalist. Accord-
ingly, the Club of Rome’s notorious report (I refer to the
Meadows’s version), The Limits to Growth, earns Gorz’s
admiration as a document that “brought grist to the mill of all who
reject capitalism because of its logic, premises, and conse-
quences” (pg. 78) Later, Gorz reiterates his concurrence with the
report by adding: “Even if the figures in the Meadows report are
unreliable, the fundamental truth of its thesis remains un-
changed.” (pg. 84) Having spent years in the radical ecology
movement, I’m not at all certain what “mill” Gorz is talking about
or how anti-capitalist the “consequences” of the report may be.

Actually, Gorz would not be Gorz if he did not try to qualify
such utterly absurd remarks. So we then learn later that the
report is also designed to rescue capitalism. “When the Meadows
report looks forward to tripling worldwide industrial production
while recommending zero growth in industrial countries, doesn’t

it imply this neo-imperialist vision of the future?” (pg. 85)—
notably, a maximum exploitation of Third World resources,
“Americans will become a nation of bankers, busy recirculating
their profits levied on the work of others” (pg. 85). That the
United States, in fact, is now undergoing a massive indeed,
historic industrial revolution of its own in concert with Western
Europe and Japan is an immensely important reality that hardly
crosses Gorz’s intellectual horizon. The man is still on the level of
Lenin’s Imperialism, a work long outdated by far reaching struc-
tural changes in the industrially advanced countries of the world.

His Marx, in turn, is a source primarily of the most shallow
theories of overaccumulation and classical bourgeois theories of
economic crises. Thus the maxim, “Grow or die,” finally surfaces
well on in the book (page 22) but not to explore its ecological
implications; rather, Gorz uses it to shore up his emphasis on the
“decline in the rate of profit,” which he now deals with not as a
“tendency” but as a fact. In short, a social theory of scarcity is so
cruelly interlocked with a geological one that it is hard to
determine if Gorz has abandoned social theory for economics,
economics for biology, or biology for geology. Accordingly, the
very man who has told us on the opening page of his “Intro-
duction” that “ecological thinking... has enough converts in the
ruling elite to ensure its eventual acceptance by the major
institutions of modern capitalism” (pg. 3) has no difficulty in
emphasizing (fifteen pages later) that “the ecological perspective
is incompatible with the rationality of capitalism” (pg. 18). Gorz
literally drops these contradictions all over the place — within his
essays, between them, or quite promiscuously, among them.

Gorzutopias and theses abound in one form or another all over
the place. In “one of several possible utopias,” Gorz presents a
scenario of how Gorzutopia (version two) might come about after
“the elections, but during the period of transition to the new
administration.” Exactly who has been elected and by what form
of organizational process remains unclear. What we learn is “that
a number of factories and enterprises had been taken over by the
Paris, again, 1968? These are not idle questions if one wishes,
even lightmindedly, to deal with a “period of transition.” All we
know is that there is “turmoil.” Everyone begins to occupy
everything—the “young unemployed—who had the previous two years been occupying abandoned plants”, “empty buildings... transformed into communes”; schools, by students and their teachers—and everywhere, “hydroponic gardens” (Gorz, incidentally, couldn’t have made a worse choice here for ecological gardening), “facilities for raising fish,” installations for “woodworking, metal-working, and other crafts.” We must assume on our own that the CRS has decided to occupy its barracks, the Parisian “flics” their police headquarters, and the French Army its long lost forts in Algeria, much to the delight of the ORA.

Suddenly the veil is lifted: the “President of the Republic and Prime Minister” appear on evening television. Mass media scores another triumph! Together, the two men give the French people a heavy dose of Gorzutopia which happily mixes the fancies of Fritz Schumacher and Ivan Illich together with Andre Gorz and Karl Marx. The “government,” we are told, has “developed a program for an alternative pattern of growth, based on an alternative economy and alternative institutions.” Frenchmen and Frenchwomen will “work less,” “more effectively,” and in “new ways.” Everyone will, “as a matter of right, be entitled to the satisfaction of his or her needs.” “We must consume better,” the President warns, and “the dominant firms in each sector” will become “the property of society.” “We must re integrate culture into the everyday life of all.” The Presidential address to the nation runs through such delightfully diverse notions as individual and local autonomy, environmental controls, and a degree of decentralization that will avoid the “dictatorship (not the abolition—M.B.) of the state.” (My emphasis throughout—M.B.)

To jazz up the scenario, Gorz focuses on the Prime Minister, who rapidly lists “twenty-nine enterprises and corporations” that will be “socialized” by the “National Assembly.” Workers will be “free to hold general assemblies” that will essentially take over production and work itself will be confined to the afternoon so that the proletariat can be free to make its decisions in the morning—alternating hours, redesigning the goods that benefit Gorzutopia, and setting suitable salaries. Somehow “Money itself will no longer confer any rights,” declares the Prime Minister—but apparently it will continue to exist, together with prices, markets, and luxuries, which, presumably by governmental edict, will begin to wither away together with the State. But before the State totally disappears, Gorz cannot deny himself one delicious act of coercion: “After completing compulsory education, the Prime Minister went on, each individual would be required to put in twenty hours of work each week (for which he or she would earn a full salary), in addition to continuing whatever studies he or she desired.” (My emphasis—M.B.)

This is no “scenario” it is a childish “libertarian” Disneyland in which Gorz permits his readers to indulge in social spectacles on a cartoon level. The book itself could already be dismissed as an overdone comic strip were it not for the pits Gorz reaches when he reconnoiters the infamous “population problem.” Here, Gorz passes from Marx and Disney to Malthus and Garrett Hardin. “Twelve Billion People?” cries Gorz in alarm—and the reader is enjoined to tremble over the certitude of “famine,” “epidemics,” “population pressure,” resource exhaustion, and a “classic game theory scenario—the tragedy of the commons.” Whether Gorz knows that Garrett Hardin’s “Tragedy of the Commons” is one of the opening shots in the emergence of ecolafascism and the “lifeboat ethic” I do not know. But Hardin’s views, like those of Malthus, are trotted out with the same aplomb as those of Marx. Accordingly, if the population growth rate in not slowed, “there will be 9 billion people in 1995, 40 billion in 2025, and 100 billion in 2075.” By this time, Gorz cries, “Catastrophe will be inevitable.” Happily, he adds, “the Indian government knows something about this”—and one seriously wonders if Gorz has Indira Gandhi’s forced sterilization program in mind when he celebrates “sterilization campaigns” as well as the Gorzian “achievement of a living standard that encourages a spontaneous birth rate,” “agrarian reform” and “the emancipation of women.” It is noteworthy that feminism, so vital to any libertarian “population” discussion, rates three words in the entire book.

What Gorz does here is simply embarrassing. His population projections, like those of the Population Foundation, deal with human beings as though they were fruit flies. His methodology implies an acceptance of neo-Malthusian demography. Hardin’s “Tragedy of the Commons” mentality gains greater credibility and attention than Josue de Castro’s views in The Geopolitics of
Hunger, which seem more like an after-thought rather than a serious program for analysis and action. The social roots of population growth, not to speak of feminism and Marx’s critique of Malthus, are subordinated to hypothetical ratios of proliferation. The “Green Revolution” gets its obligatory wristslap, but Gorz offers only a minimal explanation of the interrelationship between famine and imperialism, or, for that matter, hunger and geopolitics. Here, the neo-Malthusian restatement of “original sin” (i.e., the “population problem” begins in everyone’s bedroom, not in the world’s brokerage houses) acquires an extraordinary degree of eminence. The “crisis” appears more as a crisis of numbers than of social relations in which “technical constraints” like condoms are equally as significant as social factors. What ecology has done for Gorz is to confuse him. Far from enriching his outlook with the need for a nature philosophy, an ethics, the problems of society’s interaction with the biotic world, and a radical practice, it has actually cultivated his most philistine intellectual qualities and his inner proclivity for ideological sensationalism. Despite its radical rhetoric, Ecology as Politics contains some of the worst, albeit fashionable, prejudices of the environmentalist movement, tastelessly decorated with Marxian terminology.

It is time to bring this critical review to an end. I will not follow Gorz through his ritualized discussion of nuclear power and public health. If the reader has scanned Anna Gyorgy’s No Nukes! and Ivan Illich’s Medical Nemesis, she or he requires no additional comments. The book concludes with a series of personal, largely “countercultural” vignettes of a Gorzian journey through California, titled: “The American Revolution Continues.” To be frank, in California Gorz might just as well have looked for the world revolution — everything “continues” in one way or another in that part of the world. Needless to say, the vignettes include the prescribed “Jim,” who is still active in campus politics; the indispensable “Susie,” who hates California smog; the necessary “George,” who practices socialism in one neighborhood; the cryptic “Heinz,” who has moved to California from Germany. It also contains my personal friends, Lee Swenson and Karl Hess (the latter lives in West Virginia) and there is hardly anything that Gorz can say about them that is harmful.

Perhaps the most interesting remarks in these vignettes however, center around Ralph Nader and Jerry Brown. Nader, Gorz has told his French readers, “believes that people have to organize and take power over their own lives” (pg. 203). Having recently engaged in a brief verbal duel with Nader, I can attest to the fact that this consumer advocate is more oriented toward Establishment politics than popular action. Jerry Brown, in Gorz’s sketch, is virtually characterized as a “neo-anarchist” (the term is Gorz’s, not mine). Like all “neo-anarchists,” no doubt, Jerry’s “models are Ho Chi Minh, Ghandi, and Mao. His bedside reading is Small Is Beautiful... and he spends a lot of time at the Zen (Buddhist) center.” The French reader is further told that “Brown has become immensely popular. He refuses to live in the governor’s mansion, he sleeps on a mattress on the floor in a rented apartment, and he makes his staff go on work retreats that can last from 7 A.M. to 2 P.M. Somewhat like Fidel Castro, he shows up where he is least expected...” So on and so forth. Linda Ronstadt receives no mention in this idyllic picture of the “neo-anarchist” Governor of California, so it hardly pays to say more.

That a Marxist, or a publicist trained in some kind of Marxism, can believe that any Governor of California is a credible figure, however, does warrant some comment. It matters little what Jerry Brown says he is or what he claims he reads. What matters is that a supposedly “leading” French “radical” believes it and describes Brown’s manufactured persona with an even modest degree of credulity. It now becomes painfully evident that Gorz’s absurdities have a rationality of their own. Gorz’s reality principle is hopelessly one-dimensional, indeed, surprisingly askew. The book itself is not simply a bizarre mixture of utterly contradictory theories and facts; it is a compelling symptom of the crisis of modern socialism. The double meanings which Gorz gives to “ecological thinking,” “decentralization,” “autonomy,” “the State,” and his “utopian” scenarios for a new society become problems not of theoretical analyses but of social diagnoses. What appear as conflicting ideas in the book are not ideological contradictions; they are really cultural traits of an emerging era of intellectual confusion and incoherence as a normal condition of
the international Left. If Herb Gintis can praise this book to the skies, if the reviews it receives in the radical press are in any way favourable, it will be because the Left itself has descended to unprecedentedly low depths - together with the culture in which it is rooted.

The most disquieting aspect of this theoretical and cultural regression is the inability of Left social critics to distinguish between the differences in the premises and logic of profoundly disparate theories or even bear solemn witness to the internal contradictions that must inevitably cause them to clash with each other. Like those ponderous banks at the turn of the century that combined Greek columns with rococo bas reliefs, leaving the viewer in an architectural limbo, socialist theorists dip freely into disparate and profoundly contradictory traditions to fashion their blurred ideologies. To be out of focus is not merely fashionable today but absolutely necessary if one wishes to resonate with the prevailing culture. Gorz is merely one of the more vulnerable examples of such ideological eclecticism. Perhaps more clearly than most, he is the tombstone to an era when revolutionaries took their ideas seriously: when they criticized their opponents with ruthless logic; when they demanded clarity, coherence, and insight. One may agree or disagree with the Marx who wrote The Critique of the Gotha Program; but one cannot help but admire his stunning and unrelenting powers of critique, his willful demand for consistency, and his meticulous demand for coherence. With Gorz we enter an entirely different era: one where the State legislates anarchy into existence, where Marx must endure the company of Malthus, where centralized production co-exists with decentralized communes, where workers' control is exercised under a planned-from-above economy, and where not only the State but the market “withers away.” Neither Marx nor Bakunin, Engels nor Kropotkin, Lenin nor Malatesta are permitted to speak in their own voices. Gorz tunes them in, out, or up as his journalistic needs require, like a television technician toying with his monitoring panel. Accordingly, fashion becomes a substitute for theory and the latest gimmick a substitute for serious practice.

Books like Ecology as Politics are not merely a problem but a challenge. Will ideas become matters of serious concern or mere topics for radical chit-chat? Will revolution be the lived experience that literally provides the substance of life or entertaining and expendable episodes? Will movements be guided by coherent ideas or dissolve into tasteless spectacles? To claim that these questions can be answered today would be mere pretension. But if truth should always be its own end, then the answer too should be clear enough. In any case, it will not be found in “radical” comic books that have been prepared by ideological cartoonists.

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