‘The Drop-Outs are Anticipating Future Economic Policy’: Work, Leisure and Countercultural Legacies in Britain

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‘The drop-outs are anticipating future economic policy’, claimed Richard Neville in his 1970 countercultural classic *Playpower*.[1] In a passage strikingly reminiscent of contemporary debates over the impact of automation on work and leisure, Neville viewed the potential consequences of such technologies with an optimism typical of the postwar years. ‘We had better learn how to use the leisure bonus’,[2] he wrote, advocating the hippie revival of play as ‘the best revolution around’[3] under these circumstances.

In recent years, such countercultural hedonism has often coloured the left’s rediscovery of a technologically grounded anti-work ethic in the wake of socialist resurgence across the UK, Europe and the States. Its pranksterish provocation underpins Aaron Bastani’s *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, along with the meme culture from which that book’s title originated. Even the use of the word ‘communist’ can be incendiary in the current conjuncture, as Bastani’s Novara Media comrade Ash Sarkar demonstrated when she engaged in a vintage classic of youth cultural media baiting, retorting to Piers Morgan’s repeated travestying of her political position with the epithet ‘I’m literally a communist, you idiot’. Meanwhile, almost everything about the Laboria Cubonik collective’s *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* – from its desire to abolish the nuclear family and technologically minimise reproductive labour to its lurid science fictional cut ‘n’ paste aesthetic –

echoes an era of women's liberation struggles bound up with the utopian promise of the underground.[4]

Nor is this impulse confined to those with no biographical connection to the 60s and 70s, more easily able to romanticise an era they never knew. Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide To Our Future* and its follow-up *Clear Bright Future: A Radical Defence of the Human Being* are shot through with the messianic urgency of countercultural missives in their calls for an ecologically sustainable, automation-led post-scarcity economy, not to mention a transgressive penchant for profanity in the service of liberation ('bullshit' is a favourite epithet in the latter text).[5]

Meanwhile the late Mark Fisher had begun work on a project entitled 'Acid Communism' shortly before his passing. Typically for Fisher, the unfinished introduction seems haunted by the ghosts of historical possibilities. Nevertheless, it displays an uncharacteristically sunny assessment of the potential of the 1960s and 1970s in Fisher's call to revisit the counterculture's 'stumbling beginning' towards 'a life freed from drudgery'.[6]

All this is promising and worthwhile, if nothing else because it updates a dominant position on the intellectual left, one which has prevailed for at least two decades. This is the insistence that the libertarian energies of the counterculture have been more or less absorbed by the neoliberal reorganisation of production and consumption.[7] In a fractured world of crises and contestation, such a position has come to seem dated, residually reflective of the disenchanted 'end of history' era of 1989-2008.

Yet Neville's analysis also haunts the present in ways that complicate socialist claims on countercultural inheritance. At times *Playpower* sounds more like a giddy

anticipation of the vast expansion of the cultural industries in the neoliberal era: 'Non-workers include artists, craftsmen and media men…today, media is substitute play…that is why the Underground is obsessed with media'. As in neoliberal ideology, in Neville's vision culture as both aesthetic pleasure and economic panacea goes hand-in-hand with contempt for the supposed philistinism, puritanism and backwardness of the working class. Proletarians become scapegoats for conservative ills in ways that echo current ideological divisions over Brexit; Neville disdainfully calls them 'authoritarian xenophobic hard hats who fear black men's cocks' (a statement which itself bears the traces of racist and colonialist discourses in its dehumanisation, its generalisation and its reduction of the working class to an irrational masculinised threat).[8] Meanwhile the left is portrayed in similar terms as both worthy and archaic: 'Grubby Marxist leaflets and hand-me-down rhetoric won't put an end to toil. It will be an irresistible, fun-possessed, play-powered counter-culture.'[9]

As early as 1975, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies characterised the counterculture as a 'profoundly adaptive' middle class response to postwar shifts in the capitalist productive base.[10] As spheres such as media and consumption expanded, the system required not just a more flexible, hedonistic consciousness – but also those with the skills to produce and promote it. Middle class countercultural youth were thus the vanguard of this consciousness production, shaking up fashion, education, sexual mores, working patterns and more – and facing a predictable backlash from their more straitlaced forebears like Mary Whitehouse.[11] The CCCS did acknowledge the contested nature of countercultural revolt. They noted that a 'deeper disaffiliation' from the dominant was possible, hinting at the

counterculture's utopian dimensions and its attempted alliances with the labour movement.[12] Yet they remained ambiguous about the politics of an 'unfinished' cultural trajectory.[13]

In an era in which the legacy of the counterculture appears to resonate with leftist hopes for the egalitarian pleasures of a post-scarcity economy, it is worth returning to that unfinished trajectory. It is time to explore whether this legacy may still play a plausible role in contemporary left imaginaries and the task of building collective agency, or if it is largely a historical resource for a middle class once more forced to adapt by infrastructural mutations and ruptures; a divisive aesthetic less likely to guide us all into a play-powered future and more likely to animate destructive hostilities between class fractions otherwise united by their precarious and exploited status.

Counterculture, Class and Postwar Britain

The question of class fractions and the way they interact is key to my argument. The CCCS's analysis concerning the middle-class basis of the counterculture is in part persuasive – but it does suffer from a limitation that has been identified time and time again: can we really locate the counterculture and subcultures so neatly within 'parent' middle and working-class cultures?

Against the postmodern drift that has prevailed in the wake of such critiques – especially in the form of the 'post-subcultural turn'[14] - we might instead turn to Raymond Williams' work on cultural formations to deal with this problem.

Accounting for the development of dissident middle-class groupings like the Godwin circle and Bloomsbury in British cultural and political history, he notes: 'We must remember, first, that a social class is by no means culturally monolithic.' So far, so CCCS, we might think. According to this logic, we could characterise the counterculture as the avant-garde of the post-war middle class. But for Williams, cultural formations do not just arise *within* classes: 'Additionally', he suggests, 'there is a basis…in the changing relations between…classes.'[15]

What if we understood the counterculture in this way? After all, the postwar working class not only faced transformations of its own as automation amongst other factors reshaped its patterns of labour and culture; it was also far from unaffected by concurrent changes within the middle class. In part this was because of the social mobility opened up by the postwar consensus. It meant that a significant fraction of working-class youth experienced an uneven and often uneasy amalgamation of middle-class culture, education, employment and expectations with their proletarian roots. 'I had this feeling of not *belonging* anywhere', recalled one of the grammar school participants in Jackson and Marsden's seminal study of the effects of the 1944 Education Act, *Education and the Working Class*.[16]

Given this, it is not difficult to understand why this class fraction might have been drawn to the romantic bohemianism of the counterculture and its immediate precursors. Discussing the dislocation experienced by working class grammar school students, Jackson and Marsden interestingly claim that 'the beginnings [at school] could seem almost hallucinatory'.[17] If, as Mark Fisher argues, 'the crucial defining feature of the psychedelic is the question of consciousness, and its relationship to what is experienced as reality',[18] then it becomes even clearer as to why it might be

that some from this working class fraction joined the countercultural underground: their disorientating social experience resonated directly with its explorations of altered states.

If the counterculture was indeed a formation composed of both the dissident middle class and the displaced working class, it would make sense to consider how this dynamic shaped the ways in which countercultural production addressed the issue of work, leisure and technology – at the level of both content and form. Below, I consider a number of examples of middle-class countercultural production taken from the underground press, on the basis that media was one of main fields of expanding middle class employment in the post-war period. This is not to deny working class involvement in this field – rather it is to suggest that it was broadly representative of the kinds of transformations within the middle class pinpointed by the CCCS.

Indeed, the examples chosen often seem to confirm the more pessimistic element of the CCCS's analysis – that for all the counterculture's seeming radicalism, it may in part have been an indication of a class reforming itself to cope with a developing mode of production. In this context it is worth noting Bob Dickinson's argument that underground media often acted as a stepping stone to more conventional careers in the media and cultural industries.[19] Furthermore, these examples do so in ways that, as I go on to show, are not only emergent but also have deep residual roots in British middle-class culture.

The two instances of cultural production I discuss by those with working-class roots – Ray Gosling's memoir *Sum Total* and the 1968 film *Charlie Bubbles* – seem somewhat more self-conscious about both the radical potentials and pitfalls involved

in visions of technology, automation and non-alienated labour. And it is precisely class position that affords them this self-consciousness, along with its expression in cultural form. As with material from the underground press, these two examples of working-class writing and film have been chosen for reasons of form as much as content. They represent not only an era that saw the growth of working-class access to education and greater involvement in both established and emerging forms of cultural production - but also the productive formal experiment that resulted from these developments. Such formal experiment in both *Sum Total* and *Charlie Bubbles* directly taps into questions of work, leisure and alienation arising from the experience of this class fraction.

Middle-Class Dissidents

i) The Service Ethic and the Civilising Mission

In *Culture and Society*, Williams notes that since the 19th century, the educational system in Britain has trained a middle-class fraction to professional labour rooted in the notion of service.[20] A response to the 'disintegrating pressures' on social relations produced by the dynamics of an expanding capitalism, the service ethic acted as a counterpoint to the dominant bourgeois ethic of possessive individualism. Though according the service ethic some respect, Williams notes its limitations. These include its ultimate reformism within an existing system and its inability to ascribe culture, agency or leadership to a working class whose lives it has at times

deigned to improve. More recently, Mike Wayne has done important work on the growth of this ethic, its connections with economic change and its political expressions. On this latter point, Wayne observes that 'liberalism's core dictum' is captured by Thomas Macauley's statement: 'reform that you may preserve'.[21]

In a later essay on the Bloomsbury Fraction, Williams too addresses this theme. Arguing that Bloomsbury developed from the nineteenth century professionalisation of the middle class, Williams notes the modernising function it performed, seeing Bloomsbury as a combination of 'dissenting influence and influential connection' that was 'a forerunner' of cultural and social developments across the middle and ruling class.[22] These included the kinds of developments that would prepare the ground for the counterculture – 'a certain liberalisation' as Williams puts it – regarding attitudes to personal relationships, the arts and intellectual enquiry and world cultures, amongst other areas.

More specifically in relation to work, it is surely notable that in 1930, John Maynard Keynes was forecasting a future of technologically enabled leisure and vastly reduced working hours a full forty years before Richard Neville. Equally notable, and analogous to Neville's position, is Keynes's contempt for Marxism: his suggestion in a passage framed by racism and anti-Semitism indicative of the limits to Bloomsbury's progressivism that 'there was never anyone so *serious* as the Russian of the revolution' (a seriousness considered 'crude and stupid and boring'), and his rejection of 'a creed which, preferring the mud to the fish, exalts the boorish proletariat above the bourgeois and the intelligentsia who, with whatever faults, are the quality in life and surely carry the seeds of all human advancement?' This final statement supports Williams' claim that Bloomsbury's key contribution was the

continuation of 'bourgeois enlightenment…the supreme value of the civilised *individual*, whose pluralisation…was…the only acceptable social direction.'[23]

It is worth looking at countercultural media in this light, detecting the traces of this ethic and the way that it evolved in a countercultural context. One representative example occurs in the Scottish alternative magazine, *Aether*. This grew out of a commune on the edge of the Cairngorms and had links with Aberdeen University's environmentalist society. Printed by the Aberdeen People's Press, the magazine tended to focus on ecology, technology and new forms of work and living. An article from 1974, 'Beginning At the End' reviews the ecological thinker Keith Hudson's work, produced in response to the 1973 oil crisis. It notes that capital investment in automation was likely to produce what the writer called 'vertical slice' unemployment across classes and regions. For both Hudson and *Aether*, the preferred response to this was degrowth, a widespread take-up of communalism and anarchism. One statement in particular stands out: 'The vertical slice style of unemployment will allow people of talent, who until now have been creamed off into high-paid industry, to return to the community where their skills will prove invaluable for the leadership of social change.'

Despite the professed radicalism, an assumption of class and intellectual superiority persists, along with a reformist emphasis on finding solutions with little to no discussion of class conflict or even political conflict. Looked at with hindsight, too, such talk of 'leadership' of communities seems almost a premonition of gentrification – a key component of capital's shift into finance, real estate and the service industry since automation and offshoring have restructured the British economy. As has been well documented, gentrification relies precisely on such

'people of talent', often from backgrounds in cultural and media production, taking up apparently pioneering residence amongst economically marginal or depressed communities, their symbolic capital helping to produce 'regeneration' in the form of inflated real estate markets and service sector investment – a process that usually acknowledges the working class only through a reified, hackneyed commodification of its culture.[24] The present window display of a Manchester estate agent specialising in city centre apartments serves as only one example among millions, featuring a linguistic collage of clichéd colloquialisms on its plate glass windows even as the area it stands in – once a patchwork of postwar council housing, community pubs and semi-derelict mills repurposed as artist studios and band rehearsal spaces – continues to be relentlessly socially cleansed and rebuilt.

The strange, ambiguous perspective of 'Beginning at the End' – its tension between radical middle-class dissidence and an adaptive, perhaps even unconscious, reflex to a changing mode of production - can be seen at the level of form as well as content, as oddly juxtaposed tones and styles co-exist. Grandiose speculation – the pursuit of 'a new kind of existence' - sits alongside pragmatism and hedging. Utopian projections – which as Fredric Jameson notes have historically tended to emerge from the intelligentsia at moments of crisis and change - combine with the sober tone of the review. It may not be a stretch, too, to observe that such hesitance perhaps captures at a formal level the stalled historic position of the British middle class from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, which as Williams notes 'lost its nerve, socially, and thoroughly compromised with the [aristocratic] class it had virtually defeated.'[25]

And underneath it all, a residual bourgeois work ethic persists and adapts: *Aether*'s review of Hudson's work includes an advert for the formation of a society linked to its ideals, which states that it 'will be suitable only for those who are prepared to attend – and convene if necessary – local *weekly* meetings.' Elsewhere, a feature on the 'self-governing' Coventry Arts Umbrella collective in the newsletter of the Arts Lab movement echoes such sentiment. It oscillates similarly between romantic utopianism – the desire to 'unleash…creative potential' – and practicality, detailing day-to-day activities and economic functioning. The writer's appeal for 'more creative people' comes with the caveat that contributors must be prepared to do 'heart-breaking' work, reflecting resentfully: 'Why are there always more moaners than scrubbers?' In a phrase that crystallised the 'emotional economy' of the postwar new middle class, Raph Samuel once memorably observed that they 'like to see things hum.'[26]

This jollified sensibility, overlaying residual bourgeois sobriety, persists into the present. One contemporary example can be seen in the work of graphic artist Anthony Burrill. Burrill, who has designed for Extinction Rebellion, is however better known for a print made 'using traditional letterpress techniques' that states with deceptive simplicity 'work hard and be nice to people'. In interview he has expressed his resentment that the print has been pirated, claiming: 'The point of the poster is to promote a set of life values, to make your own things happen through persistence and optimism. The re-made versions are at odds with this original intention.'[27] Burrill's response? A passive-aggressive, proprietorial follow-up print that says 'think of your own ideas'.

ii) Emergent Fusions of Work and Lleisure – Bitman, *Information and the Rise of the Network*

It is a work ethic that reappears in slightly different form elsewhere in the countercultural press, though equally transformed by Richard Neville's advocacy of play. Again and again, what seem like utopian visions of surpassing the division between work and leisure in the wake of automation can be read equally as a middle-class fraction adapting itself to new kinds of work.

The underground magazine *Bitman* [May 1970] grew out of *International Times*, one of the lynchpins of the London countercultural press. The brainchild of Cambridge graduate John Hopkins, *Bitman* was intended as an info sheet on underground activities. Its name was partly inspired by the phrase 'binary information transfer' and the original aim was to computerise the service, in a foreshadowing of countercultural involvement in the development of the internet.[28] Lacking the technology and the means though in 1970, the first editorial declares that *Bitman* must be run by 'information freaks – people who treasure good information, love filing and are prepared to work for free, at least for time being'.

So despite the egalitarian elements of the project and its leftish leanings – it offered cheap food, a related phone line was free to call and volunteers would find 'crash pads' for people to stay (not to mention the magazine's non-partisan adverts for radical publications like *International Socialist*, *The Morning Star* and *Peace News*) – there was a reliance on unpaid labour sustained by enthusiasm and cultural capital. In a strange twist, even the administrative, communicative white-collar work that automation promised eventually to minimise could be romanticised by the

counterculture in a manner usually reserved for artistic and artisan labour. And in class terms, this was a type of work that was not only exclusive in terms of those with the appropriate skills and disposition, but also exclusive in that it was more open to those with the economic security and confidence to work for nothing, 'at least for the time being'.

There were undoubtedly many who engaged in countercultural production without remuneration whose economic position, far from privileged, could be precarious. It is also more or less certain that the expansive welfare state and new educational opportunities of the postwar era often made such production possible for those who may otherwise have been denied the chance, as has recently been observed of punk and post-punk.[29] Yet there is something about the cultural form of *Bitman*, beyond its content and the ethics of its production, that seems to encapsulate a further development in middle-class employment of this era. As a hub of reprinted bulletins and articles from a range of national and global countercultural initiatives, the magazine was homologous with the rise of what Samuel calls 'horizontal' influence in 'business and the professions': advancement through the building of 'inter-professional networks and cross-professional contacts' that disguised still present 'lines of seniority' behind an apparent equality and informality.[30] The instrumental informality of social networking, moreover, is one more example of the sphere of leisure being subordinated to that of work, rather than the latter being infused positively with the qualities of the former in conditions of post-scarcity. If we look at working-class figures who partially embraced the counterculture, yet whose mobility and networking remained limited or was strongly determined by their origins, we see a somewhat different picture emerging.

Working-Class Weirdos

i) Nostalgia for Graft

In his memoir *Sum Total,* written when the future broadcaster was just 22, Ray Gosling recounts a brief experiment with a curious tactic in relation to work. He does so, I would argue, as a means of negotiating his ambiguous social position: a working class background in Northampton; grammar school; an abandoned university degree; and, briefly, setting up a proto-countercultural rock 'n' roll youth club in Leicester supported by the *New Left Review*. Down on his luck after the youth club's failure, Gosling resorts to a strategy I call 'nostalgia for graft'. Getting a production-line job in a small leather goods factory, he observes: 'I think I earn my money. I suppose it's what they call a fair day's pay for a fair day's work…I'm content, in my way.'[31]

In its way it is as residual a class feeling as middle class attachments to the service ethic – a relic of the profound ideological legitimation of an industrial experience of regimented time and work discipline undertaken by nineteenth century Methodism and utilitarianism.[32] It is also just as romantic a gambit of dealing with the contradictions and challenges of a shifting mode of production. However, the perspective afforded by his in-between status makes Gosling much more self-conscious about its limitations. The attempt at stability and authenticity is undermined by an acute awareness of the alienating effect of production line work –

not individually but systemically: 'If I stayed at that factory for about a year…what would be left of me would be a shell…This has got nothing to do with a sensitive nature, the poor artist having to graft in a factory. It's the factory and the way they run it and not in me that the fault lies.'[33] This is not all – Gosling's claim that this is 'a declining industry' recognises that new, presumably automated mass production technologies render his tactic futile long term.[34]

A similar dynamic plays out in *Charlie Bubbles*. In large part the film was the work of two Salfordian working class grammar school alumni: the playwright Shelagh Delaney, who wrote the script, and Albert Finney, who directed and starred in the film. Finney's eponymous character, a critically and commercially successful but dissolute writer, flees London for his proletarian Mancunian roots in a vain attempt at reconnection that recalls Gosling's flight to the factory, though the film focuses more on the contradictions of leisure. As Charlie lounges around a wonderfully *du jour* modernist hotel suite in Piccadilly Plaza, the waiter who brings him his breakfast turns out to have been an old friend of Charlie's father. Recounting tales of Depression and war, the waiter asks innocently: 'Are you still working, sir, or do you just do the writing now?' Here, the waiter acts as a switchpoint between two generations of the working class – a seemingly more authentic world of the Hungry Thirties and military service and the expanding service industry of the postwar years.[35] Charlie, who is too young for the former and has presumably been educated out of the latter, cannot connect to either – and nor can the waiter even conceive of Charlie's cultural production as work.

The irony, though, is the partial accuracy of the waiter's apparent *faux pas*: that in a still class-bound society, technological advance and the expansion of the

culture industries do not result in the dream of merging work and leisure. Some must continue grafting while others perform roles that appear leisured though still leave them alienated. For those like Charlie, this comes with the added twist of becoming separated irrevocably from the working-class culture that formed him, which is in any case breaking up and changing. Finney's acting here captures all of the pathos and confusion of this situation: a supercilious smirk followed by a suddenly crestfallen glance upwards as he signs the bill, his final statement an exaggerated Lancashire lilt in a doomed attempt at crossing the divide.

ii) 'When the Dream Came True I was Lost'

The waiter in Charlie Bubbles is not the only one to recognise such problems. In *Sum Total*, Ray Gosling articulates a utopian ideal of overcoming the alienated division of work and leisure: 'I wanted…to lead the charmed life. I went from job to job searching, looking for some pattern some way in which I could build up a life in the way I wanted: to work hard and fully and make use of imagination and guts and a love of life, and yet not be tied down.'[36] Once free of his factory job, though, Gosling is also free of the structure it imposed: 'There becomes no leisure time. Work and home and out get fused…I just didn't know what to do with my time…I was only equipped for work and play. When the two came together, when the dream came true I was lost.'[37] Yet he does not give up, despite the difficulty of collectively articulating the future:

> I still dream…we all dream – the pools, the horses, the book, the song…you stand at that bloody machine and hum and sing and dream and dream and dream. And you can never tell anyone what you really dream of. You daredn't, for fear it would stop you coming to terms, the little compensation you have. Until after a time you can't even put the dreams into words.[38]

There could be few more succinct summaries of what Ernst Bloch was driving at in his concern with 'forward dreaming' and delineation of the 'Not-Yet-Conscious';[39] what Fredric Jameson has called 'the utopian impulse' that saturates everyday life[40] and which, for Bloch, repeatedly focuses on 'a life of fulfilling work free of exploitation, but also of a life beyond work, i.e. in the *wishful problem of leisure*.'[41]

Charlie Bubbles, meanwhile, joins the Swinging London set and his lifestyle seems to embrace a leisured future of technological optimism. Tellingly, his smart London home is equipped with a video monitoring and PA system in the office. Like Gosling, 'work and home and out [are] fused'**.** Yet the point of view shots from the writer's desk are pre-emptive of the surveilling, alienating qualities of new media technologies – and Charlie is still resentfully dependent on very traditional human servants in his inebriated, petulant state. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, in a rapidly technologising consumer society, we 'forget or fail to learn the skills of coping with life challenges'.[42] It is surely no accident either that Charlie is slumped on a high tech sofa with built-in phone and radio playing muzak in the hotel scene discussed earlier. Like Gosling, when the dream comes true he is lost – and others must still graft.

iii) Appropriative Aesthetics

How do the two texts deal with such realisations formally? As Alan Sinfield has noted: 'Subcultural meaning, like all meaning, works through a strategic reordering of what is to hand…subordinate cultures are tangled up with the oppression they are trying to handle; these are the conditions in which people try to negotiate cultural space'.[43] More recently, Daniel Hartley has observed in his reading of Raymond Williams on class and prose style that those writers outside 'the linguistic hegemony of the dialect of the powerful…were forced to try and…bring together…discourses which pulled in opposite directions', thus exposing the 'fault lines' of 'class struggle'. This is a phenomenon that ultimately derives from 'the effect of social position…on ways of seeing and feeling'.[44] In other words, not just content but form is determined by class, as has been implicitly observed already of the countercultural media I have analysed. It is therefore unsurprising that this insight should be applicable to cultural production such as film that lies outside the sphere of prose. Thus what we see in both *Sum Total* and *Charlie Bubbles* is the appropriation of predominantly middle class countercultural tropes by socially mobile working class figures – and the amalgamation of these tropes with established working class cultural forms.

In *Sum Total* there are clear Beat influences – the rhythmic, spontaneous, stream-of-consciousness qualities to the writing, which contribute to its visionary air. But these are contained within the genre of autobiography. As Williams has argued, this has been attractive historically to those from working class backgrounds who have been shaped by a Christian culture of testimony and confession.[45] Confession is

one of the sutures between the two otherwise quite different forms, lending a sincerity often lacking in more irreverent manifestations of the counterculture. The other is captured in Williams' description of class-conscious autobiography: 'At once the representative and the exceptional account.'[46] As with the Beat outsider, a story is offered that aims to critically map the social, whilst both the difficulties and the fragile possibilities of doing so are captured by the marginal, ambiguous or exceptional perspective.

There is a quasi-autobiographical feel to *Charlie Bubbles* too, with the protagonist's trajectory partially mirroring those of Finney and Delaney. In its settings and concerns there are residual elements as well of the social realism that, in both form and content, had facilitated popular cultural working-class representation since the 1950s. But the film is persistently laced with countercultural aesthetics – in particular the trope of daydream as escape, once gain evoking Bloch. Mark Fisher detects such a trope in similarly appropriated form in songs like The Beatles' 'I'm Only Sleeping' and the Small Faces' 'Lazy Sunday'. These are songs that, for Fisher, map out 'worlds beyond work' – and in support of such a case it is surely notable that in the period of their release the growing popular cultural diffusion of psychoanalysis led to such phenomena as the *New Musical Express* quizzing the Fab Four about the content of their dreams. 'It's the weird ones that make me think', noted Ringo, observing that he never dreamed of work and its related anxieties: 'Those kinds of things happen in real life. There's no need to dream about them'.[47] At the conclusion of the film, faced with his compounded dilemmas, Charlie steps onto an enormous, lysergically orange hot air balloon and drifts away over the Peak District.

Importantly, these formal attempts to imagine anew do not always end at individual escapism. Sometimes they indicate the possibility of a transformative alliance of class fractions, one that acknowledges the centrality of the working class to any project of emancipation, equality and qualitative transformation at the level of work. Visiting a coal mine in a foreshadowing of a broadcasting career that gave voice to those often denied it, the young Ray Gosling wrote in typically inspired yet self-searching tones:

> It's much easier for the man who had no struggle…there are no inhibitions, no jealousies, no rivalry. You know where he stands, apart…But you see, I don't feel I do. I'm like a refugee. This is something rather new, we're not sure, any of us…But I must stay until there has been a give and take, a communication…You see, out of necessity we must get together.[48]

Conclusion

It is time to return to the question posed initially: of whether the cultural legacy of the counterculture may still play a role in contemporary left imaginaries of a post-work society and the political agency required to get there, or if it is more likely to animate destructive hostilities between class fractions.

In some respects things do not look good. One way into the more pessimistic contemporary implications of countercultural positions on work, leisure and

automation is to consider a persistent feature of dominant public discourse on Brexit. Again and again, media commentators and researchers alike have harped on the statistical correlation between the Leave vote and those without a university degree or whose formal education ended after they had attended secondary school.[49] Here, 'education' functions as an ideological metonym for the perception that presumptively working-class Leave voters[50] do not share a metropolitan middle-class working lifestyle that is not only largely dependent upon higher education but also owes much to one strand of the counterculture in its Richard Neville-like celebration of the cultural industries: technological innovation alongside romantic preservation, cosmopolitanism, and the commodified blurring of high and popular. Despite this apparent postmodern levelling, captured in Samuel's skewering of new middle class delusions of their own classlessness,[51] Alan Sinfield's observation on postmodern culture bears repeating: 'It is likely that the fading of certain kinds of hierarchy is producing the compensatory strengthening of others.'[52] Ideologically 'classless' the largely Remain-supporting new middle class may be – but in their perception of workin-class support for Brexit as a symptom of an overall backwardness, be that in regard to work, education, consumption, social attitudes or technology (and implicitly, themselves as modernisers on all these fronts), the echo can be heard of the elitist service ethic as it has been filtered through the counterculture.

Today's advocates of a crumbled status quo often come from a class fraction living out the incorporated neoliberal dream of a work/leisure collapse. Occupying what the art critic and journalist Kyle Chayka has called globalised AirSpace, working from MacBooks in identikit hipster cafes or tasteful airbnbs whose aesthetics are

ironically determined less by a fetishised spontaneous human creativity and more by automated algorithms,[53] they seem blind to the fact that others must graft to facilitate this lifestyle. Not only this, there is also a prevalent lack of awareness that as automation comes for service sector working-class labour and austerity destroys what remains of the welfare state, anger, fear and frustration about the future are inevitable results. Such affect will only be fanned further towards the rising right by those who patronise it and treat it with ill-advised contempt.

It is important to stress, though, the undeniable fact that middle-class dissidents have made historic contributions to socialism.[54] It is likely that such contributions are still waiting to be found within the pages of a thriving and expansive underground press that has so far been largely neglected in favour of a narrow focus on canonical, London-based publications such as *International Times* and *Oz*. Class position may well determine cultural production – but it can do so in many different ways.

Meanwhile, the continual expansion of Higher Education has produced a growing educationally mobile working-class fraction in certain respects comparable to the postwar period, though with far less chance of eventual prosperity. Perhaps it is among this precarious constituency especially that the appropriative aesthetics, the sensitively explored uncertainties around work and leisure and the tentative utopianism of *Sum Total* and *Charlie Bubbles* may strike a chord. Both offer fragments of a cognitive map and a style that strives for solidarity even as it acknowledges the difficulties of this task, whilst taking us 'halfway to paradise' in the words of one of Gosling's favourite songs.

Notes

[1] Richard Neville, *Playpower* (London: Paladin, 1971), 219.

[2] Neville, *Playpower*, 221.

[3] Neville, *Playpower*, 227.

[4] Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation* (London: Verso, 2018).

[5] Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide To Our Future* (London: Penguin, 2015) and *Clear Bright Future: A Radical Defence of the Human Being* (London: Allen Lane, 2019).

[6] Mark Fisher, 'Acid Communism (Unfinished Introduction)' in *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher 2004 – 2016* ed. Darren Ambrose (London: Repeater, 2018), 753-770 (756-757) [Not sure what's going on with the page numbers here…] Former are the page numbers of the chapter as it's an edited collection; latter in brackets are page numbers of actual quote/relevant section, which stretches over two pages

[7] See, for instance, Slavoj Žižek, 'The Ambiguous Legacy of '68', *In These Times* 20 June 2008, available online at http://inthesetimes.com/article/3751/the_ambiguous_legacy_of_68 (accessed 28 May 2019) and Jim McGuigan, *Cool Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2009). Both Žižek and McGuigan's analyses are indebted to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2018) [1999].

[8] Neville, *Playpower*, 224.

[9] Neville, *Playpower*, 209.

[10] John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview' in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* ed. Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 9-74 (65).

[11] Clarke *et al*., 'Subcultures', 63-65.

[12] Clarke *et al*., 'Subcultures', 67-68.

[13] Clarke *et al*., 'Subcultures', 71.

[14] See Andy Bennett, 'The Post-Subcultural Turn: Some Reflections Ten Years On', *Journal of Youth Studies* 14 no.5 (2011): 493-506 for a summary of this tendency. Bennett claims that any attempt to correlate class and counterculture is 'essentialist', evincing a faith in youth culture's apparent capacity to 'transcend structural categories'.

[15] Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 74.

[16] Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (London: Pelican, 1966), 110.

[17] Jackson and Marsden, *Education*, 111.

[18] Fisher, 'Acid Communism', 763.

[19] Bob Dickinson, *Imprinting the Sticks: The Alternative Press Beyond London* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 180.

[20] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1961) [1958], 315.

[21] Mike Wayne, *England's Discontents: Political Cultures and National Identities* (London: Pluto, 2018), 146.

[22] Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005) [1980], 162-3.

[23] Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', 165.

[24] See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 295 and 303 for the ways in which 'local…elites' have developed strategies to attract 'highly mobile capital', which include the production of a 'distinctive image…an atmosphere of place…that will act as a lure to both capital and people 'of the right sort'…The search for roots ends up at worst being produced and marketed as an image, as a simulacrum or pastiche (imitation communities constructed to evoke images of some folksy past, the fabric of traditional working class communities being taken over by an urban gentry).'

[25] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1965) [1961], 346.

[26] Raphael Samuel, 'The SDP and the New Middle Class', in *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* ed. Alison Light, Sally Alexander and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Verso, 1998) [1982], 260.

[27] Anthony Burrill, 'Anthony Burrill tell us about his numerous Etsy WORK HARD rip-offs', available online at https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/anthony-burril-plagiarism-work-hard-be-nice-to-people (accessed 2 June 2020).

[28] See for example on this topic Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[29] 'Gavin Butt, Kodwo Eshun and Mark Fisher in Conversation' in *Post-Punk Then and Now* ed. Butt, Eshun and Fisher (London: Repeater, 2016), 8-24.

[30] Samuel, 'The SDP', 259.

[31] Ray Gosling, *Sum Total* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 115.
[32] See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 401, and 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present* no. 38 (Dec 1967): 56-97.

[33] Gosling, *Sum Total*, 116.
[34] ibid. 115.
[35] Significantly the role is performed by Joe Gladwin, who also played the regular character of Fred Jackson in *Coronation Street* between 1961 and 1965 and would therefore have been associated with that programme's often nostalgic representations of working-class culture and its explorations of social and educational mobility through the figure of Ken Barlow. Both of these features were in part influenced by *Coronation Street* creator Tony Warren's reading of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* – see Paul Hoggart, 'My Father's Legacy', available online at https://www.gold.ac.uk/richard-hoggart/paul-hoggart-speech/ (accessed 21 June 2019).

[36] Gosling, *Sum Total*, 117.
[37] ibid. 119-120.
[38] ibid. 118.
[39] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Volume One* trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) [1959], 10.

[40] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), 2.

[41] Bloch, *Principle of* Hope, 16.

[42] Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 197.

[43] Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London: Continuum, 2004) [1989], 203.

[44] Daniel Hartley, *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017), 84.

[45] Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005) [1979], 219.

[46] Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', 219.

[47] Alan Smith, 'My Dreams…by Ringo', *New Musical Express*, 15 July 1966, 3.

[48] Gosling, *Sum Total*, 92.

[49] The Lord Ashcroft poll is a typical example – see 'A reminder of how Britain voted in the EU referendum – and why', available online at https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/03/a-reminder-of-how-britain-voted-in-the-eu-referendum-and-why/ (accessed 3 June 2020).

[50] Class is a further site of ideological contestation in analyses of the 2016 Referendum. Against a common perception that working class voters secured the victory of the Leave campaign, Danny Dorling avers that 'the Leave voters among the middle class were crucial to the final result because the middle class constituted two thirds of all those who voted.' Danny Dorling, 'Brexit: The Decision of a Divided Country', *The BMJ* 354 (July 2016), available online at https://www.bmj.com/content/354/bmj.i3697.full?ijkey=Qzh0MvExCSL1BkA&keytype=ref (accessed 22 October 2019).

[51] Samuel, 'The SDP', 258 and 271.

[52] Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture*, 334

[53] Kyle Chayka, 'Same Old, Same Old: How the Hipster Aesthetic is Taking Over the World', *The Guardian* 7 August 2016 available online at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/06/hipster-aesthetic-taking-over-world accessed 3 June 2020.

[54] Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture*, 310 and Perry Anderson, 'Problems of Socialist Strategy' in *Towards Socialism* ed. Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn (London: Collins, 1965), 283.