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Richard Ades
Revolutionary Purity Showdown
1979–2011

Scanned from original script
This play was written and performed in Detroit in 1979. For another take on collective living and other anti-authoritarian issues see the play *Illyria Street Commune* by Fredy Perlman

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Revolutionary Purity Showdown

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C: Bitch!
B: Son of a bitch!
A: Motherfucker!

(During HOST'S closing remarks, ANNOUNCER brings in pies for contestants to use on judges. However, contestants are so much into their argument that they begin pieing each other while HOST, ANNOUNCER and judges shake hands and walk off together.)

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C: Contestant A…(Buzzer sounds.)
HOST: And the game is over. With the scores five, five and five, the game is over.
C: Wait a minute. I haven't given my critique yet.
HOST: I'm sorry, contestant C, but remember, I said when you hear the buzzer, the game is over. And you heard the buzzer.
B: Yeah, but you said we had one minute left.
HOST: Sorry, I must have miscalculated.
B: But that's not fair.
A: Yeah, I was saving my best stuff for the end.
C: Oh, so that explains all that trivia you were throwing out.
A: Trivia? What do you mean, trivia? Your critiques weren't exactly earth-shattering, you know.
B: Yeah, you and your "considered."
C: You keep out of this. Your critiques weren't exactly the stuff revolutions are made of, either.
B: Oh, yeah? I wish you'd step outside and say that.
C: Why? So you won't hear it?
B: That does it. Step over this line.
A: He'd have to have hip-boots to step over your line.
B: You keep out of this before you get hurt.
C: Leave her alone.
A: Don't patronize me, chauvinist!
C: Feminist!
A: Macho!
B: Liberal!
C: Fascist!
A: Trotskyist!
C: Stalinist!
B: Leninist!
A: Dadaist!
B: Jerk!
A: Idiot!
C: Asshole!
A: Prick!

HOST: Okay. Contestant C?
C: You're a…What did he call me?
HOST: He said you're an anarchist.
C: Oh, yeah. You're a Repub…No, I said that.
HOST: Challenge or counter-critique, contestant C. I'll give you five seconds.
C: You're a…damn…you're a…
HOST: 3…2…
C: Your mother wears galoshes.
B:…I challenge that.

(Judges are puzzled.)

HOST. Okay, judges, the question: is being an anarchist equivalent to having a mother who wears galoshes?

(Judges are still puzzled.)

EMMA: We're a little confused. We thought you were all anarchists.
B: I can explain that. You see, I reject all labels and all ideologies as being inherently reductionist in nature. I am not an anarchist or a socialist or any other kind of — ist. I am a human being.
EMMA: I see. So you refuse to put any labels on yourself.
B: That's right.
LEON: And you think that simply by doing this, you can avoid the pitfall of 'developing a rigid ideology?
B: Well, I've always been an optimist…(catching himself) I mean…

(Judges ring bell, then get in fight over bell and horn which escalates to the end.)

HOST: Counter-critique accepted. One minute remaining in the game. Contestant C.

Cast of Characters

ANNOUNCER (off stage)
HOST
JUDGES: EMMA GOLDMAN, LEON SZOLGOCZ, HARPO MARX
CONTESTANT A: woman, representing theatre
CONTESTANT B: representing newspaper
CONTESTANT C: man, representing printing collectives

ANNOUNCER: It's time for Revolutionary Purity Showdown. And here's your host for Revolutionary Purity Showdown, the man whose purity has never been in question, Bill Bailey.

HOST: Thank you, Mike Murphy. And thank you ladies and gentlemen, friends and comrades, brothers and sisters, and welcome to Revolutionary Purity Showdown, the show which says there's no point in having a line if you don't have the best line, and there's no point in being right on, if you aren't right on top. If you caught last week's show, you saw the exciting battle of the vanguards, in which comrades from the SWP, the Sparticist League, and of course Workers Vanguard, fought it out for the grand prize, a free trip to the Communist Bloc country of their choice. Unfortunately, no one won, but there were plenty of good leftist-type zingers and put-downs along the way, and of course we all benefited from the wit and wisdom of our three distinguished judges, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Leon Trotsky. But that was last week. This week it's the battle of the libertarians on Revolutionary Purity Showdown, so put away your little red books, and pull out your Bakunin, Dolgoff, and Camatte. Yes, this week we bring on the anarchists, pseudo-anarchists, post-anarchists, and those who would be anarchists, if they weren't so anarchistic that they refuse to call themselves anarchists. But before we meet our contestants, let's find out who this week's judges are. Mike?

ANNOUNCER: Bill, this week we've rounded up three of the world's foremost authorities on non-authoritarianism. First, the former Marxist who had a falling out with Soviet Russia, writer and political activist, Emma Goldman. Next, the comrade who cast a vote against President McKinley without ever going near a ballot box, and political commentator Leon Szolgocz. And finally, the wildest and wooliest of the anarchistically funny Marx brothers, the man who never has

A: Yes, I…(notices judges are poised to lunge at bell) I'll let it go.

HOST: Contestant B.

B: Contestant C, part of the rent money you pay on your house goes to pay state property tax.

C: So does yours.

B: Shit…

(Judges ring bell.)

HOST: Contestant C.

C: Contestant B, your shirt is more expensive than mine.

B: Prove it!

(Judges ring bell.)

HOST: Contestant A.

A: Contestant C, your car is bigger than mine.

C: Your house is bigger than mine.

(Judges ring bell.)

HOST: My congratulations, contestants. Most of the people we have on are reduced to arguing pure absurdities by this time. Remember, less than two minutes remaining. Contestant B…Contestant B?

B: (looking through notes) Yeah. Contestant C. Two members of your collective live together as man and…

HOST: No, I think you've used that, contestant B.

B: Oh, right. Okay. Contestant C. Last year your collective bought over a ton of expensive paper…

C: No, you've said that.

HOST: You've said that already, contestant B.

B: Okay. Well, you're a…you're a…

HOST: Hurry. Time is running out, contestant B.

B: You're an anarchist.

HOST: The judges accept the counter-critique.
B: See what you get for nit-picking.
HOST: Contestant B, your turn.
B: Contestant A. You shop at the A&P, which contributes to the growth of capitalism.
A: You don't shop at a supermarket?
B: Yes, but I shop at Farmer Jack, which has lower prices than A&P.
A: Challenge!

(Judges lunge at bell. EMMA is first and rings it. More scuffling follows.)

HOST: Judges, let's keep it down, please. Contestants, a reminder. When you hear this sound (buzzer sounds offstage) the game is over. We're now entering the final three minutes of the game, and you're all even-Steven at five points each, so don't let up now. Contestant C, your turn.
C: Contestant A. You engage in a monogamous relationship, which is contrary to the true spirit of liber…
A: Don't give me that. Just because I won't go to bed with you…
C: Foul! That's hitting below the belt.
A: That's exactly where you deserve to be hit.

(Judges lunge at bell, EMMA rings it.)

HOST: The judges rang the bell — I'm not exactly sure what for…
EMMA: Uh…we wanted to see contestant C hit below the belt.
LEON: Or anyone. We're not particular.
HOST: I think the judges accept contestant A's counter-critique. Contestant A, your turn.
A: Contestant B, your newspaper has a telephone.
B: Yeah? Well, your house has a telephone.
HOST: Challenge, contestant A?

a good word to say about anyone, or a bad word for that matter, no relation to Karl, Harpo Marx.
HOST: Comrades, welcome to Revolutionary Purity Showdown. Emma, Harpo, good to see you. Leon, I hope you didn't go to two much trouble dressing up for the show. No, seriously, our director saw you coming in and he came over and asked me, "Where'd you dig him up?" I said, "Where didn't we dig him up?" A little "in" humor there. Moving right along, it's time to meet this week's contestants. At the request of the contestants, no names will be used, each person instead being represented by a letter. The contestants' reasoning on this is that to let their names be known would tend to reinforce the bourgeois category of the celebrity, which is inimical to the various philosophies of the contestant's respective projects, as well as to those libertarian or other-than-libertarian sentiments which the contestants happen to hold in common. The contestants stress that they are not opposed to individualism per se, but rather to individual fame or notoriety which is at least partially gained through the efforts of persons who are not so honored. And that's their reasoning on that. Personally, I think you would rather have heard their names than their reasoning, but that's the way it goes. That said, let's meet the contestants. Mike?
ANNOUNCER: Bill, our first contestant represents a small storefront theatre on Detroit's southwest side, please welcome Contestant A. Our next contestant represents one of Detroit's oldest radical newspapers, please welcome Contestant B. And our final contestant represents a group of people who are involved in printing collectives in Detroit and on the west coast, please welcome Contestant C. And that's our three contestants.
HOST: Thanks, Mike, and welcome, contestant A, Contestant B, and contestant C. Of course, before we start the game, we always like to find out a little something about the

contestants. However, for reasons which have already been stated, this week's contestants have declined to say anything about themselves or their specific projects. In lieu of this, they've agreed to choose one spokesperson from amongst themselves who will make a general statement about the political and philosophical beliefs which the three hold in common. Contestants, I believe you drew lots backstage. Who will be the spokesperson?

C: I will.

A and B: (throwing paper wads at C) Boo! Elitist! Usurper of authority!

C: Look, I didn't ask for this position, you know.

A: Yeah, but you sure jumped at the chance.

B: Yeah, you weren't exactly dragged into it kicking and screaming.

HOST: Now, come on, A and B, give him a chance. Contestant C you have the floor.

C: Thank you. (reading from paper while A and B look on in disgust) The main belief which the three of us share is that capital has been and is the ruination of our society and of the world in general.

B: Boo! Pedantic, pedantic.

C: What do you mean, pedantic? You wrote this part yourself.

B: Yeah, but when you say it, it sounds pedantic.

HOST: Go on, contestant C.

C: We also believe that capital tends to recuperate or corrupt everything and everyone it comes in contact with. Therefore, our three projects are not only completely non-profit, but we scrupulously separate our projects from our means of livelihood.

A: He means we don't make money off them.

C: Look, when I need an interpreter, I'll…

A: Appoint one?

C: I was going to say, ask for one.

A: Same difference, isn't it?

(EMMA starts to ring bell, but LEON grabs it and rings it himself. EMMA and he argue silently.)

HOST: Yes, and the turn goes to contestant C.

C: To get back to more serious matters: Contestant A, your theatre performs a reactionary function by encouraging people to laugh at their problems rather than deal with them.

A: Our plays are no more escapist than the fiction which you write and print.

C: My fiction tends toward the tragic, which is inherently less escapist than comedy.

A: Go on. Just because you can't write comedy.

C: That's a lie.

A: Is not.

C: Is too.

A: Is not.

HOST: Please, we just have minutes remaining. Judges, is tragic fiction equally as reactionary and escapist as comic theatre?

(LEON motions for EMMA to ring bell, but HARPO rings it first. More arguments ensue.)

HOST: Yes. Contestant A, your turn.

A: Contestant B, you have a bank account.

B: Come on. Everyone has a bank account. Even you.

A: Yes, but your bank account is at a savings and loan institution, which pays one quarter per cent more interest than regular banks.

B: (pulls out bank book) Yes, but according to your bank book…

A: Where'd you…

B: which you accidentally left in my car last week, you have $50 more in your account than I have in mine.

HOST: Judges, is having $50 more in a regular bank account…

(All judges grab for bell, which has been put in center of table. LEON, who is closest, grabs and rings it first.)

C: Not at our project. Everyone there contributes to the writing or translating of material, the printing, the collating, and the distributing.

A: You manufacture your own paper and ink, I suppose?

(EMMA rings bell.)

B: Shit, I wish I'd thought of that.

HOST: The judges accept the counter-critique. Your turn, contestant A, and I remind you all that there is little more than five minutes remaining in the game.

A: Okay, contestant B. You earn your living by working a privileged, bourgeois-type job.

B: What's your definition of a bourgeois-type job?

A: One that pays more than mine. I mean…

B: Aha! Challenge.

(EMMA rings bell.)

HOST: The judges accept the challenge. Contestant B.

B: Contestant A. You watch television.

A: I do not.

B: Yeah, then what was that bluish light I saw emanating from your window the other night?

A: Uh, that was my black light. It'd been sitting in the closet for years and I thought I'd…

B: Does your black light pick up Mr. Belvedere commercials?

A: Okay. But you watch it, too. I saw you watching The Rockford Files at a party last week.

B: Yes, but it was on someone else's TV. That's not as bad as watching your own TV.

A: Yes, but it was a color TV. Watching someone else's color TV is just as bad as watching your own black and white TV.

HOST: Judges, is watching someone else's color TV equivalent to watching your own black and white TV?

B: Yeah, he's already starting to think like a bureaucrat.

HOST: Now, now, you'll have plenty of time to discuss your respective character flaws when the game starts. Contestant C, I understand the three of you had some hesitation about appearing on Revolutionary Purity Showdown.

C: That's right. Besides the obvious questions of whether this show constitutes a mass media event, and whether public affairs programming is qualitatively different from commercial programming — questions which still haven't been answered to my satisfaction…

B: Now he tells us.

C: Besides that, there's also the point that this is after all a competition, and competition is the lifeblood of capital. As I pointed out to the others, it's inconsistent for us, who wish to destroy this society which is based on competition and replace it with one based on cooperation — it's inconsistent for us to then come on this show, mass media event or not, and take part in a competition.

HOST: I see…then…

B: I think I was the one who made that point.

C: No. I was.

B: No, I think I was. You agreed with me…

A: No, you're both wrong. I made the point, except I added that competition is a patriarchal concept, and thus pre-dates capital by several hundred centuries.

C: No, I remember you made that point, but only after I made the basic point about capital.

B: After I made the point about…

HOST: All right I think we get the idea that you're all opposed to competition; but the fact remains that you did come to the show.

C: Well, just as we had concluded that we could not, in good conscience, participate in the show, it occurred to one of us…

A and B: Me.

C:…that while we are opposed to competition, there is a great difference between competition and criticism. After all, a good, honest critique, given with the intention of improving the other person's participation in the revolutionary project, can only have the effect of furthering the ultimate goal of cooperation. Therefore, a competition like this one, which is based on the exchange of such critiques, can also only further the cause of cooperation, and thus is basically anti-competitive in nature.

HOST: Well said, and I think that contestants deserve a round of applause for this dazzling display of reasoning. (applause)

EMMA: Bill?

HOST: Yes, Emma.

EMMA: Bill, I also congratulate the contestants on their reasoning, and I just want to say this proves what I've always believed: that an informed, critical mind can move mountains.

LEON: Yeah, if not argue them out of existence altogether.

EMMA: Right.

HOST: Harpo, do you have any comments?

(HARPO honks horn.)

HOST: I agree. Let's get on with the game. Are you ready, contestants?

A, B & C: Yes. Ready.

HOST: Okay. Here's how it works. You'll notice that each of you has a set of five blocks on the table in front of you. The purpose of the game is to keep those five blocks and to add five more blocks to the set, for a total of ten. And how do you get those five extra blocks, contestant C?

C: By making critiques.

HOST: Right. By throwing critiques, insults, and otherwise maligning the character of your two fellow contestants. For each successful critique you throw out, you earn one block from the person you critiqued, plus the right to try for another block. However, if your critique is successfully chal-

EMMA: Sometimes consistency counts.

HOST: I think that's more yes than no. Contestant C, your counter-critique holds and it's your turn.

C: Contestant B. Despite your newspaper's claims to being a collective, there are people on your staff who haven't written an article in years.

(During the following exchange, the judges confer silently, after which HARPO gives his bell to EMMA, his horn to LEON.)

B: So? Maybe they haven't wanted to write an article in years.

HOST: Contestant B, I have to point out that's not even an acceptable defense, much less a challenge or counter-critique.

B: Okay, I challenge it. It's good and proper to have standards like saying you're against division of labor, but actually living up to those standards consistently day after day, year after year, is something else. I mean, doesn't trying count for anything?

(LEON honks horn.)

A: I could have told you that.

HOST: No, trying does not count. And I notice Leon Szolgocz honked the horn that time, thus ending the judges' own division of labor.

LEON: Yeah, if the game goes on long enough, we're going to shame Harpo into talking.

(HARPO shakes head petulantly.)

HOST: Contestant C, you take a point and continue.

C: Contestant A, there are people in your theatre who seldom if ever contribute to the writing of material.

A: Come on. So what. There's always going to be some division of labor.

B: Contestant A. Most of the people in your theatre live by themselves, which furthers capital's plan to recuperate itself by fragmenting society into separate consumer units.

A: I challenge that. If we live by ourselves, it's because we need the space to preserve our individuality, not because we want to fit into capitalism's grand plan. I mean, don't good intentions count for anything?

(HARPO honks horn.)

HOST: No, the judges say, good intentions don't count, and contestant B has again pulled into the lead. Continue.

B: Contestant C. Two members of your collective live together as man and wife, thus perpetuating a bourgeois lifestyle.

C: I challenge that on the grounds that contestant B is being inconsistent. He criticizes them for living separately and us for living together.

HOST: Judges, I think the question is, does consistency count, yes, or no?

(Judges confer briefly.)

EMMA: Yes, consistency counts.

HOST: Yes, consistency does…

B: Wait a minute. How can we develop a forward-looking critique if we're shackled by the artificial standard of consistency?

(Judges confer again.)

EMMA: No, consistency doesn't count.

HOST: No, consistency does not…

C: Wait a minute. How can we develop a logical critique if there's no progression to the reasoning?

(Judges confer again.)

lenged, or if it is matched by a suitable counter-critique, you gain no point and no extra turn. All disputes will be decided by our panel of judges, whose decisions will be final. And at this point I should mention that prior to the show all three contestants formally protested this submission to a higher authority and only agreed to it with the stipulation that after the contest they be given an opportunity to pie the judge or judges of their choice. Now whatever you do, contestants, don't lose all your blocks, because that means you're out of the running. But the first contestant to earn ten blocks wins this week's grand prize, which is…

ANNOUNCER: Bill, this week's lucky winner will receive a life-size poster of Pope Paul VI. The poster is a blow-up of an actual photo taken of the late pope lying in state two days after he'd started to turn green. The poster is suitable for framing or for use as a dart board and it will be delivered right to your door if you're this week's lucky winner.

HOST: Thanks, Mike. Any questions? All right then let's get on with the game, and good luck to all of you. Contestant A, you begin.

A: Okay, Bill, this is for contestant B. Contestant B, you're an authoritarian.

HOST: Good, good, we're starting right out with the basics. Contestant B, any retorts?

B: Yes. Contestant A, you're a liberal.

HOST: Okay, we have two insults of roughly equal stature. No point is given and the turn goes to Contestant B.

B: This is for contestant C. You're a Maoist.

C: You're a Leninist.

HOST: Again, two equal insults, and the turn goes to contestant C.

C: Contestant A, you're a Stalinist.

A: You're a Trotskyist.

HOST: We're going to run out of names pretty soon. Contestant A?

A: Contestant B, you're a Marxist.
HOST: And contestant A goes back to the basics. Contestant B?
B: Uh…you're an Engelist.
HOST: A what?
B: An Engelist. A follower of Engels.
A: I challenge that.
HOST: All right, judges, we have a challenge. Is Engelist an acceptable insult? Yes or no?
EMMA: Yes.
LEON: Yes.
(HARPO rings bell.)
HOST: The judges say Engelist is an acceptable insult. Contestant B, your turn.
B: You're a Bolshevik.
HOST: Which contestant is that for?
B: Oh…Either one.
HOST: Sorry, contestant B, but you have to name your target.
B: Okay. Contestant C.
HOST: Contestant C?
C: I'm sorry. What was the insult?
HOST: Are we keeping you up, Contestant C? (C laughs good-naturedly) Contestant B says you're a Bolshevik.
C: Okay, you're a…a…Republican.
B: I challenge that.
HOST: And we have another challenge. Judges, is Republican an acceptable insult?

(Judges confer, then HARPO honks horn.)

HOST: The judges say Republican is not an acceptable insult. So the point goes to…
C: Wait a minute. What's wrong with Republican? (Judges look at each other, then EMMA speaks.)

paper, too, because our paper comes from rags and reused newsprint.
C: I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say you buy your electricity from Detroit Edison, which pollutes the local ecology more than anyone else does.
B: I suppose you generate your own electricity?
C: Uh-uh. No counter-counter-critiques, remember?
HOST: Okay, judges. Is buying electricity ecologically equivalent to buying paper?

(Judges look at each other, HARPO honks horn.)

C: No? What do you mean, no? They're just as equivalent as collecting sales tax and paying rent. Why did you give me a no on that?

(Judges confer briefly.)

EMMA: We wanted to make sure the horn still worked.
HOST: So contestant B gains a point…
C: Wait a minute. I object, damn it. Not only have the judges displayed a flippant attitude throughout these very serious proceedings, but their judgments have been consistently and completely arbitrary.
EMMA: What? That's treason!
LEON: Hang him!

(HARPO pulls out a coat hanger.)

HOST: Contestant C, I must remind you that the judges' decision is final. Give contestant B one of your blocks. And judges, I must remind you that your authority stops somewhere short of proscribing capital punishment. (Judges poke each other sheepishly.) Contestant B, with less than ten minutes remaining, it's again your turn.

LEON: (shouts) Horse shit!

HOST: Okay, judges, we have a critique and a counter-critique — finally. The question: is reading books on professional theatre equivalent to filing an income tax return?

(Judges look at each other, shrug, HARPO rings bell.)

HOST: Yes, so contestant A's counter-critique holds, and the turn goes to contestant A.

B: You guys are pathetic. I thought we were all friends here and I find out I'm sitting between the original Snoop Sisters.

A: All right. Contestant B. Your bookstore collects state sales tax.

B: Oh, no, you're not going to pull that on me. Your theatre compromises with the law, too.

A: How?

B: You pay rent.

A: What?

B: And don't try to say you're squatting on the place. I've got your receipts right here.

A: How did you get those?

B: Wouldn't you like to know.

A: And anyway, you can't use that. You pay rent, too.

B: Uh-uh. No counter-counter-critiques, right, Bill?

HOST: Right. Okay, judges, is paying rent equivalent to collecting sales tax, yes or no?

(Judges are again confused, HARPO again rings bell.)

HOST: Yes, and the turn goes to contestant B.

A: (to B, lightly) I'll get you for that.

B: Don't count on it. Contestant C, According to this other receipt I have here, your printing collective bought over a ton of expensive paper last year, thus contributing heavily to capitalism's rape of the ecology. And don't try to say we use

EMMA: If you start naming political parties, we'll be here all night.

HOST: So the point goes to…

C: Wait a minute. What kind of reasoning is that? And why did you accept Bolshevik, then?

HOST: I'm sorry, contestant C, but the judges' decision is final. Give contestant B one of your blocks.

C: Yeah, but, shit…

HOST: We have three cream pies waiting for you back stage, contestant C. Okay, contestant B earns a point and an extra turn. Contestant B?

B: Contestant A, you're a knee-jerk feminist.

A: You're a macho male.

HOST: No point there. Contestant C?

C: (still mad) Okay. Contestant A. Your theatre once considered asking for a grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts.

HOST: Now we're getting down to the nitty-gritty. Contestant A.

A: What does that mean? Are we being condemned for something we considered doing?

HOST: We're looking for a challenge or a counter-critique, contestant A. Are you challenging contestant C's statement?

A: No. Okay, contestant C. One member of your collective receives a pension from the government.

C: I challenge that. Getting a pension from the government is completely different from getting a grant from the government.

A: (shouting) They're both money, aren't they?

HOST: Let's leave that up to the judges. The question: Is getting a pension equivalent to getting a grant?

(Judges look at each other, then answer.)

EMMA: Yes.

LEON: No.

(HARPO appears confused.)

HOST: Harpo, we have one yes and one no, so that leaves it up to you. Is a pension equivalent to a grant, yes or no?

(HARPO does a silent eenie, meenie, minie, moe with the bell and horn, finally rings bell.)

HOST: Yes, they are equivalent, so the counter-critique holds and no point is given.

C: (to HARPO) You get two pies, you fuzzy-haired fascist.

(HARPO feigns being hurt or insulted.)

HOST: Now, now, contestant C, save your insults for your fellow contestants. Back to contestant A.

A: (now angry) Contestant B. Your newspaper runs a profit-making bookstore.

B: (has been good-natured up till now) That's the only way we can support the paper. It can't support itself.

HOST: Contestant B, we're not looking for an explanation. We're looking for either a challenge or a counter-critique.

B: Yeah, but…

HOST: A challenge or a counter-critique.

B: Okay, here's a counter-critique. Contestant A, your theatre once held a rent party for which you bought $30 worth of beer and pulled in $140 on admissions at $2 a head, thus making over $100 pure profit.

A: What? You mean you've never held benefits?

HOST: No counter-counter-critiques, contestant A.

A: Okay, well, I challenge that. A rent party is not equivalent to running a bookstore.

HOST: Judges, are the two equivalent, yes or no?

(Judges confer briefly, HARPO honks horn.)

A: You better believe that's the last time you'll be invited to my house.

C: I'm not surprised you're ashamed to see me since you know my critique is true.

HOST: Contestant A, challenge or counter-critique?

A: No. I refuse to dignify this absurd charge with a response.

C: What you mean is you can't respond because you know my critique is true.

A: I have nothing to say to you.

C: Of course not. What can you say when you know my critique is true.

A: (leaping at him, B holds her back) I'll kill you, you son of a prick.

C: You seem to be angry. Maybe it's because you know my critique is true.

A: All right. All right, contestant C, here's a counter-critique for you. I charge that your printing collective won't have to become a corporation because you already are a corporation.

C: That's a lie.

A: Not according to the papers of incorporation which I happened to see lying on a table the last time I was in your house.

C: All right. It's a non-profit corporation. It's strictly a legal term.

A: Oh yeah? Well, how do you explain the fact that your non-profit corporation pays income tax? Or was that a valentine's card you sent to the IRS last month?

C: We send in the return to show that we haven't made a profit so we won't have to pay income tax.

A: Well, why don't you just refuse to file a return and refuse to pay the tax?

C: And go to jail? Be serious. Everyone has to compromise with the law somewhere.

A: Hear that, Leon Szolgocz? He says everyone has to compromise with the law somewhere.

HOST: I think that qualifies as a yes, or a no…I'll tell you what. We'll give no point on that, but we'll allow contestant C to take another turn. Is that fair to all concerned? Good. And before he takes it, let me remind you of the scores. As they stand now, contestant A has 6 points, contestant B has 4 points, and contestant C has 5 points. So you all have a good way to go, and there are just about fifteen minutes remaining in the game. Contestant C, your turn.

C: Okay. Contestant A. I'd hoped to spare you this, but sometime in the not too distant future your theatre will turn into a commercial, profit-making corporation.

A: Now wait a minute. It's bad enough he attacks us for what we considered doing, now he's got to attack us for something we're going to do sometime in the future? What is he, a soothsayer?

C: That's it, be sarcastic. You're just overreacting because you know my critique is true.

A: Oh, yeah? Well, tell me, just how far in the not too distant future will this transformation take place? (gets cut off by HOST)

HOST: Challenge or counter-critique, contestant A?

A: To what? He hasn't even told me what evidence he has for this ridiculous projection.

C: Yeah, your wild charges only underscore the fact that you know my critique is true.

A: I notice you're not forthcoming with your evidence. Is it because maybe you don't have any?

C: You're forcing me to drag you into the mud, aren't you? I had hoped to keep my evidence to myself, but I see it's not possible. I happen to know that contestant A has in her possession two very incriminating and revealing books: one, "The History of Broadway," and two, and even more revealingly, "Makeup for the Professional Theatre." I saw them in her bookcase the last time I was invited to her house.

HOST: The judges say no, so the counter-critique fails, and contestant B's extra point goes to contestant A.

A: (to B) See what you get for nit-picking?

B: Just wait.

HOST: Contestant A, your turn again.

A: Contestant C. Your printing collective takes in commercial jobs.

C: Only when we have to pay the rent.

HOST: Counter-critique, contestant C?

C: You're damn right. Contestant A, you collect money from the audience…

A: Donations, to pay the rent.

C: which is the same thing commercial theatres do, which means you're a commercial theatre.

A: Oh, come on. I challenge that.

HOST: Judges: Is taking donations from the audience equivalent to doing commercial printing jobs?

(Judges confer, then HARPO rings bell.)

HOST: Yes, the judges say, so contestant C keeps his point…

A: Wait a minute. That doesn't make sense at all. I want to know just how you justify that answer.

(Judges confer at some length; finally LEON answers while other two nod their agreement.)

LEON: We're the judges, so we don't have to justify it.

HOST: The power's starting to go to your head, eh, Szolgocz? Okay, on to contestant B.

B: (with satisfaction) Contestant A. Your theatre perpetuates the separation between actor and audience which is present in conventional theatre, thus making it an elitist, authoritarian activity.

A: You have the nerve to say that, and you running a newspaper.

HOST: Counter-critique, contestant A?

A: That's my counter-critique. A newspaper perpetuates the division between actor and audience, writer and reader, doer and observer, just as much if not more than a theatre does.

B: But we have a letter column.

A: Most of which you write yourselves.

B: We do not.

A: Do too.

B: Do not.

A: Do too.

HOST: Let's try to keep this on a level of mature camaraderie. Judges, it's up to you. Does a theatre perpetuate the separation between actor and audience more than a newspaper does?

EMMA: Yes.

HOST: Goldman the writer says yes.

(HARPO angrily honks horn at EMMA, who jumps.)

HOST: Harpo the actor says no. Leon Szolgocz, it's up to you.

LEON: No.

HOST: No. So contestant A keeps her point. Leon, of course you're not obligated to tell us, but I'm sure everyone would be interested to know your reasoning on this question.

LEON: I used to have a crush on a reporter, but she never liked me.

HOST: Good. Okay, on to contestant C.

C: Contestant B. Your newspaper runs articles written by college professors and other elitist intellectuals who also write books for profit…

B: Can we help that? What they do outside the paper is their own…

C: and you run cartoons drawn by someone who once considered writing an article for Playboy.

A: There he goes with his "considered" again.

HOST: Challenge or counter-critique, contestant B?

B: I challenge that.

C: On what grounds?

B: On the grounds that no one is perfect. You're not perfect, he's not perfect, the audience isn't perfect, the judges certainly aren't perfect (judges are insulted by this)…

HOST: So what you're saying is…B: Let he who is perfect cast the first stone.

(HARPO honks horn. Other judges congratulate him.)

B: Maybe I should rephrase that.

HOST: Too late, contestant B, I think the stone has been cast. Contestant C, you take a block and another turn.

C: Okay. Contestant A. One of your theatre's latest shows featured performances by professional artists.

A: So what? A member of your printing collective is a professional artist.

HOST: Is that your counter-critique, contestant A?

A: Yes. That's my counter-critique.

C: Good. I challenge that.

A: On what grounds?

C: On the grounds that it's all right to include a professional in your project as long as your project is not in the professional's area of professionalism.

A: (unbelievingly) What? I challenge that.

HOST: No, contestant A, I'm afraid you can't challenge a challenge. Okay, judges, it's up to you. Is it permissible to include professionals in your project if and only if the project is not in the professional's area of professionalism?

(Judges confer briefly and agree on answer.)

EMMA: Only under a full moon. (Judges congratulate themselves on the answer.)