

This is a translation of the second section of Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations by Raoul Vaneigem.

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7 THE AGE OF HAPPINESS

The contemporary welfare state belatedly provides the guarantees of survival which were demanded by the disinherited members of the production society of former days (1). Richness of survival entails the pauperisation of life (2). Purchasing power is a licence to purchase power, to become an object in the order of things. The tendency is for both oppressor and oppressed to fall, albeit at different speeds, under one and the same dictatorship: the dictatorship of consumer goods (3).

• 1

The face of happiness vanished from art and literature as it began to be reproduced along endless walls and hoardings, offering to each particular passerby the universal image in which he is invited to recognise himself.

Three cheers for Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham: happiness is not a myth! 'The more we produce, the better we shall live,' writes the humanist Fourastie, and another genius, General Eisenhower, takes up the refrain: 'to save the economy, we must buy, buy anything.' Production and consumption are the dug of modern society. Thus suckled, humanity grows in strength and beauty: rising standard of living, all mod. cons, a choice of entertainments, culture for all, the comfort of your dreams. On the horizon of the Krushev report, the rosy dawn of communism is breaking at last, a new era heralded by two revolutionary decrees: the abolition of taxes and free transport for all. Yes, the golden age is in

sight; or rather within spitting distance.

In this upheaval one thing has disappeared: the proletariat. Where on earth can it be? spirited away? gone underground? or has it been put in a museum? Sociologi disputant. We hear from some quarters that in the advanced industrial countries the proletariat no longer exists, what with all those stereograms, TV sets, slumberland mattresses, minicars, tower blocks and bingo halls. Others denounce this as sleight of hand and indignantly point out a few remaining workers whose low wages and wretched conditions do undeniably evoke the 19th century. 'Backward sectors', comes the retort, 'in the process of reabsorption.' Can you deny that the direction of economic development is towards Sweden, Czechoslovakia, the welfare state, and not towards India?

The black curtain rises: the hunt is on for the starving, for the last of the proletarians. The prize goes to the one who sells him his car and his mixer, his bar and his home library; the one who teaches him to see himself in the leering hero of an advertisement that reassures him: 'You smile when you smoke Cadets.'

And happy, happy humanity so soon to receive the parcels which were redirected to them at such great cost by the rebels of the nineteenth century. The insurgents of Lyon and Fourmies have certainly proved luckier dead than alive. The millions of human beings who were shot, tortured, jailed, starved, treated like animals and made the objects of a conspiracy of ridicule can sleep in peace in their communal graves, for at least the struggle in which they died has enabled their descendants, isolated in their air-conditioned rooms, to believe on the strength of their daily dose of television that they are happy and free. The communards went down, fighting to the last, so that you too could own a Philips hi-fi stereo system. A fine future, and one to realise all the dreams of the past, there is no doubt about it.

Only the present is left out of the reckoning. Ungrateful and uncouth, the younger generation doesn't want to know about this glorious past which is offered as a free gift to every

consumer of trotskyist-reformist ideology. They claim that to make demands means to make demands for the here and now. They recall that the meaning of past struggles is rooted in the present of the men who fought them, and that despite different historical conditions they themselves are living in the same present. In short, one might say that radical revolutionary currents are inspired by one unchanging project: the project of being a whole man, a **will to live totally** which Marx was the first to provide with scientific tactics. But these are pernicious theories which the holy churches of Christ and Stalin never miss a chance to condemn. More money, more fridges, more holy sacraments and more GNP, that's what is needed to satisfy our revolutionary appetites.

Are we condemned to the state of well-being? Peace-loving citizens will inevitably deplore the forms taken by the opposition to a programme which everybody agrees with, from Krushchev to Schweitzer, from the Pope to Fidel Castro, from Aragon to the late Mr Kennedy.

In December 1956, a thousand young people ran wild in the streets of Stockholm, setting fire to cars, smashing neon signs, tearing down hoardings and looting department stores. At Merlebach, during a strike called to force the mine-owners to bring up the bodies of seven miners killed by a cave-in, the workers set about the cars parked at the pit-head. In January 1961, strikers in Liege burned down the Guillemins station and destroyed the offices of the newspaper La Meuse. Seaside resorts in England and Belgium were devastated by the combined efforts of hundreds of mods and rockers in March 1964. In Amsterdam (1966) the workers held the streets for several days. Not a month goes by without a wildcat strike which pits the workers against both employers and union bosses. Welfare State? The people of Watts have given their answer.

A Ford worker summed up his difference of opinion with the Fourasties, Bergers, Armands, Moles and other watchdogs of the future in the following terms: 'Since 1936 I have been

fighting for higher wages. My father before me fought for higher wages. I've got a TV, a fridge and a Cortina. If you ask me it's been a dog's life from start to finish.'

In action, as in words, the new poetry just doesn't get on with the Welfare State.

2

In the kingdom of consumption the citizen is king. A democratic monarchy: equality before consumption (1), fraternity in consumption (2), and freedom through consumption (3). The dictatorship of consumer goods has finally destroyed the barriers of blood, lineage and race; this would be good cause for celebration were it not that consumption, by its logic of things, forbids all qualitative difference and recognizes only differences of quality between values and between men. The distance has not changed between those who possess a lot and those who possess a small but ever-increasing amount; but the intermediate stages have multiplied, and have, so to speak, brought the two extremes, rulers and ruled, closer to the same centre of mediocrity. To be rich nowadays merely means to possess a large number of poor objects.

Consumer goods are tending to lose all use-value. Their nature is to be consumable at all costs. (Recall the recent vogue of the nothing-box in the USA: an object which cannot be used for anything at all.) And as General Eisenhower so candidly explained, the present economic system can only be rescued by turning man into a consumer, by identifying him with the largest possible number of consumable values, ~~which~~ is to say, non-values, or empty, fictitious, abstract values. After being 'the most precious kind of capital', in Stalin's happy phrase, man must now become the most valued of consumer goods. The stereotyped images of the star, the poor man, the communist, the murderer-for-love, the law-abiding citizen, the rebel, the bourgeois, will replace man, putting in his place a system of multicopy categories arranged according to the irrefutable logic of robotisation. Already the idea of 'teenager'

tends to define the buyer in conformity with the product he buys, to reduce his variety to a varied but limited range of objects in the shops. (Records, guitars, Levis...) You are no longer as old as you feel or as old as you look, but as old as what you buy. The time of production-society where 'time is money' will give way to the time of consumption, measured in terms of products bought, worn out and thrown away: a time of premature old age, which is the eternal youth of trees and stones.

The truth of the concept of immiseration has been demonstrated today not, as Marx expected, in the field of goods necessary for survival, since these, far from becoming scarce, have become more and more abundant; but rather in relation to survival itself, which is always the enemy of real life.

Affluence had seemed to promise to all men the *Dolce Vita* previously lived by the feudal aristocracy. But in the event affluence and its comforts are only the children of capitalist productivity, children doomed to age prematurely as soon as the marketing system has transformed them into mere objects of passive consumption. Work to survive, survive by consuming, survive to consume, the hellish cycle is complete. In the realm of economism, survival is both necessary and sufficient. This is the fundamental truth of bourgeois society. But it is also true that a historical period based on such an antihuman truth can only be a period of transition, an intermediate stage between the unenlightened life that was lived by the feudal masters and the life that will be constructed rationally and passionately by the masters without slaves. Only thirty years are left if we want to end the transitional period of slaves without masters before it has lasted two centuries.

3

With regard to everyday life, the bourgeois revolution looks more like a counter-revolution. The market in human values has rarely known such a collapse. The aristocratic life with its wealth of passions and adventures suffered the fate

of a palace partitioned off into furnished rooms, gloomy bedsitters whose drabness is made even more unbearable by the sign outside which proclaims, like a challenge hurled at the Universe, that this is the age of freedom and well-being. From now on hatred would give way to contempt, love to cohabitation, the ridiculous to the stupid, passion to sentimentality, desire to envy, reason to calculation, the taste for life to the fear of death. The utterly contemptible morality of profit came to replace the utterly detestable morality of honour; the mysterious and perfectly ridiculous power of birth and blood gave way to the perfectly ubuesque power of money. The children of August 4th 1789 took bankers' orders and sales charts as their coats of arms; mystery was now enshrined in their ledgers.

Wherein lies the mystery of money? Clearly in that it represents a sum of beings and things that can be appropriated. The nobleman's coat of arms expresses God's choice and the real power exercised by his elect; money is only a sign of what might be acquired, it is a draft on power, a possible choice.

The feudal God, who appeared to be the basis of the social order, was really only its magnificent crowning excuse. Money, that odourless god of the bourgeois, is also a mediation; a social contract. It is a god swayed not by prayers or by promises but by science and specialised know-how. Its mystery no longer lies in a dark and impenetrable totality but in the sum of an infinite number of partial certainties; no longer in the quality of lordship but in the number of marketable people and things (for example, what a hundred thousand pounds puts within the reach of its possessor).

In the economy of free-trade capitalism, dominated by imperatives of production, wealth alone confers power and honour. Master of the means of production and of labour power, it controls the development of productive forces and consumer goods and thus its owners have the pick of the myriad fruits of an infinite progress. However, as this capitalism transforms itself into its contrary, state-planned econ-

omy, the prestige of the capitalist playing the market with his millions fades away and with it the caricature of the pot-bellied, cigar-puffing merchant of human flesh. Today we have managers who derive their power from their talent for organisation; and already computers are doing them out of a job. Managers, of course, do get their monthly paychecks but do they do anything worthwhile with them? Can they enjoy making their salary signify the wealth of possible choices before them: building a Xanadou, keeping a harem, cultivating flower-children? When all possibilities of consumption are already organised, how can wealth preserve its representative value? Under the dictatorship of consumer goods, money melts away like a snowball in hell. Its significance passes to objects with more representational value, more tangible objects better adapted to the spectacle of the welfare state. Consumer goods are already encroaching on the power of money, because, wrapped in ideology, they are the true signs of power. Before long its only remaining justification will be the quantity of objects and useless gadgets it enables one to acquire and throw away at an ever-accelerating pace; only the quantity and the pace matter, because mass distribution automatically wipes out quality and rarity-appeal. From now on the ability to consume, faster and faster, great quantities of cars, alcohol, houses, TV sets and girlfriends will show how far you've got up the hierarchical ladder. From the superiority of blood to the power of money, from the superiority of money to the power of the gadget, the ne plus ultra of christian/socialist civilisation: a civilisation of prosaism and vulgar detail. A nice nest for Nietzsche's 'little men.'

Purchasing power is a licence to purchase power. The old proletariat sold its labour power in order to subsist; what little leisure time it had was passed pleasantly enough in conversations, arguments, drinking, making love, wandering, celebrating and rioting. The new proletarian sells his labour power in order to consume. When he's not flogging himself to death to get promoted in the labour hierarchy, he's being persuaded to buy himself objects to distinguish himself

in the social hierarchy. The ideology of consumption becomes the consumption of ideology. The cultural detente between east and west is not accidental! On the one hand, homo consomator buys a bottle of whiskey and gets as a free gift the lie that accompanies it. On the other, communist man buys ideology and gets as a free gift a bottle of vodka. Paradoxically, Soviet and capitalist regimes are taking a common path, the first thanks to their economy of production, the second thanks to their economy of consumption.

In the USSR, the surplus labour of the workers does not, strictly speaking, directly enrich their comrade the director of the enterprise. It simply strengthens his power as an organiser and a bureaucrat. His surplus-value is a surplus-value of power. (But this new-style surplus-value is nevertheless subject to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Marx's laws of economic life are confirmed today in the economy of life.) He earns it, not on the basis of money-capital, but on the basis of a primitive accumulation of confidence-capital gained by his docile absorption of ideological matter. The car and the dacha which are thrown in to reward his services to the Socialist Fatherland, to Output and the Cause, foretell a form of social organisation in which money will indeed have disappeared, giving way to honorific distinctions of rank, a mandarinat of the biceps and of specialised thought. (Remember the special treatment given to the Stakhanovites, to 'heroes of space' and scrapers of catgut and canvas.)

In capitalist countries, the material profit gained by the employer from both production and consumption is still distinct from the ideological profit which the employer is no longer alone in deriving from the organisation of consumption. This is all that prevents us from reducing the difference between manager and worker to the difference between a new Jaguar every year and a mini lovingly maintained for five. But we must recognise that the tendency is towards planning, and planning tends to quantify social differences in terms of the ability to consume and to make others consume. With the differences growing in number and shrinking

in significance, the real distance between rich and poor is diminishing, and mankind is levelled into mere variations on poverty. The culmination of the process would be a cybernetic society composed of specialists ranked hierarchically according to their aptitude for consuming and making others consume the doses of power necessary for the functioning of a gigantic social computer of which they themselves would be at once the programme and the print-out. A society of exploited exploiters where some slaves are more equal than others.

There remains the third world. There remain the old forms of oppression. That the serfs of the latifundia should be the contemporaries of the new proletariat seems to me a perfect formula for the explosive mixture from which the total revolution will be born. Who could dare to suppose that the south american indians will be satisfied with land reform and lay down their arms when the best-paid workers in Europe are demanding a radical change in their way of life? From now on, the revolt against the State of Well-Being sets the minimum demands for world revolution. You can choose to forget this, but you forget it at your peril...as Saint-Just said, those who make a revolution by halves do nothing but dig their own graves.

8 EXCHANGE AND GIFT

The nobility and the proletariat conceive human relationships on the model of *giving*, but the proletarian way of giving transcends the feudal gift. The bourgeoisie, the class of *exchange*, is the lever which enables the feudal project to be overthrown and transcended in the long revolution (1).—History is the continuous transformation of natural alienation into social alienation, and the continuous strengthening of a contradictory movement of contestation which will overcome all alienation and end history. The historical struggle against natural alienation transforms natural alienation into social alienation, but the movement of historical disalienation eventually attacks social alienation itself and reveals that it is based on magic. This magic has to do with private appropriation. It is expressed through sacrifice. Sacrifice is the archaic form of exchange. The extreme quantification of exchange reduces man to an object. From this rock bottom a new type of human relationship, involving neither exchange nor sacrifice, can be born (2).

1

The bourgeoisie administers a precarious and none-too-glorious interregnum between the sacred hierarchy of feudalism and the anarchic order of future classless societies. The bourgeois no-man's-land of exchange is the uninhabitable region separating the old, unhealthy pleasure of giving oneself, in which the aristocrats indulged, and the pleasure of giving through love of oneself, which the new generations of

proletarians are little by little beginning to discover.

'Fair exchange' is the favourite absurdity of capitalism and its essentially similar competitors. The USSR 'offers' its hospitals and technicians, just as the USA 'offers' her investments and good offices, and supermarkets 'offer' 'free gifts.'

But the fact is that the meaning of *giving* has been rooted out from our minds, our feelings and our actions. Remember Breton and his friends offering roses to the pretty girls on the Boulevard Poissoniere, and immediately arousing the suspicion and hostility of the public.

The infection of human relations by exchange and bargaining is plainly linked to the existence of the bourgeoisie. The fact that exchange persists in a part of the world where it is claimed that there is a classless society suggests that the shadow of the bourgeoisie continues to rule under the red flag. Especially as the pleasure of giving, which appears in all industrial societies, defines very clearly the frontier between the world of calculation and the world of exuberance, of festivity. This style of giving has nothing to do with the prestige-gift practised by the nobility, hopelessly imprisoned by the notion of sacrifice. The proletariat really does carry the project of human fullness, the project of total life: a project in which the aristocracy had failed, albeit failed magnificently. But let's give the devil his due: it is through the historical presence and mediation of the bourgeoisie that such a future becomes accessible to the proletariat. Is it not thanks to the technical progress and the productive forces developed by capitalism that the proletariat is in a position to realise, through the scientifically elaborated project of a new society, the egalitarian visions, the dreams of omnipotence and the desire to live without *dead time*? Today everything confirms the mission, or rather the historical opportunity of the proletariat: the destruction and transcendence of feudality. And it will do it by trampling underfoot the bourgeoisie, which is doomed to represent merely a transitional period in the development of man, albeit a transitional period without which the transcending of the feudal project would have been inconceivable: an essential stage,

then, which created the lever without which unitary power would never have been overthrown, and above all could never have been transformed and corrected according to the project of the whole man. The invention of God shows that unitary power was already a world for the whole man, but for a whole man standing on his head. All that was required was to turn it right side up.

No liberation is possible this side of economics; in the world defined by economics there is only a hypothetical economics of survival. With these two truths the bourgeoisie is spurring mankind on towards the supercession of economics, towards a point beyond history. So the bourgeoisie is doing an even greater service than that of putting technology at the service of poetry. Its greatest day will be the day it disappears.

2

Exchange is linked to the survival of primitive hordes in the same way as privative appropriation; both together constitute the fundamental axiom which the history of mankind has been built on up to the present day.

When the first men found that it gave them more security in the face of a hostile nature, the formation of hunting territories laid the foundations of a social organisation which has imprisoned us ever since. (Cf. Raoul and Laura Makarius: *Totem et exagomie*.) Primitive man's unity with nature is essentially magical. Man only really separates himself from nature by transforming it through technology, and as he transforms it he disenchants it. But the use of technology is determined by social organisation. The birth of society coincides with the invention of the tool. More: organisation itself is the first coherent technique of struggle against nature. Social organisation—hierarchical, since it is based on privative appropriation—gradually destroys the magical bond between man and nature, but it preserves the magic for its own use: it creates between itself and mankind a mythical unity modelled on the original participation in the mystery of nature. Framed by the 'natural' relations of prehistoric man, social organisation slowly dissolves this frame that defines and im-

prisons it. From this point of view, history is just the transformation of natural alienation into social alienation; a process of disalienation becomes a process of social alienation, a movement of liberation only produces new chains; until the will for human liberation launches a direct attack on the whole collection of paralysing mechanisms, that is on the social organisation based on privative appropriation. This is the movement of disalienation which will undo history and *realise* it in new modes of life.

Effectively, the bourgeoisie's accession to power represents man's victory over natural forces. But as soon as this happens, hierarchical social organisation, which was born out of the struggle against hunger, sickness, discomfort...loses its justification, and can no longer escape taking full responsibility for the malaise of industrial civilisations. Today men no longer blame their sufferings on the hostility of nature, but on the tyranny of a perfectly inadequate and perfectly anachronistic form of society. When it destroyed the magical power of the feudal lords, the bourgeoisie pronounced the death sentence on the magic of hierarchical power itself. The proletariat will carry out this sentence. What the bourgeoisie began by historical processes will now be finished off in opposition to its own narrow conception of history. But it will still be a historical struggle, a class struggle which will *realise* history.

The hierarchical principle is the magic spell that has blocked the path of men in their historical struggles for freedom. From now on, no revolution will be worthy of the name if it does not involve, at the very least, the radical elimination of all hierarchy.

*

As soon as the members of a horde mark out a hunting territory and claim private ownership of it, they find themselves confronted by a hostility which is no longer the hostility of wild animals, weather, inhospitable regions, or sickness, but that of human groups who are excluded from the hunting-grounds. Man's genius found a way out of the animal dilemma: viz destroy the rival group or be destroyed by it.

This way was through treaties, contracts and exchanges, which are the basis of primitive communities. Between the period of nomadic food-gathering hordes and that of agricultural societies, the survival of clans depended on a triple exchange: exchange of women, exchange of food, exchange of blood. Magical thinking provides this operation with a supreme controller, a master of the exchanges, a power beyond and above the contracting parties. The birth of the gods coincides with the twin birth of sacred myth and hierarchical power.

Of course this exchange is never of equal benefit to both clans. The problem is always to ensure the neutrality of the excluded clan without actually letting it into the hunting territory. And agricultural societies refined these tactics. The excluded class, who were tenants before they became slaves, enter the landowning group not as landowners, but as their degraded reflection (the famous myth of the Fall), the mediation between the land and its masters. Why do they submit? Because of the coherent hold over them exercised by the myth—although it's not the deliberate intention of the masters (that would be to credit them with a rationality which was still foreign to them). This myth conceals the cunning of exchange, the imbalance in the sacrifice which each side agrees to make. The excluded class *really* sacrifice an important part of their life to the landowner: they accept his authority and work for him. The master *mythically* sacrifices his authority and his power as landowner to the dominated class: he is ready to pay for the safety of his people. God is the underwriter of the transaction and the defender of the myth. He punishes those who break the contract, while those who keep it he rewards with power: mythical power for those who sacrifice themselves in reality, real power for those who sacrifice themselves in myth. History and mythology show that the master could go so far as to sacrifice his life to the mythical principle. The fact that he paid the price of the alienation which he imposed on others reinforced the master's divine character. But it seems that a make-believe execution, or one in which he was replaced by a deputy, soon released the master from such a hard bar-

gain. When the Christian God delegated his son to the world, he gave generations of bosses a perfect model by which to authenticate their own sacrifice.

Sacrifice is the archaic form of exchange. It is a magical exchange, unquantified, irrational. It dominated human relationships, including commercial relationships, until merchant capitalism and its money-the-measure-of-all-things had carved out such a large area in the world of slaves, serfs and burghers that the economy could appear as a particular zone, a domain separated from life. When money appears, the element of exchange in the feudal gift begins to win out. The sacrifice-gift, the potlatch — that exchange-game of loser-takes-all in which the size of the sacrifice determines the prestige of the giver — could hardly find a place in a rationalised exchange economy. Forced out of the sectors dominated by economic imperatives, it finds itself reincarnated in values such as hospitality, friendship and love: refuges doomed to disappear as the dictatorship of quantified exchange (market value) colonises everyday life and turns it into a market.

Merchant and industrial capitalism accelerated the quantification of exchange. The feudal gift was rationalised according to the rigorous model of commerce. The game of exchange became a matter of calculation. The playful Roman promise to sacrifice a cock to the gods in exchange for a peaceful voyage remained outside the grasp of commercial measurement because of the disparity of the things that were exchanged. And we can well imagine that the age in which a man like Fouquet could ruin himself in order to shine more brightly in the eyes of his contemporaries produced a poetry which has disappeared from our times, which take as their model of a human relationship the exchange of 35p for an 8oz. steak,

And so sacrifice came to be quantified, rationalised, measured out and quoted on the stock exchange. But what is left of the magic of sacrifice in a world of market values? And what is left of the magic of power, the sacred terror that impels the model employee to tip his hat respectfully to the boss?

in a society where the quantity of gadgets and ideologies produced represents the quantity of power consumed, exercised and used up, magical relationships evaporate, leaving hierarchical power exposed to the full blast of contestation. When the last bastion falls, it will be either the end of a world or the end of the world. It's up to us to knock it down before it falls down by itself and drags us all with it.

Rigorously quantified, first by money and then by what you might call 'sociometric units of power', exchange pollutes all our relationships, all our feelings, all our thoughts. Where exchange is dominant, only *things* are left: a world of thing-men plugged into the organisation charts of the computer freaks: the world of reification. But on the other hand it also gives us the chance to radically restructure our styles of life and thought. A rock bottom from which *everything* can start again.

*

The feudal mind seemed to conceive the gift as a sort of haughty refusal to exchange, a will to deny interchangeability. This refusal went with their contempt for money and common measurement. Of course, sacrifice excludes pure giving; but there was often so much room for play, humanity and gratuitous gestures that inhumanity, religion and seriousness could pass for accessories to such preoccupations as war, love, friendship, or hospitality.

By giving themselves, the nobility united their power with the totality of cosmic forces and claimed control over the totality which myth had made sacred. The bourgeoisie exchanged *being* for *having* and lost the mythical unity of being and the world: the totality fell into fragments. Semi-rational exchange in production implicitly makes a creativity that is reduced to labour-power equal in value to its hourly wage. Semi-rational exchange in consumption implicitly makes consumer-experience (life reduced to the activity of consumption) equal in value to an amount of power which indicates the consumer's position in the hierarchical organisation chart. The sacrifice of the master is followed by the last stage of sacrifice, the sacrifice of the specialist.

In order to consume, the specialist makes others consume according to a cybernetic programme whose hyperrationality of exchange will abolish sacrifice. And man. If pure exchange ever comes to regulate the modes of existence of the robot-citizens of the cybernetic democracy, sacrifice will cease to exist. Objects need no justification to make them obedient. Sacrifice forms no part of the programme of machines, or of the antagonistic project, the project of the whole man.

*

The crumbling away of human values under the influence of exchange mechanisms leads to the crumbling of exchange itself. The insufficiency of the feudal gift means that new human relationships must be built on the principle of pure giving. We must rediscover the pleasure of giving: giving because you have so much. What beautiful and priceless pot-latches the affluent society will see—whether it likes it or not!—when the exuberance of the younger generation discovers the pure gift. The growing passion for stealing books, clothes, food, weapons or jewelry simply for the pleasure of giving them away gives us a glimpse of what the will to live has in store for consumer society.

Prefabricated needs are confronted with the unitary need for a new style of life. Art, that economics of experience, has been absorbed by the market. Desires and dreams work for Madison Avenue now. Everyday life has crumbled into a series of moments as interchangeable as the gadgets which occupy them: mixers, stereograms, contraceptives, euphorimeters, sleeping pills. Everywhere equal particles vibrate in the uniform light of power. Equality, justice. Exchange of nothings, restrictions and prohibitions. Nothing moving, only dead time passing.

We will have to renew our acquaintance with the feudal imperfection, not in order to make it perfect but in order to transcend it. We will have to rediscover the harmony of unitary society and liberate it from the divine phantom and the sacred hierarchy. The new innocence is not so far removed from the ordeals and judgments of God: the unequal-

ity of blood is closer to the equality of free individuals, irreducible to one another, than bourgeois equality is. The cramped style of the nobility is only a crude sketch of the grand style which will be invented by the masters without slaves. But what a world is trapped between this style of life and the mere way of living on, surviving, which ravages so many existences in our times.

9 TECHNOLOGY AND ITS MEDIATED USE

Contrary to the interests of those who control its use, technology tends to disenchant the world. Mass consumption society strips gadgets of any magical value. Similarly, organization (a technique for handling new techniques) robs new productive forces of their subversive appeal and their power of disruption. Organization thus stands revealed as nothing but the pure organisation of authority (1).—Alienated mediations make man weaker as they become indispensable. A social mask disguises people and things. In the present stage of private appropriation, this mask transforms its wearers into dead things, into commodities. Nature no longer exists. To rediscover nature means to reinvent it as a worthwhile adversary by constructing new social relationships. With the expansion of material equipment, the old hierarchical society is bursting at the seams (2).

1

The same bankruptcy is evident in non-industrial civilisations, where people are still dying of starvation, and automated civilisations, where people are already dying of boredom. Every paradise is artificial. The life of a Trobriand islander, rich in spite of ritual and taboo, is at the mercy of a smallpox epidemic; the life of an ordinary Swede, poor in spite of his comforts, is at the mercy of suicide and survival sickness.

Rousseauism and pastoral idylls accompany the first throbbings of the industrial machine. The ideology of progress, as one finds it in Condorcet or Adam Smith, emerged from

the old myth of the Four Ages. With the age of iron leading into the golden age, it seemed 'natural' that *progress* should fulfil itself as a return: a return to the state of innocence before the Fall.

The belief in the magical power of technology goes hand in hand with its opposite, the movement of disenchantment. The machine is the model of the intelligible. There is no mystery, nothing obscure in its drive-belts, cogs and gears; it can all be explained perfectly. But the machine is also the miracle that is to transport man into the realms of happiness and freedom. Besides, this ambiguity is useful to its masters: the old con about happy tomorrows and the green grass over the hill operates at various levels to justify the rational exploitation of men today. Thus it is not the logic of disenchantment that shakes people's faith in progress so much as the inhuman use of technical potential, the way that its mystical justification begins to grate. While the labouring classes and the underdeveloped peoples still offered the spectacle of their slowly decreasing material poverty, the enthusiasm for progress still drew ample nourishment from the troughs of liberal ideology and its extension, socialism. But, a century after the spontaneous demystification of the Lyons workers when they smashed the looms, a general crisis broke out, springing this time from the crisis of big industry: Fascist regression, sickly dreams of a return to artisanry and corporatism, the Ubuesque master-race of blond beasts.

Today, the promises of the old society of production are raining down on our heads in an avalanche of consumer goods that nobody would venture to call manna from heaven. You can hardly believe in the magical power of gadgets in the same way as people used to believe in productive forces. There is a certain hagiographical literature on the steam hammer. One cannot imagine much on the electric toothbrush. The mass production of instruments of comfort—all equally revolutionary, according to the publicity hand-outs—has given the most unsophisticated of men the right to express an opinion on the marvels of technological innovation in a tone as familiar as the hand he sticks up the

barmaid's skirt. The first landing on Mars will pass unnoticed on Blackpool beach.

Admittedly the yoke and harness, the steam engine, electricity and the rise of nuclear energy all disturbed and altered the infrastructure of society (though this was almost accidental). But today it would be foolish to expect new productive forces to upset modes of production. The blossoming of technology has seen the birth of a super-technology of synthesis which could prove as important as the social community, that first of all technical syntheses, founded at the dawn of time. Perhaps more important still; for if cybernetics was taken from its masters, it might be able to free human groups from labour and from social alienation. This was precisely the project of Charles Fourier in an age when utopia was still possible.

But between Fourier and the cyberneticians who control the operational organization of technology lies the distance between freedom and slavery. Of course, the cybernetic project claims that it is already sufficiently developed to be able to solve all the problems raised by the appearance of a new technique. But don't you believe it.

1: The permanent development of productive forces, the exploding mass production of consumer goods, promise nothing. Musical air-conditioners and solar ovens stand unheralded and unsung. We see a weariness coming, and one that is already so obviously present that sooner or later it's bound to develop into a critique of organization itself.

2: For all its flexibility, the cybernetic synthesis will never be able to conceal the fact that it is only the transcending synthesis of the different forms of government that have ruled over men, and their final stage. How could it hope to disguise the inherent alienation that no power has ever managed to shield from the weapons of criticism and the criticism of weapons?

By laying the basis for a perfect power structure, the cyberneticians will only stimulate the perfection of refusal. Their programming of new techniques will be shattered by the

same techniques turned to its own use by another kind of organization. A revolutionary organisation.

2

Technocratic organization raises technical mediation to its highest point of coherence. It has been known for ages that the master uses the slave as a means to appropriate the objective world, that the tool only alienates the worker as long as it belongs to a master. Similarly in the realm of consumption: it's not the goods that are inherently alienating, but the conditioning that leads their buyers to choose them and the ideology in which they are wrapped. The tool in production and the conditioning of choice in consumption are the mainstays of the fraud: they are the mediations which move man the producer and man the consumer to the illusion of *action* in a real *passivity* and transform him into an essentially dependent being. The stolen mediations separate the individual from himself, his desires, his dreams, and his will to live; and so people come to believe in the myth that you can't do without them, or the power that governs them. Where power fails to paralyse with constraints, it paralyses by suggestion: by forcing everyone to use crutches of which it is the sole supplier. Power as the sum of alienating mediations is only waiting for the holy water of cybernetics to baptise it into the state of Totality. But total power does not exist, only totalitarian powers. And the baptism of cybernetics has already been cancelled owing to lack of interest.

Because the objective world (or nature, if you prefer) has been grasped by means of alienated mediations (tools, thoughts, false needs), it ends up surrounded by a sort of screen: so that, paradoxically, the more man transforms himself and the world, the more it becomes alien to him. The veil of social relations envelops the natural world totally. What we call 'natural' today is about as natural as Nature Girl lipstick. The instruments of praxis do not belong to the agents of praxis, the workers: and it is obviously because of this that the opaque zone that separates man from him-

self and from nature has become a part of man and a part of nature. Our task is not to rediscover nature but to make a new one, to reconstruct it.

The search for the real nature, for a natural life that has nothing to do with the lie of social ideology, is one of the most touching naiveties of a good part of the revolutionary proletariat, not to mention the anarchists and such notable figures as the young Wilhelm Reich.

In the realm of the exploitation of man by man, the real transformation of nature only takes place through the real transformation of the social fraud. At no point in their struggle have man and nature ever been really face to face. They have been kept apart by what mediates this struggle: hierarchical social power and its organization of appearance. To transform nature was to socialise it, but they certainly made a mess of the job. There is no nature other than social nature, since history has never known a society without power.

Is an earthquake a natural phenomenon? It affects men, but it affects them only as alienated social beings. What is an earthquake-in-itself? Suppose that at this moment there was an earthquake disaster on Alpha Centauri. Who would it bother apart from the old farts in the universities and other centres of pure thought?

And death: death also strikes men socially. In the first place, because the energy and resources poured down the drain of militarism and wasted in the anarchy of capitalism and bureaucracy could make a vital contribution to the scientific struggle against death. But above all because it is in the vast laboratory of society (and under the benevolent eye of science) that the foul brew of culture in which the germs of death are spawned is kept on the boil; (Stress, nervous tension, conditioning, pollution, iatrogenic disease...) Only animals are still allowed to die a natural death...some of them.

Could it be that, after disengaging themselves from the animal world by means of their history, men might come to envy

the animal's contact with nature? This is, I think, the childish meaning which should be seen in the search for the 'natural'. But if we could enrich it and set it off in the right direction such a desire would mean that we had transcended 30,000 years of history.

What we have to do now is to create a new nature that will be a worthwhile adversary: that is, to resocialise it by liberating the technical apparatus from the sphere of alienation, by snatching it from the hands of rulers and specialists. Only at the end of a process of social disalienation will nature become a worthwhile opponent: in a society in which man's creativity will not come up against man himself as the first obstacle to its expansion.

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Technological organisation can't be destroyed from the outside. Its collapse is the result of internal decay. Far from being punished for its Promethean aspirations, it is dying because it never escaped from the dialectic of master and slave. Even if the cybernauts did come to power they'd have a hard time staying there. The very best they can offer has already been turned down in these words from a black worker to a white boss (*Presence Africaine*, 1956): 'When we first saw your trucks and planes we thought that you were gods. Then, after a few years, we learned how to drive your trucks, as we shall soon learn how to fly your planes, and we understood that what interested you most was manufacturing trucks and planes and making money. For our part, what we are interested in is using them. Now, you are just our metal-workers.'

10 DOWN QUANTITY STREET

Economic imperatives seek to impose on the whole of human activity the standardised measuring system of the market. Very large quantities take the place of the qualitative, but even quantity is rationed and economised. Myth is based on quality, ideology on quantity. Ideological saturation is an atomisation into small contradictory quantities which can no more avoid destroying one another than they can avoid being smashed by the qualitative negativity of popular refusal. (1) — The quantitative and the linear are indissociable. A linear, measured time and a linear, measured life are the definitions of survival, or living on: a succession of interchangeable instants. These lines are part of the confused geometry of power (2).

1

The system of commercial exchange has come to govern all of man's everyday relations with himself and with his fellow men. Every aspect of public and private life is dominated by the quantitative.

The merchant in *The Exception and the Rule* confesses: 'I don't know what a man is. Only that every man has his price.' To the extent that individuals accept power and enable it to exist, power in turn judges them by its own yardstick: it reduces and standardises them. What is the individual to an authoritarian system? A point duly located in its perspective. A point that it recognises, certainly, but recognises only in terms of the numbers that define its position in a system of co-ordinates.

The calculation of a man's capacity to produce or to make others produce, to consume or to make others consume, concretises to a T that expression so dear to our philosophers: *the measure of man*. Even the simple pleasures of a ride in the country are generally measured up in terms of miles on the clock, speeds reached and petrol consumption. With the rate at which economic 'imperatives' are buying up feelings, desires and needs and falsifying them, man will soon be left with nothing but the memory of having once been alive. Living in the past: the memory of days gone by will be our consolation for living on. How could even spontaneous laughter last in a space-time that is measured and measurable, let alone real joy? At best the dull contentment of the man-who's-got-his-money's-worth, and who exists by that standard. Only objects can be measured, which is why exchange always reifies.

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Any excitement that could still be found in the pursuit of pleasure is fast disintegrating into a panting succession of mechanical gestures, and one hopes in vain that their rhythm will speed up enough to reach even the semblance of orgasm. The quantitative Eros of speed, novelty, love-against-the-clock is disfiguring the real face of pleasure everywhere.

The qualitative is slowly taking on the aspect of a quantitative infinity, an endless series whose momentary end is always the negation of pleasure, Don Juan's basic 'can't get no satisfaction.' If only contemporary society would encourage such dissatisfaction, and allow total licence to the delirious and devastating attractions of an insatiable appetite! Who would deny that there is a certain charm in the life of the idler, a trifle blase perhaps, but enjoying at his leisure everything that can make passivity sweet: a seraglio of pretty girls, witty and sophisticated friends, subtle drugs, seven-course Chinese meals, heady liqueurs and sultry perfumes: a man whose desire is not so much to change life as to seek refuge in the greatest attractions it has to offer. A libertine in the grand style.

Let's talk sense, though. Nowadays that kind of choice just doesn't exist, for in both Western and Eastern societies even quantity is rationed. A tycoon with only one month left to live would still refuse to blow his entire fortune on one huge orgy...the morality of exchange and profit doesn't let go that easily. Thrift, the capitalist economics of family life.

Yet what a windfall for mystification, to have the qualitative imprisoned in the skin of the quantitative! I mean that a world in which all things seem possible can still harbour the illusion of being a world of many dimensions. But to let exchange be subsumed by the gift, to let all kinds of adventures blossom between heaven and earth (from Gilles de Rais to Dante...): this was precisely what the bourgeoisie couldn't do, this was the door that it had closed on itself in the name of industry and commerce! All it had left was a vast nostalgia. Poor and precious catalyst—at once all and nothing—thanks to which a society without class and without authoritarian power will come to realise all the dreams of its aristocratic childhood.

In the act of faith, the unitary societies of tribal and feudal times possessed a qualitative element of myth and mystification which was of major importance. The bourgeoisie, once it had shattered the unity of power and God, found itself clutching fragments and crumbs of power, crumbs which it tried to clothe with a unitary spirit. But it didn't work. Without unity there can be no qualitative! Democracy triumphs along with social atomisation. Democracy is the limited power of the greatest number, and the power of the greatest limited number. The great ideologies very soon abandon faith for numbers. Nowadays 'La Patrie' is no more than a few thousand war veterans. And what Marx and Engels used to call 'our party' is today a few million voters and a couple of thousand bill-stickers: a *mass* party.

In fact, ideology draws its essence from quantity: it is simply an idea reproduced again and again in time (pavlovian conditioning) and in space (where the consumers take over). Ideology, information and culture tend more and more to lose their content and become pure quantity. The less

importance a piece of news has, the more it is repeated, and the more it distracts people from their real problems. Goebbels said that the bigger the lie, the more easily it is swallowed. But ideology takes us away from the Big Lie by constantly bidding against itself. One after another it lays before us a hundred paperbacks, a hundred washing powders, a hundred political ideas, and with equal conviction proves that each of them is incontestably superior to any of the others. Even in ideology quantity is being destroyed by quantity itself: conflicting conditionings end by cancelling each other out. Is this the way to rediscover the power of the qualitative, a power that can move mountains?

Quite the contrary. Contradictory conditioning is more likely to end in trauma, inhibition and a radical refusal to be brainwashed any more. Admittedly ideology still has one trick up its sleeve—that of posing false questions, raising false dilemmas and leaving the conditioned individual, poor bugger, with the worry of sorting out which is the truer of two lies. But such pointless diversions carry little weight compared with the survival sickness to which consumer society exposes its members.

Boredom breeds the irresistible rejection of uniformity, a refusal that can break out at any moment. Stockholm, Amsterdam and Watts (for a start) have shown that the tiniest of pretexts can fire the oil spread on troubled waters. Think of the vast quantity of lies that can be wiped out by one act of revolutionary poetry! From Villa to Lumumba, from Stockholm to Watts, qualitative agitation, the agitation that radicalises the masses because it springs from the radicalism of the masses, is redefining the frontiers of submission and degradation.

2

In unitary regimes the sacred was the cement which held together the social pyramid in which each particular being from the highest lord to the lowest serf had his place according to the will of Providence, the order of the world and the king's pleasure. The cohesion of the structure soon dis-

appeared, dissolved by the corrosive criticism of the young bourgeoisie, but, as we know, the shadow of the divine hierarchy remains. The dismantling of the pyramid, far from destroying the inhuman cement, only pulverises it. We see little particular beings becoming absolute: little 'citizens' released by social atomisation. The inflated imagination of egocentricity creates a universe on the model of one point, a point just the same as thousands of other points, grains of sand, all free, equal and fraternal, scurrying here and there like so many ants when their nest is broken open. All the lines have gone haywire since God disappeared, depriving them of their point of convergence; they weave and collide in apparent disorder. But make no mistake, despite the anarchy of competition and the isolation of individualism, class and caste interests are beginning to tie up, structuring a geometry to rival the old divine geometry, and impatient to reconquer its coherence.

Now, the coherence of unitary power, although it's based on the divine principle, is a palpable coherence, which each individual lives in and knows. But paradoxically the material principle of fragmentary power can only furnish an abstract coherence. How could the organisation of economic survival hope to substitute itself smoothly for this immanent, this omnipresent God who is called on to witness the most trivial gestures, like cutting bread and sneezing...? The omnipotence of the feudal mode of domination was quite relative anyway, but let us suppose that with the aid of cyberneticians it could be equalled by a secularised government of men. Even so, how could anyone replace the mythic and poetic ethos surrounding the life of communities that are socially cohesive, an ethos that provides them with some kind of third dimension? The bourgeoisie is well and truly caught in the trap of its own half-revolution.

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Quantification implies linearity. The qualitative is plural, the quantitative univocal. Life quantified becomes a measured route-march towards death. The radiant ascent of

the soul towards heaven is replaced by inane speculations about the future. Moments of time no longer radiate, as they did in the cyclical time of earlier societies; time is a thread stretching from birth to death, from memories of the past to expectations of the future, on which an eternity of survival strings out a row of instants and hybrid presents nibbled away by what is past and what is yet to come.

The feeling of living in symbiosis with cosmic forces—the sense of the simultaneous—revealed to our forefathers joys which our passing presence in the world is hard put to provide. What remains of such a joy? Only vertigo, giddy transience, the effort of keeping up with the times. You must move with the times — the motto of those who make a profit out of it.

Not that we should lament the passing of the old days of cyclical time, the time of mystical effusion. Rather correct it: centre it in man, and not in the divine animal. Man is not the centre of present time, he is merely a point in it. Time is composed of a succession of points, each taken independently of the others like an absolute, but an absolute that is endlessly repeated and rehashed. Because they are located on the same line, all actions and all moments assume equal importance. The definition of prosaism. Down quantity street, everything's always just the same. And these absolutised fragments are all quite interchangeable. Divided from one another — and thus separated from man himself — the moments of survival follow one another and resemble one another just like the specialised attitudes and correspond to them: roles. Making love or riding a motorbike, it's all the same. Each moment has its stereotype, and the fragments of time carry off the fragments of men into a past that can never be changed.

What's the use of threading pearls to make a garland of memories? If only the weight of the pearls would snap the thread! But no: moment by moment, time bores on; everything is lost, nothing created...

What do I want? Not a succession of moments, but one

huge instant. A totality that is lived, and without the experience of 'time passing.' The feeling of 'time passing' is simply the feeling of growing old. And yet, since one must first of all survive in order to live, virtual moments, possibilities, are necessarily rooted in that time. To federate moments, to bring out the pleasure in them, to release their promise of life is already to be learning how to construct a 'situation.'

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Individual survival-lines cross, collide and intersect. Each one assigns limits to the freedom of others; projects cancel one another out in the name of their autonomy. This is the basis of the geometry of fragmentary power.

We think we are living in the world, when in fact we are being positioned in a perspective. No longer the simultaneous perspective of primitive painters, but the perspective of the Renaissance rationalists. It is hardly possible for looks, thoughts and gestures to escape the attraction of the distant vanishing-point which orders and deforms them; situates them in its spectacle. Power is the greatest town-planner. He parcels out lots of public and private survival, buys up vacant lots at cut price, and only permits construction that complies with his regulations. His own plans involve the compulsory acquisition of everybody. He builds with a heaviness that is the envy of the real town-builders that copy his style, translating the old mumbo-jumbo of the sacred hierarchy into stockbroker 'belts, white-collar apartments and workers' flats. (Like, for example, in Croydon.)

The reconstruction of life, the rebuilding of the world: one and the same desire.

11 MEDIATED ABSTRACTION AND ABSTRACT MEDIATION

Today, reality is imprisoned within metaphysics in the same way as it was once imprisoned within theology. The way of seeing which power imposes 'abstracts' mediations from their original function, which is to extend into the real world the demands which arise in lived experience. But mediation never completely loses contact with experience; it resists the magnetic pull of authority. The point where resistance begins is the look-out post of subjectivity. Until now, metaphysicians have only organised the world in various ways; our problem is to change it, by opposing them (1). The regime of guaranteed survival is slowly undermining the belief that power is necessary (2). This leads to a growing rejection of the forms which govern us, a rejection of their (coercive) ordering principle. (3) Radical theory, which is the only guarantee of the coherence of such a rejection, penetrates the masses because it extends their spontaneous creativity. 'Revolutionary' ideology is theory which has been co-opted by the authorities. Words exist at the frontier between the will to live and its repression; the way they are employed determines their meaning; history controls the ways in which they are employed. The historical crisis of language indicates the possibility of transcending it towards the poetry of action, towards the great game with signs (4).

1

What is this detour in which I lose myself when I try to find myself? What is this screen that separates me from my-

self under the pretence of protecting me? And how can I ever find myself again in this crumbling fragmentation of which I am composed? I move forward into a terrible doubt of ever getting to grips with myself. It is as though my path is already marked out in front of me, as though my thoughts and feelings are following the contours of a mental landscape which they imagine they are creating, but which in fact is moulding them. An absurd force - all the more absurd for being inscribed in the rationality of the world, and seeming incontestable - keeps me jumping in an effort to reach a solid ground which my feet have never left. And by this useless leap towards myself I succeed only in losing my grip on the present; most of the time I live out of step with what I am, marking time with dead time.

I think that people are surprisingly insensitive to the way in which the world, in certain periods, takes on the forms of the dominant metaphysic. No matter how daft it may seem to us to believe in God and the Devil, this phantom pair become a living reality from the moment that a collectivity considers them sufficiently present to inspire the text of their laws. In the same way, the stupid distinction between cause and effect has been able to govern societies in which human behaviour and phenomena in general were analysed in terms of cause and effect. And in our own time, nobody should underestimate the power of the misbegotten dichotomy between thought and action, theory and practice, real and imaginary... these ideas are forces of organisation. The world of falsehood is a real world; people are killing one another there, and we'd better not forget it. While we spiel and spout ironically about the decay of philosophy, contemporary philosophers watch with knowing smiles from behind the mediocrity of their thought; they know that come what may the world is still a philosophical construction, a huge ideological fozzle. We survive in a metaphysical landscape. The abstract and alienating mediation which estranges me from myself is terrifyingly concrete.

Grace, a piece of God transplanted into man, outlived its

Donor. Secularised, abandoning theology for metaphysics, it remained buried in the individual's flesh like a pacemaker, an interiorised mode of government. When Freudian imagery hangs the monster Superego over the doorway of the ego, its fault is not so much its facile oversimplification as its refusal to search further for the social origin of constraints. (Reich understood this well.) Oppression reigns because men are divided, not only among themselves but also inside themselves. What separates them from themselves and weakens them is also the false bond that unites them with power, reinforcing this power and making them choose it as their protector, as their father.

'Mediation', says Hegel, 'is self-identity in movement.' But what moves can lose itself. And when he adds 'it is the moment of dying and becoming', the same words differ radically in meaning according to the perspective in which they are placed: that of totalitarian power or that of the total man.

As soon as mediation escapes my control, every step I take drags me towards something foreign and inhuman. Engels painstakingly showed that a stone, a fragment of nature alien to man, became human as soon as it became an extension of the hand by serving as a tool (and the stone in its turn humanised the hand of the hominid). But once it is appropriated by a master, an employer, a ministry of planning, a management, the tool's meaning is changed: it deflects the action of its user towards other purposes. And what is true for tools is true for all mediations.

Just as God was the supreme arbiter of grace, the magnetism of the governing principle always draws to itself the largest possible number of mediations. Power is the sum of alienated and alienating mediations. Science (*scientia theologiae ancilla*) converted the divine fraud into operational information, organised abstraction, returning to the etymology of the word: *ab-trahere*, to draw out of.

The energy which the individual expends in order to realise himself, to extend himself into the world according to his desires and his dreams, is suddenly braked, held up, shunted onto other tracks, co-opted. What would normally be the phase of fulfilment is forced out of the living world and kicked upstairs into the transcendental.

But the mechanism of abstraction is never completely loyal to the principle of authority. However reduced man may be by his stolen mediation, he can still enter the labyrinth of power with Theseus' weapons of aggression and determination. If he finally loses his way, it is because he has already lost his Ariadne, snapped the sweet thread that links him with life: the desire to be himself. For it is only in an unbroken relationship between theory and lived praxis that there can be any hope of an end to all dualities, of the beginning of the era of totality, the end of the power of men over men.

Human energy does not let itself be led away into the inhuman without a fight. Where is the field of battle? Always in the immediate extension of lived experience, in spontaneous action. Not that I am opposing abstract mediation in the name of a sort of wild, 'instinctive' spontaneity; that would merely be to reproduce on a higher level the idiotic choice between pure speculation and mindless activism, the disjunction between theory and practice. I am saying that tactical adequacy involves launching the attack at the very spot where the highwaymen of experience lay their ambush, the spot where the attempt to act is transformed and perverted, at the precise moment when spontaneous action is sucked up by misinterpretation and misunderstanding. At this point there is a momentary crystallization of consciousness which illuminates both the demands of the will-to-live and the fate that social organisation has in store for them; living experience and its co-optation by the machinery of authoritarianism. The point where resistance begins is the look-out post

of subjectivity. For identical reasons, my knowledge of the world has no value except at the moment when I act to transform it.

2

The mediation of power works a permanent blackmail on the immediate. Of course, the idea that an act can't be carried through in the totality of its implications faithfully reflects the reality of a bankrupt world, a world of non-totality; but at the same time it reinforces the metaphysical character of events, which is their official falsification. Common sense is a compendium of slanders like 'We'll always need bosses', 'Without authority mankind would sink into barbarism and chaos' and so on. Custom has mutilated man so thoroughly that when he mutilates himself he thinks he is following a law of nature, And perhaps the suppression of the memory of what he has lost is what chains him most firmly to the pillory of submission. Anyway, it befits the slave mentality to associate power with the only possible form of life, survival. And it fits well with the master's purposes to encourage such an idea.

In mankind's struggle for survival, hierarchical social organisation was undeniably a decisive step forward. At one point in history the cohesion of a collectivity around its leader gave it the best, perhaps the only chance of self-preservation. But survival was guaranteed at the price of a new alienation: the safeguard was a prison, preserving life but preventing growth. Feudal regimes reveal the contradiction bluntly: serfs, half man and half beast, existed side-by-side with a small privileged sector, some of whom strained after individual access to the exuberance and energy of unrestrained living.

The feudal idea cared little about survival as such: famines, plagues and massacres swept millions of beings from that best of all possible worlds without unduly disturbing the generations of literati and subtle hedonists. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, finds in survival the raw material of its economic

interests. The need to eat and subsist materially is bound to be good for trade. Indeed it is not excessive to see in the primacy of the economy, that dogma of bourgeois thought, the very source of its celebrated humanism. If the bourgeoisie prefers man to God, it is because only man produces and consumes, supplies and demands. The divine universe, which is pre-economic, incurs their disapproval almost as much as the post-economic world of the total man.

By force-feeding survival until it is satiated, consumer society awakens a new appetite for life. Wherever survival and work are both guaranteed, the old safeguards become obstacles. Not only does the struggle to survive prevent us from really living; once it becomes a struggle without real goals it begins to threaten survival itself: what was ridiculous becomes precarious. Survival has grown so fat that if it doesn't shed its skin it will choke us all in it and die.

The protection provided by masters has lost its *raison d'être* since the mechanical solicitude of gadgets theoretically ended the necessity for slaves. From now on, the *ultima ratio* of the rulers is the deliberately maintained terror of a thermonuclear apocalypse. Peaceful coexistence guarantees their existence. Power no longer protects the people; it protects itself against the people. Today, this inhumanity spontaneously created by men has become simply the inhuman prohibition of all creation.

3

Every time that the total and immediate consummation of an action is deferred, power is confirmed in its function of grand mediator. Spontaneous poetry, on the other hand, is anti-mediation par excellence.

One could say schematically that bourgeois/soviet fragmentary power, which may be characterised as the sum of constraints, is being absorbed gradually into a form of organisation based more on alienating mediations. Ideological en-

chantment replaces the bayonet. This perfected mode of government inevitably brings to mind the prophets of cybernetics. Following the prudent directives of the technocratic specialised left, the electronic Argus is planning to eliminate the middlemen (spiritual leaders, putschist generals, Franco-Stalinists and other sons of Ubu) and wire up his Absolute State of well-being. But the more mediations are alienated, the more the thirst for the immediate rages, the more the savage poetry of revolutions tramples down frontiers.

In its final phase, authority will culminate in the union of abstract and concrete. Power already abstracts, and the electric chair is still being used. The face of the world, illuminated by power, is organised according to a metaphysic of reality: and it's a sight for sore eyes to see the faithful philosophers showing off their new uniforms: technocrat, sociologist, specialist...

The pure form which is haunting social space is recognisable as the death of men. It is the neurosis which precedes necrosis, survival sickness spreading slowly as living experience is replaced by images, forms, objects, as alienated mediation transmutes experience into a thing, madreporises it. It's a man or a tree or a stone...prophesied Lautreamont.

Gombrowicz at least gives due respect to Form, power's old go-between, now promoted to the place of honour among pimps of State:

'You have never really been able to recognize or explain the importance of Form in your life. Even in psychology you have been unable to accord to Form its rightful place. We continue to believe that it is feeling, purposes or ideas that govern our behaviour, considering Form to be at most a harmless ornamental addition. When the widow weeps tenderly beside her husband's coffin, we think that she is crying because she feels her loss so keenly. When some engineer, doctor or lawyer murders his wife, his children or a friend, we suppose that he was driven to the deed by violent or bloodthirsty impulses. When some politician expresses him-

self vacuously, deceitfully or shabbily in a public speech, we say that he is stupid because he expresses himself stupidly. But the fact of the matter is this: a human being does not exteriorise himself in an immediate manner, according to his nature, but always through a definite Form and this Form, this way of being, this way of speaking and reacting, does not issue solely from himself but is imposed on him from outside.

And so the same man can appear sometimes wise, sometimes stupid, bloodthirsty or angelic, according to the Form which affects him and according to the pressure of conditioning...When will you consciously oppose the Forms? When will you stop identifying with what defines you?'

4

In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx writes:

Theory becomes a material force once it has got hold of the masses. Theory is capable of getting hold of men once it demonstrates its truth with regard to man, once it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp something at its roots. But for man the root is man himself.

In short, radical theory gets hold of the masses because it comes from them in the first place. It is the repository of spontaneous creativity, and its job is to ensure the striking power of this creativity. It is revolutionary technique at the service of poetry. Any analysis of revolutions past or present that does not involve a determination to resume the struggle more coherently and more effectively plays fatally into the hands of the enemy: it is incorporated into the dominant culture. The only time to talk about revolutionary moments is when you are ready to live them at short notice. A simple touchstone for testing the mettle of the clanking thinkers-errant of the planet's left.

Those who are able to end a revolution are always the most eager to explain it to those who have made it. The arguments

they use to explain it are as good as their arguments for ending it, one can say that much. When theory escapes from the makers of a revolution it turns against them. It no longer gets hold of them, it dominates and conditions them. The theory that was developed by the strength of the armed people now develops the strength of those who disarm the people. Leninism explains revolutions too—it certainly taught Makhno's partisans and the Kronstadt sailors a thing or two. An ideology.

Whenever the powers that be get their hands on theory, it turns into ideology: an argument ad hominem against man in general. Radical theory comes out of the individual, being as subject: it penetrates the masses through what is most creative in each person, through subjectivity, through the desire for realisation. Ideological conditioning is quite the opposite: the technical management of the inhuman, the weight of things. It turns men into objects which have no meaning apart from the Order in which they have their place. It assembles them in order to isolate them, makes the crowd into a multiplicity of solitudes.

Ideology is the falsehood of language, radical theory the truth of language. The conflict between them, which is the conflict between man and the inhumanity which he secretes, underlies the transformation of the world into human realities as much as its transmutation into metaphysical realities. Everything that men do and undo passes through the mediation of language. Semantics is one of the principal battlefields in the struggle between the will to live and the spirit of submission.

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The fight is unfair. Words serve power better than they do men; they serve it more faithfully than most men do, and more scrupulously than the other mediations (space, time, technology...) Hypostatized transcendence always depends on language and is developed in a system of signs and symbols

(words, dance, ritual, music, sculpture, building...) When a half-completed action which has been suddenly obstructed tries to carry on further in a form which it hopes will sooner or later allow it to finish and realise itself—like a generator transforming mechanical energy into electrical energy which will be reconverted into mechanical energy by a motor miles away—at this moment language swoops down on living experience, ties it hand and foot, robs it of its substance, abstracts it. It always has categories ready to condemn to incomprehensibility and nonsense anything which they can't contain, or summon into existence-for-power that which slumbers in nothingness because it has no place as yet in the system of Order. The repetition of familiar signs is the basis of ideology.

And yet men still try to use words and signs to perfect their interrupted gestures. It is because they do that a poetic language exists: a language of lived experience which, for me, merges with radical theory, the theory which penetrates the masses and becomes a material force. Even when it is co-opted and turned against its original purpose, poetry always gets what it wants in the end. The 'Proletarians of all lands, unite' which produced the Stalinist State will one day realise the classless society. No poetic sign is ever completely tamed by ideology.

The language that deflects radical actions, creative actions, human actions par excellence, from their realisation, becomes anti-poetry. It defines the linguistics of power: its science of information. This information is the model of false communication, the communication of the inauthentic, non-living. There is a principle that I find holds good: as soon as a language no longer obeys the desire for realisation, it falsifies communication; it no longer communicates anything except that false promise of truth which is called a lie. But this lie is the truth of what destroys me, infects me with its virus of submission. Signs are thus the vanishing points from which diverge the antagonistic perspectives which make up the world and divide it between them: the

perspective of power and the perspective of the will to live. Each word, idea or symbol is a double agent. Some, like the word 'fatherland' or the policeman's uniform, usually work for authority; but make no mistake, when ideologies clash or begin to wear out the most mercenary sign can become a good anarchist (I am thinking of the splendid title that Bellegarigue chose for his paper: L'Anarchie, Journal de l'Ordre).

Dominant semiological systems—which are those of the dominant castes—have only mercenary signs, and, as Humpty-Dumpty says, the king pays double time to words that he employs a lot. But deep down inside, every mercenary has dreams of killing the king. If we are condemned to a diet of lies we must learn to spike them with a drop of the acid truth. Precisely the way the agitator works: he charges his words and signs so powerfully with living reality that all the others are pulled out of place. He *subverts* them.

In a general way, the fight for language is the fight for the freedom to live, for the reversal of the perspective. The battle is between metaphysical facts and the reality of facts: I mean between facts conceived statically as part of a system of interpretation of the world and facts understood in their development by the praxis which transforms them.

Power can't be overthrown like a government. The united front against authority covers the whole extent of everyday life and engages the vast majority of men. To know how to live is to know how to fight against renunciation without ever giving an inch. Let nobody underestimate power's skill in stuffing its slaves with words to the point of making them the slaves of its words.

What weapons do we have to secure our freedom? We can mention three:

1. Information should be corrected in the direction of poetry news deciphered, official terms translated (so that 'society', in the perspective opposed to power, becomes 'racket' or 'area of hierarchical power')—leading eventually to a glossary or encyclopedia (Diderot was well aware of their importance and so are the situationists).

2. Open dialogue, the language of dialectic; conversation, and all forms of non-spectacular discussion.

3. What Jakob Boehme called 'sensual speech' (sensualische Sprache) "because it is a clear mirror of the senses." And the author of the Way to God elaborates: "In sensual speech all spirits converse directly, and have no need of any language, because theirs is the language of nature." If you remember what I have called the recreation of nature, the language Boehme talks about clearly becomes the language of spontaneity, of 'doing', of individual and collective poetry; language centred on ~~the project of~~ realisation, leading lived experience out of the cave of history. This is also connected with what Paul Brousse and Ravachol understood by 'propaganda by deed'.

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There is a silent communication; it is well known to lovers. At this stage language seems to lose its importance as essential mediation, thought is no longer a distraction (in the sense of leading us away from ourselves), words and signs become a luxury, an exuberance. Think of those bantering conversations with their baroque of cries and caresses which are so surprisingly ridiculous for those who do not share the lovers' intoxication. But it was also direct communication that Lehautier referred to when the judge asked him what anarchists he knew in Paris: 'anarchists don't need to know one another to think the same thing.' In radical groups which are able to reach the highest level of theoretical and practical coherence, words will sometimes acquire this privilege of playing and making love: erotic communication.

An aside. History has often been accused of happening back-to-front; the question of language becoming superfluous and turning into language-game is another example. A baroque current runs through the history of thought, making fun of words and signs with the subversive intention of disturbing the semiological order and Order in general. But the series

of attempts on the life of language by the rabble of tumbling nonsense-rhymers whose prize fools were Lear and Carroll finds its true expression in the Dada explosion. In 1916, the desire to have it out with signs, thought and words corresponded for the first time with a real crisis of communication. The liquidation of language that had so often been undertaken speculatively had a chance to find its historical realisation at last.

In an epoch which still had all its transcendental faith in language, and in God, the master of all transcendence, doubts about signs could only lead to terrorist activity. When the crisis of human relationships shattered the unitary web of mythical communication, the attack on language took on a revolutionary air. So much so that it is tempting to say, as Hegel might have, that the decomposition of language chose Dada as the medium through which to reveal itself to the minds of men. Under the unitary regime the same desire to play with signs had been betrayed by history and found no response. By exposing falsified communication Dada began to transcend language in the direction of poetry. Today, the language of myth and the language of spectacle are giving way to the reality which underlies them: the language of deeds. This language contains in itself the critique of all modes of expression and is thus a continuous autocritique. Pity our poor little sub-dadaists! Because they haven't understood that Dada necessarily implies this supercession, they continue to mumble that we talk like deaf men. Which is one way to be a fat maggot in the spectacle of cultural decomposition.

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The language of the whole man will be a whole language: perhaps the end of the old language of words. Inventing this language means reconstructing man right down to his unconscious. Totality is hacking its way through the fractured non-totality of thoughts, words and actions towards itself. We will have to speak until we can *do* without words.