

# Signs Of The Times

Our guide to the New Times traces some of the many threads which make up the fabric of our social, cultural and political lives in the late 20th century. With an eye on current social trends, and the assistance of experts in many fields, we project into the future in an effort to capture the flavour of a world which is currently being shaped for the 1990s and beyond



## Smart-Up

In the next decade, we can expect a gradual re-orientation within the structure of healthcare: smaller hospitals and more out-

patient treatment as a result of movements away from major surgery to minimal intervention using laser, telescope and precisely-targeted medicines. The Right is closely involved with the development of new technology and new health-care solutions - the Left has yet to develop a credible political response. There are certainly democratic possibilities in the new technology. The 'smart card', for example, a personalised, plastic, computerised medical record, currently on trial in Devon, is designed to give patients freer access to their own medical notes. Before long we might all be carrying the card. •



## Altered States

There is no turning back now for Gorbachev's *perestroika*. But the rapid modernisation of the Soviet economy will inevitably bring with it a fresh series of

problems for its economists and citizens alike. The hallmark of 1990s Soviet life will be uncertainty, and the strongest pressures will be to fragment. In particular, can the republics be coaxed in to a new relationship with the political centre based on considerably greater autonomy and cultural assertiveness? The decade is likely to see the passing away of the Eastern Bloc, as the other East European states claim new 'non-aligned' identities and the EC beckons with new economic co-operation.

There may even be a historic closing of unfinished business in Asia, with the USSR, Japan, China and the US feeling their way towards a new kind of Helsinki agreement in the Asiatic world.

For the rest of us, socialism will never be the same again, but there may at least be a clearer and more honest international language with which to discuss its dilemmas, problems and challenges.

## Future Shock

Neil Spencer, assistant editor of *Arena* magazine, has a vision of a complex and fragmented new-age culture: 'After the alternately angry and apathetic 80s, expect the nightmare 90s, as virulent strains of pollution run rampant through eco-systems, weather patterns and political ideologies of Right and Left alike. Dying forests, dead seals and child leukaemia are your starters for 2001.

As eco-mayhem creates a new economic and political agenda, it will also fuel the inevitable millenarian paranoia. Responses to "the end is nigh" fever will include born-again hedonism ("Tonight we're gonna party like it's 1999," as Prince puts it), born-again fundamentalism (Christian, Islam, you name it), and born-again mysticism (praise the Aquarian age). Holy rollers on Celtic community radio, satellite tv porn, and glossy "new age" magazines will be among media responses in a Western world awash with media.

A middle-of-the-road global mono-culture, shaped and



endorsed by multinationals - the Adidas/Pepsi/Mitsubishi/Levis/Michael Jackson world tour - will carry on coming. Among the real cultural attractions will be wondrous new musical hybrids, as the traditions acknowledged in the 80s - afro, latin, flamenco, folk - mutate with each other and with the new technology. The video walkman is already here - the CBS/Sony Barbara Streisand home hologram can't be far behind.' •

## Food Chain

Consumption of wholemeal bread - up. Low-fat milk - up. Fresh fruit and vegetables - up. Sugar - down. Red meat - down. Full-cream milk - down. A healthier nation in the making? Maybe. But the figures are contradictory. Consumption of confectionary; chocolate, ice cream and biscuits is also rising. And food is getting faster. The McDonald's expansion con-

tinues. On average, three new outlets are expected to open in Britain every month for the next 15 years. Work it out. A total of 540 - lots of fries.

Is the classically Fordist production-line burger trend likely to survive the new times? McDonald's head office in Finchley anticipate no problems. And, after all, they do have the approval of an influential local, who drops in occasionally and swears by the Big Mac. •



## Chips With Everything

Developed at low cost during the 1970s, silicon chips enable large amounts of diverse information to be processed rapidly through computers.

The information technology revolution is already deeply entrenched in our everyday lives. What is so transforming about computers is that they can connect up and control different types of activity through a common mathematical language which literally removes the 'middle man'.

Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM) demonstrates this 'linking-up' ability beautifully. From design conception to final polish, a new car is built basic-

## Euro-state

Will 1992 really bring harmony to Europe, or merely force integration upon its reluctant component states? It has been a long time coming, representing the implementation of the original 1956 European Economic Community blueprint. In contrast to the crisis-ridden 70s of national economic solutions, member governments are now reconciled both to their countries' interdependence and to the limits of their control over a market-oriented internationalising economy.

So the big questions are not 'if but how much' and

ly by computer. No-one needs to translate a designer's pencil sketches into the various pre-production and production-line stages. The auto firms have visions of custom-made cars which each of us could design to meet our own special fancy, assembled from an ever-expanding range of components (the supply of which is computer-monitored to reduce stockholdings).

In the 90s, today's information technology will proliferate in more areas. Its potential will probably be most dramatically expanded down the end of the telephone line.

Hard on the heels of the infotech revolution is the evolution of telecommunications, where digital technology allows computers to bridge time and distance barriers with a kind of electronic esperanto. Voice, pictures, computerspeak can all be turned into a common blip language carried down the same phone line. BT aims to digitise the phone system within two years. The computer-controlled system introduces a new layer of 'interactive' services via the 'smart' phone: home banking, home shopping, home dating, and of course, home working.

Only one blot on the far-reaching golden technological horizon: we may exhaust global supplies of silicon before the millenium. •

with what outcomes. The political tensions will be about working through a definition of the necessary extent of EC-wide co-ordination. On the sidelines will be those who nostalgically hanker after a return to national sovereignty. More fruitfully, there will be exploration of the possibilities for genuine local and national diversity within a common framework.

Perhaps the key player is West Germany: a geopolitical fulcrum, presently in a confused and confusing frame of mind, and with good export-led - not to mention historical - reasons for looking hopefully Eastwards. •

## Cut-Down Genes

The biotech revolution has been quietly gearing up to reshape all aspects of the natural world. Since the discovery of the genetic code DNA, it has become possible to cut and recombine genes from different plants and animals and so create 'designer' organisms capable of exploiting the many curious and efficient ways that nature uses to trap energy and deal with diseases, predators and the weather.

Already genetically-engineered new plants and animals can produce not just

abundant supplies of milk, insulin, sugar and antibiotics but also drought and disease-resistant crops which would be the envy of any medieval farmer. Even growing 'bio-chips' for bio-computers is in the planning stages.

The enormous impact of these Utopian spare parts on existing world economic structure is hard to imagine, particularly when their development is increasingly in the hands of the greedy and private world of multinational business. International planning is clearly essential: there are no examples of stopping scientific revolutions and the natural costs of ignoring them are too high. •

## Fundamental-List

### Modern Times

Fordism  
Modern  
Steinbeck  
Le Corbusier  
Sartre  
Futurism  
Marlon Brando  
Production  
Mass-market  
Ford  
Self-control  
Depth  
Belief  
Elvis  
Interpretation  
Butlins  
Relationships  
The Beatles  
Determinism  
Maxwell House  
Concrete  
Liberalism  
Mass hysteria  
Humanism  
Raspberry Ripple  
Lady Chatterley  
World wars  
Angst  
Roosevelt  
In/Out lists  
Newspapers  
Z Cars  
Conservatism  
Emotion  
Dow Jones  
Stalinism  
Free love  
The Titanic  
The Cabinet  
Bingo

### New Times

Post-Fordism  
Post-modern  
Pynchon  
Venturi  
Foucault  
Nostalgia  
William Hurt  
Consumption  
Market segmentation  
Toyota  
Remote control  
Surface  
Credit  
Michael Jackson  
Deconstruction  
Theme parks  
White weddings  
Bros  
The arbitrary  
Acid House  
Holographic glass  
Libertarianism  
Fatal Attraction  
Post-structuralism  
Hedgehog Crisps  
Blue Velvet  
Terrorism  
Boredom  
Reagan  
New Times guides  
Colour supplements  
Miami Vice  
Thatcherism  
Affectation  
Nikkei Index  
Glasnost  
The free market  
Challenger  
The Prime Minister  
The Big Bang

# GUIDE TO NEW TIMES

## Shop Style

You may not find them side by side, but they'll be in the same pedestrianised shopping centres: the archetypal Fordist and post-Fordist shopping outfits. And *both are* expanding furiously

### Toys'R'Us

- Company:** The US-owned multinational chain of superstores: the paradigm of 'pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap' retailing.
- Concepts:** Toys 'R' Us - 350 toy superstores in North America and Europe.  
Kids 'R' Us - 74 children's and baby wear superstores in the US.
- Finance:** Sales of \$3.14bn (£1.85bn) and profits of \$204m (£120m) in the year of January 31.
- Chairman:** Charles Lazarus, 64, founded the company in 1948.
- Stores:** Bright, brash superstores with a uniform style of wide aisles, fast checkouts and glaring lighting. Products are stacked floor to ceiling.
- Products:** Each store sells at least 18,000 different types of toys with as many as 500,000 individual items. One of the early British stores sported 30,000 robots, 25,000 dolls and 18,000 cars.
- Sourcing:** All products are sourced centrally. Product design is delegated to suppliers. Toys 'R' Us makes the most of economies of scale by negotiating bulk discounts from manufacturers.
- Philosophy:** 'A warehouse-sized paradise where children always find what they want, where prices are low and assortments always large. Toys 'R' Us is, quite simply, a magical place that parents and children never outgrow.' *Annual Report and Accounts 1987/88* •

### Next

- Company:** A British group of fashion, accessory and home interior shops: one of the pioneers of 'niche' retailing.
- Concepts:** Next Too and Next Collection women's wear; Next for Men; Next the Jeweller; Next Essentials for shoes and accessories; the Next directory mail order catalogue; Next Lingerie; Next Interiors; and shops and more mail order catalogues and garden centres and newsagencies ... mostly in Britain with a few shops in West Germany.
- Finance:** Sales of £862m and profits of £92m in the year to January 31.
- Chairman:** George Davies, 46, a career retailer recruited by Hepworth in 1981 to create a new women's wear business.
- Stores:** Every Next store concept has a different design and the designs change continuously. In the early days it favoured modernist monochrome. Now it opts for a more mellow style of neutral tones and natural woods.
- Products:** Different collections for each store concept.
- Sourcing:** Almost all Next products are created by a team of designers, mostly art school graduates, based at its headquarters in Leicester. Suppliers must work to Next's specifications.
- Philosophy:** 'I can never afford to rest because I know our present customer will grow older and we have to continue the cycle. We have got to go on capturing the youth.' George Davies, *Sunday Telegraph*. July 1988 •



**Desktop Dailies:** New technology is transforming the newspaper industry. Controversial publishing innovator, Eddie Shah: 'I see the newspaper market fragmenting. There'll be more specialist newspapers; a daily women's paper, sports papers. The market may not expand but it will fragment. Newspapers will have more features, comment and in-depth coverage, while tv will supply the latest news. When the cost of production was high you had to have a readership of around 1.5m to break even. The way new technology has gone, desktop publishing, for example, means we are aiming for a 350,000 break-even sales figure on *The Post*. The £2m spent on daily newspapers will soon be shared by more than the three big players in the game at the moment.' •

**Internationalist:** Italian Communist and Euro-MP, Luciana Castellina is concerned about the future of the Left in Europe: 'A few weeks ago the European parliament discussed a report on the problems of a common European currency and what it would require. An amendment from the Left aiming to place the future of the European central bank under public control, was rejected by the right majority.'

Although the resolution takes no immediate effect, the vote was significant. It proves which kind of Europe we will have in 1992 if the Left does not prepare itself to fight on the new supranational ground.

Two options are in fact open: a completely deregulated Europe, or a Europe in which the achievements of the labour movement and of democratic movements will be safeguarded and reinforced.

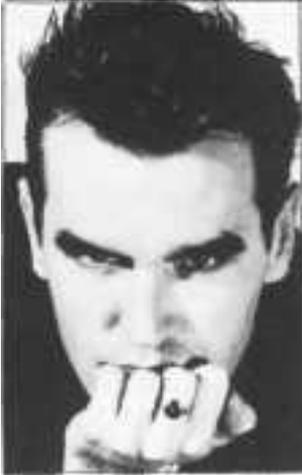
To remain parochial in the hope of resisting 1992's impact by an appeal to national sovereignty is meaningless. It won't happen because the internationalisation processes are by now irreversible.

Rather, this is an opportunity for the Left, dramatically weakened over the past decade, to regain an international dimension.'



**Blunted Edge:** US author Kathy Acker, lives in Britain and suggests: 'There's a pressure on anglo-saxon literature to become international - a great pressure. I'm always amazed at what an island Britain is but now there's no choice about internationalisation. It's difficult to pin down exactly what is meant by the term "post-modernism". There have been so many different movements and actions. A lot of it came out of 1968, particularly in France. It was about decentralisation - against centralised political control. But now what's called "post-modernism" has lost its political edge - even swung to the right. Its future depends on wider political developments. But then, you can't talk about these things without taking seriously the political role of the imagination in society. Without a new kind of left movement the most likely thing is American-

nisation, economically. I'd love to see a reaction against all this...but I don't know what it could be.' •



**Single-minded:** In 1951, 10% of all households in Britain were one-person households. By 1986 that figure had risen to 25%. Morrissey, one of the 80s' most famous solitary stars, told MT: 'Solitude has powerful advantages - I'll scrub no one's doorstep, thank you very much. We must assume that the clannish three quarters of the population are malicious carnivores and the solitary quarter are saintly vegetarians who refuse to live with them.'



**Star-gazer:** Presenter of Channel 4's astronomy series *The Stars*, Heather Couper, looks upwards and outwards: 'By the end of the 1990s, we should have answers to the three great mysteries facing astronomers today. We'll know how the universe was born. We'll finally find out how the galaxies ('star cities') came into

being. And we'll discover the nature of the dark matter that makes up over 90% of our universe - the visible stars, planets and the galaxies are just the tip of the iceberg. All this will be achieved by a generation of telescopes bigger than any we have on earth at the moment - plus a telescope orbiting in space.

But I doubt if we'll have solved the mystery that concerns us all: is there anyone else out there?' •

**Mickey-Mouse Real:** Post-modern theorist, Jean Baudrillard has a firm grip on reality: 'Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which is Disneyland... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation... The very definition of the real has become that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction... The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced. The hyperreal... which is entirely in simulation.' (*Simulations, Semiotexte*) •

**Common Future:** Prime minister of Norway and chair of the World Commission on the Environment, Gro Harlem Brundtland is putting environmental issues at the top of the political agenda in Norway: 'Humanity has come to a crossroad. As the century closes... major unintended changes are occurring in the atmosphere, in soils, in waters, among plants and animals, and in the relationships among all these. These changes outstrip our present ability to cope; our financial and political institutions are out of step with the workings of nature. To secure our common future we need a new international ethic which looks beyond narrow and short-sighted national ambitions...' •

## Generation Games

Peter York, business consultant and part-time style guru, looks into the future of advertising: 'Teenage-ism as an ideology has simply disappeared from the real world. The key groups in society are in their 30s and everyone - but everyone - has a style requirement. Advertising will have to reflect the concerns of grown-ups... it will have to acknowledge the existence of new three-dimensional kinds of people who do not fit the illiterate static caricatures that derive from the kind of lifestyle analysis packages so favoured by US agencies...

We are facing a period when the social rhetoric will change; when the old watchwords of investment, product research and education will re-emerge in the vocabulary and the unfettered enterprise spirit will begin to look rather dodgy. Advertising will be blamed - simplistically and unfairly - for



creating the world of go-for-it (on credit).

The "me" generation earnestly wishes it could be a "we" again, have "communities" - whatever those might be - and civic spirit. Both in the social and the narrowly-commercial sense, advertising will be in for a lot of flak.' (*Campaign*, Sept 88) •

## World Moves

Maps aren't what they used to be. World maps which place the Americas to the right, the Pacific and the International Dateline as the centre, and Britain on the far left, reflect the shifting orientation of global economic power. The Asia-Pacific countries, following Japan, are achieving 10-15% aver-

age growth rates in GDP. When China, Hong Kong - and probably Taiwan - link up in the near future the economic consequences will be huge. And multinationals based in countries like Singapore and Hong Kong are turning to Britain with its low-wage, tax-incentive economy, to locate their new manufacturing and assembly plants. The Far East is nearly West.

Marxism Today



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