

TOWARD A PRACTICAL REVOLUTION
BY Rex Winsome

A Preface

It is time for a practical discussion of the revolution. Late stage capitalism is upon us, we are living in a system in decline and a revolutionary change is overdue. I want to talk about the revolution in a progressive, specific and action-oriented way.

I know all kinds of people have been shouting, “revolution!” for decades and that you’re past tired of hearing it, I am too. That’s not the kind of revolution I’m talking about. That “to the barricades, comrades!” revolution has become either a cynic’s cliché or a utopian dream and I want none of it. I want a practical revolution. One pursued methodically and scientifically. I want to share with you a theory of revolution that can be understood and pursued without moralizing judgments, working class romance, or pushy idealism. My theory of the revolution is different because it’s descriptive, not prescriptive. I’m here to talk about what is happening and how we can participate, not to try and win your hearts and minds and convince you of what you ought to do.

If you’re looking for a rant against capitalism, a screed about the immorality and injustice caused by the system, look elsewhere. In fact, if you’re looking for a good reason to oppose capitalism, don’t look at the modern complainers who wail over the symptoms of the problem, look to something specific and grounded. I suggest Karl Marx’s arguments, which lay capitalism bare and scientifically expose the root economic contradictions behind all these social and cultural ills. But ignore Marx’s prescription for a proletariat revolution, he was getting ahead of himself.

If you’re looking for something “more radical” for your anti-establishment persona or black denim clad rebellion, there are plenty of sources for that too, ideologies based on apocalyptic rejection of not only the capitalist system, but civilization itself.

I’m tired of all that. I want us to talk directly and practically about changing our political economy. I’m looking for specific, constructive, doable action that reaches beyond simple reforms, pacifiers or band-aids. I’m looking for something radical *and* positive. No more romantic idealists who participate or sympathize mainly to achieve the ameliorization of their guilt. No more apocalyptic visions to justify apathy or whining in place of action. No more utopian zealots who demand absolute destruction of what is in favor of an unreachable ideal. If we’re going to have a practical discussion of the revolution we need to see all these self-defeating ideologies for what they are: escapes, excuses, and ultimately useless.

I’m not here to write a critique of capitalism or of capitalism’s critics, so I have no more to say on those subjects. I’m here to work out a theory of how revolutions work in general, and then fill it in with trends and specific events happening in today’s society. Some of you have seen and participated in these sorts of things and I hope we can compare notes, bolster each other’s actions, and better achieve our goals.

A Definition of Revolution

The first step toward developing an outline of a general revolution is to accept that revolution is something that can be understood scientifically. Its preconditions can be described, its trajectory predicted, its progress tracked. These findings can then be used to guide our actions. The problems are not too big to understand, confront or unpack. If nations and corporations can figure out the balance of trade and dynamics of market forces, then we can figure out the basic shape of a revolution.

Let’s start with a working definition. For our purposes, a revolution is a rapid radical change affecting every area of society. It is political, social, cultural, economic and spiritual all at once. The entire civilization is transformed in a relatively short period of time, from the same impetus. What existed before the revolution is significantly different from what existed after.

These events appear to happen suddenly and violently but actually, they result from longstanding contradictions and slow developments. All the pieces move naturally into place. Then a single trigger sets off a sudden reaction that topples everything and creates something new.

Two Historical Examples

To better illustrate and develop an understanding of revolutionary processes, we can begin by looking at historical examples of such changes. The last two major system-wide revolutions in Western Civilization were the fall of Rome and the rise of capitalism.

These two revolutions are very different. What they have in common is that they marked a period of radical change between two distinct and relatively stable systems. The fall of Rome changed a centralized empire with a republican form of government and an economy based on conquest, taxes and slavery to a decentralized feudal monarchy with an agricultural economy and a powerful centralized church. The rise of capitalism replaced the feudal system with a market economy, representative democracy, commodity exchange and a tendency for oligarchic interdependency.

In the following historical summaries I hope to contrast these revolutions. If we can relate the different processes to the different results, we will be presented with options. We’ll have two types of radical change that may occur. Capitalism can fall as Rome did, or something can rise as capitalism did. We need to choose a desired result and follow its precedent.

EXAMPLE 1: The Fall of Rome

The fall of Rome seems to have resulted from a long list of factors occurring at once. Historical records are incomplete, but Rome’s fall has been attributed to military over-extension, corruption, the rise of Christianity, and barbarian invasions. These causes are interrelated and the idea that any of them could swamp an empire like Rome’s is cause of some historical debate. Given

this incomplete history, my speculation is that all of these “causes” of the collapse are actually symptoms of a more radical cause. I argue that Rome fell due to the obsolescence of its political economy and lack of a viable alternative mode.

Rome was an empire, economically dependent on conquest to sustain itself. The economy was fueled by taxes levied against, and slaves taken from, conquered lands. These slaves were forced into servitude by their masters after military defeat, and continued to live in slavery for generations. They could be sold, exchanged or set free. They were sometimes given respect and independence by kind masters. Some made the most of their condition, but there was an understanding that they were forced into their position against their will.

As the empire developed over the centuries its conditions changed. The system slowly evolved. A delicate balance had to be maintained between the expansion of the empire, the maintenance of the infrastructure, and the opportunities for corruption on all levels. These tensions formed trends moving the civilization in multiple directions at once. As the corruption worsened, greater military might was needed to keep resources flowing in, infrastructure and institutions eroded, the military decayed, invaders were unstoppable and new ideologies gained ground. Eventually these contradictions grew too great and the system collapsed.

The Middle Ages

When Rome’s central authority collapsed, smaller landowners within the empire became sovereign by default. These landowners were highly isolated and no longer owing fealty to Rome, and thus were able to establish new political and social conditions befitting their new arrangements. The basic economic relationship shifted as well. Now instead of slavery, there was serfdom. This relationship while no more “free” than the forced servitude of the Roman days, was maintained in a very different way. Serfs were led to believe that their servitude was required in exchange for security and protection from neighboring warlords and roaming barbarians. This belief was maintained through a powerful religious institution that held certain roles for people as decided by god and given by birthright. The serfs, for the most part consented to their lot in life.

This system also held contradictions. As the many monarchs, nobles and lords grew in power and evolved into larger nation-states, they found themselves constantly at war with each other. The church took on a centralizing role. It maintained its power through a deceptive apolitical stature as a religious institution, while manipulating the players to prevent any one ruler from gaining enough power to re-establish something akin to the Roman Empire. Unless, like Charlemagne, they did so with the church’s goals in mind. Sustained expansionism was impossible because the playing field was too level, everyone’s power was equal enough that they couldn’t easily conquer each other.

Eventually, the instability and constant war created feudalism’s own contradictions. The nobility, rather than providing security for the serfs, was embroiling them in conflicts. Church doctrine was strained and the serfs rebelled. Direct violence was more often used to contain and control them. These contradictions led to great instability for the feudal period, and may have resulted in an eventual collapse into ever smaller units of government. Instead, feudalism was replaced.

EXAMPLE 2: The Rise of Capitalism

This brings us to the second example, the rise of capitalism. There’s a critical difference between these two revolutions. The fall of Rome left a broken shambles of a civilization which patched itself together to form the feudal arrangement. The rise of capitalism didn’t result from the collapse of the feudal system, it resulted from the development of a new system. Capitalism grew alongside the increasingly unstable feudal mode. A new class emerged from within feudal society. This new class created new property relations, new products, new labor relations and new means of distribution and exchange.

Specifically, merchants increased production of commodities, exchanged them on an increasingly free market, and manufactured them with unskilled wage laborers in place of the guild system. These innovations proved more efficient and the merchant class grew and developed great wealth, evolving into the early bourgeoisie. These economic innovations spurred massive change throughout all areas of society.

Initially the bourgeoisie was limited by the laws of the monarchs. The divine right of kings limited property ownership to the noble class by birth. Merchants, no matter how materially wealthy, were never allowed to purchase or own land. The political situation shifted dramatically, a period known as mercantilism began. Monarchs sponsored merchants and the feudal wars became trade wars, fought over the riches earned by the merchants.

When the bourgeoisie changed labor relations, they created a new lower class. Serfs left the fields and became proletarians. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat have different relationships to each other, to themselves and to society. They lived radically different lives and had new and different spiritual needs. This led to the Protestant reformation, the Gutenberg press, and various religious wars.

As these changes took place, the political system evolved gradually, reluctantly adapting itself to changed circumstances, and hampering the bourgeoisie until eventually, they revolted. Merchants finally recognized working for the nobility who had arbitrary power as a matter of precedent was unjust and inefficient. They staged a political revolution to solidify the economic revolution they’d already achieved. The revolutionary wars in France, America, and all across Europe were incited by the same fact: the bourgeoisie was wealthy enough to challenge the laws of the nobility and defeat them.

In summary, the transition from Roman Empire to Feudal Ages resulted from Rome being swamped by contradictions within its system. The transition

from feudalism to capitalism resulted from innovative actions of a distinct class within feudal society. These summaries are a simplification, but however imperfect, they illustrate two different trajectories we can look for in the present day.

The Result of all this History: Capitalism.

The capitalist system is based on the relationship between capital and labor. At its root, capitalism is about one class owning the means of production and another class exchanging labor power for wages. This system has a distinct set of assumptions and definitions: private property, representative democracy, commodity exchange, open but complacency-inducing religion and a market system that requires constant growth. The capitalist system also has distinct intrinsic contradictions. Capitalism tends toward increasing inequality, the rich get richer and the poor get more numerous. The government exists to buffer these trends and slow them down through welfare programs and military expansionism, but, as with the Roman Empire, there are limits to how far such processes can go before the entire system bursts at the seams.

Current trends all indicate that the capitalist system is quickly heading for a collapse of Roman proportions. Inequality, globalization, tribalism, fundamentalism and anti-american sentiment, oscillations between welfare state and laissez-faire practices in government are all consistent with Marx's economic predictions.

Fortunately, capitalism is only the dominant economic system in our present society. It is not the only one. There are people functioning under alternative economic frameworks. These people struggle within the capitalist system as the early bourgeoisie struggled within feudalism.

Thoughts on Action

There's much more to say about these alternative economies, indeed the rest of this document will focus on them, but before we get specific I'd like to deal with the question of action in the abstract.

Action is about choices. There is no way to not act, every choice you make, whether it's to stay home and relax, go to a protest, or go out and bomb something is a choice with an effect. We take action everyday, and it's our responsibility to understand and come to terms with the global macro-economic results of these actions so we can act intentionally.

If we choose to follow the system that has been set before us, to do as capitalism designed us to do, then we are choosing to participate in and accelerate the collapse of the capitalist system through its faults and contradictions. Perfecting capitalism is not an option, no matter what the libertarians and reformers might like to think. The contradictions exist at its very root. The facts of everyday life display and confirm the effect of those contradictions. If we look closely at our economic trends we will recognize that

working our nine to five jobs, and then going shopping is contributing to the decline and eventual collapse of the entire system. Getting a conventional education, debt, job, and retirement account are all ways to participate in something that can't last much longer.

As the system speeds toward its end, increasingly desperate measures to maintain it will be employed. Greater violence, control and injustice will occur and we are participating in all those things. That's the base of the moral argument against capitalism, an argument that I'll let others present, because I find morality and guilt-based arguments ineffective. They are too intimate of tools for inciting real changes of mind and action. I don't want to make people feel bad for participating in the violence and injustice inherent in capitalism. Feeling bad about something is easily solved by doing things that make you feel good. The things that make anti-capitalists feel good do not serve my purposes; they are all either escapes, ineffectual protests, or judgment and vilification of others.

I want my argument to appeal to cold reason. Capitalism, as flawed as it is, has been a stable and innovative system for quite a while, but its decline and collapse are inevitable, and will be ugly. It's already begun, we're living in it, but if we pay attention, we can make choices that produce the results we desire.

If you desire revolution through collapse, if you'd rather live in the midst of catastrophic decline, or want to see the slate wiped clean and let things start over by roughly picking up the pieces as the feudal lords did, then you've simply got to step back and watch it happen. Indeed, you might as well accelerate the process by participating. Move to the suburbs, go shopping, do what your parents always wanted you to do.

If you want to prevent that collapse, if you want to live during the growth of something new rather than the death of something old, your best option is to follow our second example. We can participate in alternative economies, and develop them to compete with the capitalist system.

A political reform or revolution is not an option. We need to operate at the base economic level. Political revolution was Marx's position, and history demonstrates his error. Marx went to great lengths to critique political reformers and idealists in his time but his concept of a revolution is not safe from those same critiques. Marx's revolution is based on the idea that as capitalism's contradictions escalate over time, the proletariat will eventually grow so large and unhappy that they'll rise up. This is possibly true to a point. The growth and immiseration of the proletariat seem inevitable results of the system, but I have an issue with the "rising up" part. When Marx supposes that the lower class will get organized and spontaneously seize control of the state, and then impose a new economic system, the process stops being a natural economic inevitability, and instead becomes a political cause. It's as unrealistic and utopian as any of the political causes that Marx dismissed in his time. If there was a historical precedent for this kind of process it would be something like serfs attacking the manors, stripping off the king's robes, donning the crown and suddenly creating

something radically new for all the other peasants. That kind of process is nonsensical. It's no wonder communist revolutions are constantly failing to organize the proletariat enough to stage a coup, and in the rare case when they do succeed, they always end up with bad replacements. Their new systems don't establish new economic relationships, they simply replace the bourgeois class with the communist party and try to run capitalism with a command economy.

A new approach is required, one that emerges from economic realities and doesn't need to be forced or kick started by political action. We need to look at replacing capitalism as capitalism replaced feudalism. If it comes to a revolutionary war, the war has to come after the new system is fully established within capitalist society. It has to be a war in which a robust new economic class realigns the political system to better suit their needs as the capitalists overthrew monarchs to escape the feudal limitations on property ownership.

This brings us to my method. There are four pieces I need to complete my argument. First, I'll detail the specific relationships that define the capitalist system and shape the modern economy. Second, I'll define an alternative system by the same variables. Third, I'll describe the actual existence and progress of this revolutionary change in today's world. Fourth, I'll discuss actions I have taken to participate in the revolution.

The Modern Economy

In today's world capitalism is given an overbroad definition. It attempts to universalize itself, and people seem to think that any and every economic activity is capitalist. This is not true, capitalism is one particular system of economic activity. It can be defined by a particular basic relationship between products, producers and consumers. There are specific structures that tend to grow on top of that base relationship: a certain kind of government, religion, society and culture. These institutions derive from capitalism and evolve over time with the capitalist system. Volumes can be and have been written about these things, but again, a coarse simplification will serve my purposes. Most of what follows is a rough ride over Marx's basic concepts of capitalist society, a more thorough study is required of any good revolutionary. Read *Das Kapital*.

Capitalism, like every system before it, is based on class structure. Just as Rome was based on patricians and the plebians, and feudalism on lords and serfs, capitalism is based on the bourgeois and proletarians. These classes relate to each other in a unique way. Rather than being forced into labor, or manipulated by a belief system, the proletariat works for the bourgeoisie because they own nothing but their ability to work, their labor power. The relationship has been stripped down to simple economic necessity. One class owns the businesses and gains profits from them, while the other works for wages because they have no other means of survival.

There we have the key characteristics of the capitalist system. First, there's capitalist property relationship, called private property. Second, is the labor relationship, known as exploitation. Third, we have the exchange system,

the free market. These basic relationships create a particular set of social institutions and arrangements. Bear with me as I quickly define some of these concepts to build a rough outline of the capitalist system.

The definitions and terms I use contain implicit value judgments, but I intend to look at them objectively. Responsible scholarship requires that we resist values-based judgments. Revolutionaries have been so busy hating capitalism that we've failed to understand it thoroughly and have blinded ourselves to the very solutions we so passionately seek. We should look at these components honestly, as pieces of a system that has provided almost everyone who can read this with our basic human needs every day. This is not to embrace or excuse capitalism. Recognizing how capitalism does sometimes benefit and work for people is a necessary part of understanding how it *works* how it functions, and thus how to replace it.

Definitions of a Capitalist Economy

Private property is the idea that things can be earned, bought and sold, that value can be held and exchanged in the form of money. As described above, capitalism replaced bloodlines and the divine right of kings with deeds, scripts, and account ledgers to allow those who weren't born of nobility to amass wealth. This new property relationship created many opportunities and freedom for people when capitalism first rose. As capitalism developed, this property relation was arbitrarily applied to all things, including ideas, images, and the public commons.

Exploitation is when those who "own" businesses pay wages to others who work in those businesses. This system allows greater flexibility than previous labor relationships. Class lines are not determined by birth, and can even blur. For example, in the western world, most workers are also investors, through their bank accounts and retirement funds. Each individual participates in both class activities. This flexibility is one of the great innovations of capitalism, making it more efficient than anything that came before. However, over time this relationship tends toward huge inequality. The richest people live off their investments alone and tend to grow richer while the poorer (mostly living in less developed nations) work for all of their income, which is constantly being reduced.

The Free Market is a system of exchange with shifting values based on supply and demand. This is the ultimate decentralized system of value. The free market, if it existed would be the perfect anarchist system of value. It is a self-replicating system of automatic popular sovereignty. The people's choices today define what will be made available to them tomorrow. Unfortunately, the free market tends to be unstable and, in the real world it is often manipulated by the most powerful capitalists and their attendant governments.

Marx described the details of these basic relationships with the concepts of commodification, fetishism and alienation of labor. Later I will

contrast some of my experience and observations with these concepts, so I will first define them here.

Commodification is the idea that all things can be exchanged on the free market and owned by the rules of private property. It is the process by which everything is made to fit within the capitalist mode of production. Commodification is best exemplified by the mass production of completely identical products that capitalist producers strive for today.

Commodity fetishism is the way consumers are disconnected from the origins of the products they consume. The capitalist shopper doesn't know or think about anything but the final product. There's no connection with the producers, laborers or raw materials used in the creation of the product.

Alienation of labor is the other side of that coin. It's rooted in the fact that the workers do not receive the full product of their labor and are separated from its final destination and end result. A wage earner doesn't connect to the sale of what they produce, their experience is controlled by their employers and supervisors.

These are the ways that capitalism is hardwired to produce particular economic trends and attendant social and political systems. Capitalism tends to create a specific set of institutions. Everything from the liberal secular expansionist government to the superficial tolerance for diversity, from the sprawling suburbs, to the mass produced culture results from the capitalist economy. Things are what they are because the base system requires this result.

Definitions of an Alternative Economy

Now that I've described the specific property, labor and exchange relations of capitalism, I can contrast these relations with the relations of an emerging alternative. The alternative that will re-create our political economy is artistic production.

Before you roll your eyes and toss this booklet aside, let me be clear: I am not talking about some magical transformative power of art. I am not saying that art can contain a powerful message that will suddenly galvanize a revolution or tame the savage beasts. I am not that naïve. I'm talking about art in purely economic terms. If we peel away the bullshit mystification and over-eager ambitions of artist idealists, if we ignore the "art world" and strip art down to its basic components, it is a process, an action conducted under a unique set of economic relations.

Art has always existed, and exists under capitalism today, but it exists under a struggling compromise, with limitations and complex inefficient institutions. Different media have settled into different compromises with capitalist society. Visual art tends to get by under an obsolete almost feudal system of patronage. Mechanically reproducible mediums, like film, recorded music and photography settle for an ill-suited commodification. The performing arts work under a mix of both commodification and patronage. These

arrangements are hardly acceptable, and will not improve under the capitalist system. Art challenges and defies capitalism's every defining characteristic.

Private property does not benefit artistic production. The value of an art product is a shared cultural value, one which it does not make sense for an individual to own. Some art products, like live performances, *can't* be owned by an individual. They are by their nature, ephemeral and communal. The private property relation has been imposed on the art world at a cost to production. Artists, rather than making art that expresses or critiques our culture and society, are required to make art that wealthy people want to own, or sponsor.

Exploitation is an inefficient and perverse way to produce art. An art object's value comes from the artist's connection to their work. Alienation of labor deflates that connection and strips the art product of its value. Indeed, what is non-alienated labor if not art? Art's exchange value is inherently resistant to commodity fetishism, people want art *because* they know where it came from.

The free market and commodity exchange work best with mass produced goods, but art's value comes from its uniqueness. When dealing with art works the assumptions of the market become non-sensical. One of the basic functions of the market is to respond to supply and demand, but what are we supposed to do if for example, the demand for Monet paintings is high? Entrepreneurs ought to go out and make some more Monets! They can't. Monet and his contemporaries are dead, and modern impressionists might be able to imitate his style perfectly, but they cannot repeat his personality and cultural or historical position, which is where much of Monet's value comes from. So, instead Monet paintings auction for more money and Monet prints, books, and postcards, which fail utterly to achieve the effect of a Monet painting, sell like hotcakes.

Capitalism confronts these problems by creating institutions like museums, galleries, and record companies to try and turn art into something saleable or relative to the system. Artists will work within the limits and under the whims of these institutions because finding some way to make your art sustainably within the dominant economic system is preferable to making art as an expensive hobby, or at a personal loss. These arrangements are hardly acceptable to artists. We complain and struggle, compromising our integrity, vision and "selling out" are constant concerns.

Some artists have ignored these institutions, settled for doing art as a hobby and at a loss. Some artists have discovered that outside of the capitalist system, there is a way to sustain and live off of art production. These artists are doing art as an alternative economic system, and are forming a new and growing economic class.

The Artist Class in Capitalist Society

Thus far I have explained that art is a radically different sort of economic system than capitalism, and that, as such, it has the potential to replace the capitalist system, in the type of revolution that brought us capitalism in the

first place. Now I aim to demonstrate how art is achieving that potential. Again, this is a general outline, my research is not complete, and my evidence is mainly anecdotal and based on personal interpretations of known trends.

One reason capitalism rose to replace feudalism is because capitalism specialized in manufactured goods, a neglected sector of the economy. Feudalism was agriculture based, and capitalism specialized in the mass production of manufactured goods. Eventually, manufactured goods eclipsed the agricultural economy, and the mode of production that specialized in these products became the dominant mode of production. Nowadays capitalism has been applied to all products, including agriculture.

Arts and entertainment is one of the fastest growing sectors of the modern economy. As demonstrated above, capitalism is not very good at this stuff. The rise of arts and entertainment can lead to the rise of artists as a distinct and revolutionary class. As these artists pursue and advance a radical alternative economy, they will also advance a radical set of alternative social institutions. The artist's mode of production has not yet fully realized itself. Its exact relationships will not be known and its unique social institutions and trends will not emerge until it becomes the dominant economic practice. The initial stages of the process are occurring and can be observed. From them, predictions and speculations can be made.

Artist Revolutionaries.

The best examples of artist empowerment is in the punk rock scene. This is where the movement has the longest history and the most self awareness. The punk rock ethos, anarchist ideals, and do it yourself aesthetic have caught on beyond the single genre of music and style of fashion associated with punk rock. Many artists operate under these methods, not only musicians, and definitely not only screaming, loud and fast musicians. However, music is the medium where the punk rock artist class has developed the furthest, and earned the most success relative to the capitalist model, so I start my investigation by looking further into the music scene.

Since the advent of rock n roll there has been a tension between musicians and the music industry. This forms a cycle. Musician innovators create something new, unique, accessible and popular, it catches on and then record company's put their might behind it, over-produce it, saturation-market it, and co-opt the vitality musicians had created. New musicians react to the bloated gaudy mess that record companies have made of rock n roll and come back with something new, which is quickly co-opted by the companies again. The cycle continues.

Each turn round this cycle has created more challenges for the record companies. Bob Dylan empowered singer-songwriters by making the personality of the singer part of the content of the songs. Record companies had to co-opt not only the style of the singer-songwriters, it had to co-opt the artists themselves. In response, punk rockers created music that celebrates an

emphatically anti-commercial attitude. Record companies miraculously managed to co-opt that movement as well, but less effectively. Grunge rock in the nineties made "alternative" a necessary selling point, and pop music ate itself, imploding completely. From that implosion, and thanks to new technologies, indie rock was born.

Nowadays, artists are more and more discovering that new technologies have made record companies largely unnecessary. Booking tours, recording, distributing, promotion, and everything else can be done by the artists themselves, or by their friends. Pressing CDs or recording a record occasionally require outside contractors, but there is no need to sign a contract giving some corporation ownership of your art, unless you want your art distributed and promoted on a huge scale in hopes of becoming millionaire rockstars.

These independent artists are making better music than corporations, and making it more efficiently. The top five record companies are losing money and are incapable of adapting to new technologies. Meanwhile, millions of indie rock labels and independent artists are thriving. The record company model is based on a few big names, rockstars that cost millions to produce and promote, force-feeding audiences the most saccharine sweet product that they only purchase out of familiarity. The indie labels base their success on low cost production of vital energized music. Rather than feeding audiences what some marketing department decides is most palatable, they take chances producing unique music which catches on and grows it's own audience.

The main reason that independent music is beating out the capitalist competition is that the artists have different aspirations. They aren't as concerned with the bottom line. They're overjoyed to be able to live off their art, and many are happy to work slacker jobs to make ends meet, if that means they can create art in their "free" time. This attitude is at its very root, anti-capitalist, and it has freed the artists to better navigate situations that record companies cannot handle.

Independent artists don't have as much trouble with piracy as the big labels do because they aren't tied to the private property relationship demanded by the capitalist mode of production. Copyright law is the means by which capitalism makes itself work. Ideas, words, and art creations are converted into commodities by law. The capitalist state enforces that law like the feudal state enforced the divine right of kings. Meanwhile post-capitalist artists circumvent the challenges created by virtual reproduction of recorded music by eschewing commodity fetishism. They connect the consumers directly with the producers so that the consumers will voluntarily support the producers even though they could get the products they desire for free.

Capitalism cannot emulate or co-opt that relationship, so instead they will continue to employ state force to prevent these new means of exchange. Eventually the cost of protecting intellectual property rights will be inhibitive to production, especially the gaudy high-cost production that record companies rely on to make their products sell.

Another reason independent musicians are doing better than record companies is because they've shifted the music medium away from recordings and toward live performance. Music is a unique medium, because it can exist as both live performance, and mechanically reproducible forms. When the phonograph was invented and popularized, live musicians suffered greatly. Recordings became the primary money makers and concerts and tours were designed to support the record. Now that recorded music can be virtually reproduced, things are shifting back. If a recording can be endlessly reproduced at almost the same quality by anyone with a computer, then selling records will not be profitable anymore. The only way recording music will be sustainable at all is if one, the recording and distribution is done incredibly cheaply and two, if the audience has a desire to pay for it even if they don't have to. As discussed earlier, independent artists are better suited to both those requirements than big record companies.

More importantly, the economic base for recorded music has fallen out and so the quality will inevitably decline as well. The significance of recordings will go down, recordings become promotional tools or merch to make a tour more profitable, live performance becomes the emphasis. This is an easy solution to the copyright problem. The experience of a live performance with the original artist is not reproducible: it cannot be pirated.

These facts indicate that the artist class functions with a unique property relation. As capitalists created private property to replace divine right, the artist class is creating a new relationship to replace private property. This relationship is based on two things: experience and a desire for the producer to succeed and produce more.

Keeping up with the Punks.

The example of independent music shows how musicians are working outside the capitalist mode of production and creating greater value more efficiently than their capitalist counterparts. This same sort of thing is happening in other art mediums and in non-artistic sectors of the economy. This uneven development is consistent with the rise of capitalism. The bourgeoisie got good at producing a few specific types of things, then applied that mode to other areas, eventually taking even the agricultural sector out of the hands of feudal modes.

I can't provide thorough evidence of this in this space at this time, but I will mention a few promising developments. Crafting and independent fashion design and construction are completely artistic approaches to textile and clothing industries which are growing rapidly, as documented by Milwaukee artist and businesswoman Faythe Levine in the forthcoming documentary film and book "Handmade Nation: the Rise of DIY Art, Craft and Design". In the agriculture industry, the growing popularity of food co-operatives and even organic farming are examples of consumers' aversion to commodity fetishism, indicating a post-capitalist direction. Also, the research of Richard Florida in "The Rise of the

Creative Class" about the empowerment of creatives in high tech industries, while misdirected, brings a lot of statistical research to support my positions.

Bourgeois Reactionaries.

Capitalist businesses have responded to this threat. First, there is the entertainment industry's reaction to piracy and the hypocritical assertion of their property relation through the blunt instrument of state force. If capitalism was founded on escaping the arbitrary power structures of feudal monarchies, it has developed to the point where its own structures are beginning to seem just as arbitrary and obsolete.

Second, there are attempts to co-opt the appearances and practices of artists. Every major film and music company have spawned "independent" subsidiaries that try to produce the kind of work that genuine independent artists create. This method has found some success, but it indicates a last ditch effort to get in on a trend that will eventually make the companies obsolete.

Third, outside of the art world, capitalist enterprises are begrudgingly adopting new practices to try and gain some of the vitality that gives non-capitalist producers a competitive advantage. Modern business practices such as profit sharing, free-agency, flextime and expanded benefits are all compromises made by corporations to attract laborers who have been empowered by their unique creative talents. Eventually, if these practices are truly embraced, some companies will no longer be practicing anything recognizable as capitalism. Post capitalist laborers will move to those businesses, giving them a competitive advantage. In this way capitalism is being challenged from without by artists who struggle in pursuit of a radical non-participation and from within by businesses who've innovated themselves right out of the capitalist system.

These reactions will surely grow more severe as time goes on, and if historical precedent tells us anything, the capitalists will hold on to power by any means available until some kind of political upheaval or revolutionary war is necessary. Until that time, the revolution is best pursued not by going to the barricades, but by going into business, creating new products with innovative means.