The revolution of everyday life

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part 1

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INTRODUCTION

I have no intention of revealing what there is of my life in this book to readers who are not really prepared to relive it. I await the day when it will lose and find itself in a general movement of ideas, just as I like to think that the present conditions will be erased from the memories of men.

The world must be remade; all the specialists in reconditioning will not be able to stop it. Since I do not want to understand them, I prefer that they should not understand me.

As for the others, I ask for their goodwill with a humility they will not fail to perceive. I should have liked a book like this to be accessible to those minds least addled by intellectual jargon; I hope I have not failed absolutely. One day a few formulae will emerge from this chaos and fire point-blank on our enemies. Till then these sentences, read and re-read, will have to do their slow work. The path towards simplicity is the most complex of all, and here in particular it seemed best not to tear away from the commonplace the tangle of roots which enable us to transplant it into another region, where we can cultivate it to our own profit.

I have never pretended to reveal anything new or to launch novelties onto the culture market. A minute correction of the essential is more important than a hundred new accessories. All that is new is the direction of the current which carries commonplaces along.

For as long as there have been men—and men who read Lautreamont—everything has been said and few people have gained anything from it. Because our ideas are in themselves commonplace, they can only be of value to people who are not.

The modern world must learn what it already knows, become what it is, by means of a great work of exorcism, by conscious practice. One can escape from the commonplace only by manhandling it, mastering it, steeping it in

dreams, giving it over to the sovereign pleasure of subjectivity. Above all I have emphasized subjective will, but nobody should criticise this until they have examined the extent to which the objective conditions of the contemporary world are furthering the cause of subjectivity day by day. Everything starts from subjectivity, and nothing stops there. Today less than ever.

From now on the struggle between subjectivity and what degrades it will extend the scope of the old class struggle. It revitalises it and makes it more bitter. The desire to live is a political decision. We do not want a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation is bought by accepting the risk of dying of boredom.

The man of survival is man ground up by the machinery of hierarchical power, caught in a mass of interferences, a tangle of oppressive techniques whose rationalization only awaits the patient programming of programmed minds.

The man of survival is also self-united man, the man of total refusal. Not a single instant goes by without each of us living contradictorily, and on every level of reality, the conflict between oppression and freedom, and without this conflict being strangely deformed, and grasped at the same time in two antagonistic perspectives: the perspective of power and the perspective of transcendence. The two parts of this book, devoted to the analysis of these two perspectives, should thus be approached, not in succession, as their arrangement demands, but simultaneously, since the description of the negative founds the positive project and the positive project confirms negativity. The best arrangement of a book is not to have one, so that the reader can discover his own.

Where the writing fails it reflects the failures of the reader as a reader, and even more as a man. If the element of boredom it cost me to write it comes through when you read it, this will only be one more argument demonstrating our failure to live. For the rest, the gravity of the times must excuse the gravity of my tone. Levity always falls short of the written words or overshoots them. The irony in this case will consist in never forgetting that.

This book is part of a current of agitation which the world has not heard the last of. It sets forth a simple contribution, among others, to the recreation of the international revolutionary movement. Its importance had better not escape anybody, for nobody, in time, will be able to escape its conclusions.

1 THE INSIGNIFICANT AS SIGNIFIED

Because of its increasing triviality, everyday life has gradually become our central preoccupation (1). No illusion, sacred or deconsecrated (2), collective or individual, can hide the poverty of our daily actions any longer (3). The enrichment of life calls inexorably for the analysis of the new forms taken by poverty, and the perfection of the old weapons of refusal (4).

1

The history of our times calls to mind those Walt Disney characters who rush madly over the edge of a cliff without seeing it, so that the power of their imagination keeps them suspended in mid-air; but as soon as they look down and see where they are, they fall.

Contemporary thought, like Bosustov's heroes, can no longer rest on its own delusions. What used to hold it up, today brings it down. It rushes full tilt in front of the reality that will crush it: the reality that is lived every day.

*

Is this dawning lucidity essentially new? I don't think so. Everyday life always produces the demand for a brighter light, if only because of the need which everyone feels to walk in step with the march of history. But there are more truths in twenty-four hours of a man's life than in all the philosophies. Even a philosopher cannot ignore it, for all his self-contempt; and he learns this contempt from his consolation, philosophy. After somersaulting onto his own shoulders to shout his message to the world from a greater height,

the philosopher finishes by seeing the world inside out; and everything in it goes askew, upside down, to persuade him that he is standing upright. But he cannot escape from his delirium; to refuse to admit it simply makes it more uncomfortable.

The moralists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ruled over a stockroom of commonplaces, but took such pains to conceal this that they built around it a veritable palace of stucco and speculation. A palace of ideas shelters but imprisons lived experience. From its gates emerges a sincere conviction suffused with the Sublime Tone and the fiction of the 'universal man', but it breathes with perpetual anguish. The analyst tries to escape the gradual sclerosis of existence by reaching some essential profundity; and the more he alienates himself by expressing himself according to the dominant imagery of his time (the feudal image in which God, monarchy and the world are indivisibly united), the more his lucidity photographs the hidden face of life, the more it 'invents' the *everyday*.

Enlightenment philosophy accelerated the descent towards the concrete insofar as the concrete was in some ways brought to power with the revolutionary bourgeoisie. From the ruin of Heaven, man fell into the ruins of his own world. What happened? Something like this: ten thousand people are convinced that they have seen a fakir's rope rise into the air, while as many cameras prove that it hasn't moved an inch. Scientific objectivity exposes mystification. Very good, but what does it show us? A coiled rope, of absolutely no interest. I have little inclination to choose between the doubtful pleasure of being mystified and the tedium of contemplating a reality which does not concern me. A reality which I have no grasp on, isn't this the old lie reconditioned, the ultimate stage of mystification?

From now on the analysts are in the streets. Lucidity isn't their only weapon. Their thought is no longer in danger of being imprisoned, either by the false reality of gods, or by the false reality of technocrats!

2

Religious beliefs concealed man from himself; their Bastille walled him up in a pyramidal world with God at the summit and the king just below. Alas, on the fourteenth of July there wasn't enough freedom to be found among the ruins of unitary power to prevent the ruins themselves from becoming another prison. Behind the rent veil of superstition appeared, not naked truth, as Meslier had dreamed, but the birdlime of ideologies. The prisoners of fragmentary power have no refuge from tyranny but the shadow of freedom.

Today there is not an action or a thought that is not trapped in the net of received ideas. The slow fall-out of particles of the exploded myth spreads sacred dust everywhere, choking the spirit and the will to live. Constraints have become less occult, more blatant; less powerful, more numerous. Docility

The dialogue begins.

no longer emanates from priestly magic, it results from a mass of minor hypnoses: news, culture, town planning, publicity, mechanisms of conditioning and suggestion in the service of any order, established or to come. We are like Gulliver lying stranded on the Lilliputian shore with every part of his body tied down; determined to free himself, he looks keenly around him: the smallest detail of the landscape, the smallest contour of the ground, the slightest movement, everything becomes a sign on which his escape may depend. The most certain chances of liberation are born in what is most familiar. Was it ever otherwise? Art, ethics, philosophy bear witness: under the crust of words and concepts, the living reality of non-adaptation to the world is always crouched, ready to spring. Since neither gods nor words can manage to cover it up decently any longer, this commonplace creature roams naked in railway stations and vacant lots; it confronts you at each evasion of yourself, it touches your elbow, catches your eye; and the dialogue begins. You must lose yourself with it or save it with you.

3

Too many corpses strew the paths of individualism and collectivism. Under two apparently contrary rationalities has raged an identical gangsterism, an identical oppression of the isolated man. The hand which smothered Lautreamont returned to strangle Serge Yesenin; one died in the lodging-house of his landlord Jules-Francois Dupuis, the other hung himself in a nationalised hotel. Everywhere the law is verified: 'There is no weapon of your individual will which, once appropriated by others, does not turn against you.' If anyone says or writes that practical reason must henceforth be based on the rights of the individual and the individual alone, he invalidates his own proposition if he doesn't incite his audience to make this statement true for themselves. Such a proof can only be lived, grasped from the inside. That is why everything in the notes that follow should be tested and corrected by the immediate experience of everyone. Nothing is so valuable that it need not be started afresh, nothing is

so rich that it need not be enriched constantly.

*

Just as we distinguish in private life between what a man thinks and says about himself and what he really is and does, everyone has learned to distinguish the rhetoric and the messianic pretensions of political parties from their organization and real interests: what they think they are, from what they are. A man's illusions about himself and others are not basically different from the illusions which groups, classes and parties have about themselves. Indeed, they come from the same source: the dominant ideas, which are the ideas of the dominant class, even if the take an antagonistic form.

The world of isms, whether it envelops the whole of humanity or a single person, is never anything but a world drained of reality, a terribly real seduction by falsehood. The three crushing defeats suffered by the Commune, the Spartakist movement and the Kronstadt sailors showed once and for all what bloodbaths are the outcome of three ideologies of freedom: liberalism, socialism, and Bolshevism. However, before this could be universally understood and admitted, bastard or hybrid forms of these ideologies had to vulgarize their initial atrocity with more telling proofs: concentration camps, Lacoste's Algeria, Budapest. The great collective illusions, anaemic after shedding the blood of so many men, have given way to the thousands of pre-packed ideologies sold by consumer society like so many portable brain-scrambling machines. Will it need as much blood again to show that a hundred thousand pinpricks kill as surely as a couple of blows with a club?

*

What am I supposed to do in a group of militants who expect me to leave in the cloakroom, I won't say a few ideas—for my ideas would have led me to join the group—but the dreams and desires which never leave me, the wish to live authentically and without restraint? What's the use of exchanging one isolation, one monotony, one lie for an-

other? When the illusion of real change has been exposed, a mere change of illusion becomes intolerable. But present conditions are precisely these: the economy cannot stop making us consume more and more, and to consume without respite is to change illusions at an accelerating pace which gradually dissolves the illusion of change. We find ourselves alone, unchanged, frozen in the empty space behind the waterfall of gadgets, family cars and paperbacks.

People without imagination are beginning to tire of the importance attached to comfort, to culture, to leisure, to all that destroys imagination. This means that people are not really tired of comfort, culture and leisure but of the use to which they are put, which is precisely what stops us enjoying them.

The affluent society is a society of voyeurs. To each his own kaleidoscope: a tiny movement of the fingers and the picture changes. You can't lose: two fridges, a mini-car, TV, promotion, time to kill...then the monotony of the images we consume gets the upper hand, reflecting the monotony of the action which produces them, the slow rotation of the kaleidoscope between finger and thumb. There was no mini-car, only an ideology almost unconnected with the automobile machine. Flushed with Pimm's No. 1, we savour a strange cocktail of alcohol and class struggle. Nothing surprising any more, there's the rub! The monotony of the ideological spectacle makes us aware of the passivity of life: survival. Beyond the prefabricated scandals—Scandale perfume, Profumo scandal—a real scandal appears, the scandal of actions drained of their substance to the profit of an illusion which the failure of its enchantment renders more odious every day. Actions weak and pale from nourishing dazzling imaginary compensations, actions pauperised by enriching lofty speculations into which they entered like menials through the ignominious category of 'trivial' or 'commonplace', actions which today are free but exhausted, ready to lose their way once more, or expire under the weight of their own weakness. There they are, in every one of you, familiar, sad, newly returned to the immediate, living reality which was their birthplace. And here you are, bewildered and lost in a new prosaism, a perspective in which near and far coincide.

The concept of class struggle constituted the first concrete, tactical marshalling of the shocks and injuries which men live individually; it was born in the whirlpool of suffering which the reduction of human relationships to mechanisms of exploitation created everywhere in industrial societies. It issued from a will to transform the world and change life.

Such a weapon needed constant adjustment. Yet we see the First International turning its back on artists by making workers' demands the sole basis of a project which Marx had shown to concern all those who sought, in the refusal to be slaves, a full life and a total humanity. Lacenaire, Borel, Lassailly, Buchner, Baudelaire, Holderlin—wasn't this also misery and its radical refusal? Perhaps this mistake was excusable then: I neither know nor care. What is certain is that it is sheer madness a century later, when the economy of consumption is absorbing the economy of production, and the exploitation of labour power is submerged by the exploitation of everyday creativity. The same energy is torn from the worker in his hours of work *and* in his hours of leisure to drive the turbines of power, which the custodians of the old theory lubricate sanctimoniously with their purely formal opposition.

People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth.

PARTICIPATION MADE IMPOSSIBLE: POWER AS THE SUM OF CONSTRAINTS

The mechanisms of wear and tear and destruction: humiliation (2), isolation (3), suffering (4), work (5), decompression (6).

2 HUMILIATION

The economy of everyday life is based on a continuous **exchange** *of humiliations and aggressive attitudes. It conceals a technique of wear and tear (usure), which is itself prey to the* **gift** *of destruction which it invites contradictorily (1). Today, the more man is a social being the more he is an object (2). Decolonisation has not yet begun (3). It will have to give a new value to the old principle of sovereignty (4).*

1

One day, when Rousseau was travelling through a crowded village, he was insulted by a yokel whose spirit delighted the crowd. Rousseau, confused and discountenanced, couldn't think of a word in reply and was forced to take to his heels amidst the jeers of the crowd. By the time he had finally regained his composure and thought of a thousand possible retorts, any one of which would have silenced the joker once and for all, he was at two hours' distance from the village.

Aren't most of the trivial incidents of everyday life like this ridiculous adventure? But in an attenuated and diluted form, reduced to the duration of a step, a glance, a thought, experienced as a muffled impact, a fleeting discomfort barely registered by consciousness and leaving in the mind only a dull irritation at a loss to discover its own origin? The endless minuet of humiliation and its response gives human relation-

ships an obscene hobbling rhythm. In the ebb and flow of the crowds sucked in and crushed together by the coming and going of suburban trains,and coughed out into streets, offices and factories, there is nothing but timid retreats, brutal attacks, smirking faces and scratches delivered for no apparent reason. Soured by unwanted encounters, wine turns to vinegar in the mouth. Innocent and good-natured crowds? What a laugh! Look how they bristle up, threatened on every side, clumsy and embarrassed in the enemy's territory, far, very far from themselves. Lacking knives, they learn to use their elbows and their eyes.

There is no intermission, no truce between attackers and attacked. A flux of barely perceptible signs assails the walker, who is not alone. Remarks, gestures, glances tangle and collide, miss their aim, ricochet like bullets fired at random, which kill even more surely by the continuous nervous tension they produce. All we can do is to enclose ourselves in embarrassing parentheses; like these fingers (I am writing this on a cafe terrace) which slide the tip across the table and the fingers of the waiter which pick it up, while the faces of the two men involved, as if anxious to conceal the infamy which they have consented to, assume an expression of utter indifference.

From the point of view of constraint, everyday life is governed by an economic system in which the production and consumption of insults tends to balance out. The old dream of the theorists of perfect competition thus finds its real perfection in the customs of a democracy given new life by the lack of imagination of the left. Isn't it strange, at first sight, to see the fury with which 'progressives' attack the ruined edifice of free enterprise, as if the capitalists, its official demolition gang, had not themselves already planned its nationalised reconstruction? But it is not so strange, in fact: for the deliberate purpose of keeping all attention fastened on critiques which have already been overtaken by events (after all, anybody can see that capitalism is gradually finding its fulfillment in a planned economy of which the Soviet model is nothing but a primitive form) is to conceal the fact

that the only reconstruction of human relationships envisaged is one based on precisely this economic model, which, because it is obsolete, is available at a knock-down price. Who can fail to notice the alarming persistence with which 'socialist' countries continue to organize life along bourgeois lines? Everywhere it's hats off to family, marriage, sacrifice, work, inauthenticity, while simplified and rationalised homeostatic mechanisms reduce human relationships to 'fair' exchanges of deference and humiliation. And soon, in the ideal democracy of the cyberneticians, everyone will earn without apparent effort a share of unworthiness which he will have the leisure to distribute according to the finest rules of justice. Distributive justice will reach its apogee. Happy the old men who live to see the day!

For me—and for some others, I dare to think—there can be no equilibrium in malaise. Planning is only the antithesis of the free market. Only exchange has been planned, and with it the mutual sacrifice which it entails. But if the word 'innovation' is to keep its proper meaning, it must mean transcending, not tarting up. In fact, a new reality can only be based on the principle of the *gift*. Despite their mistakes and their poverty, I see in the historical experience of workers' councils (1917, 1921, 1934, 1956), and in the pathetic search for friendship and love, a single and inspiring reason not to despair over present 'reality'. Everything conspires to keep secret the positive character of such experiences; doubt is cunningly maintained as to their real importance, even their existence. By a strange oversight, no historian has ever taken the trouble to study how people actually lived during the most extreme revolutionary moments. At such times, the wish to make an end of free exchange in the market of human behaviour shows itself spontaneously but in the form of negation. When malaise is brought into question it shatters under the onslaught of a greater and denser malaise.

In a negative sense, Ravachol's bombs or, closer to our own time, the epic of Caraquemada dispel the confusion which reigns around the total rejection—manifested to a varying

extent, but manifested everywhere—of relationships based on exchange and compromise. I have no doubt, since I have experienced it so many times, that anyone who passes an hour in the cage of constraining relationships feels a profound sympathy for Pierre-Francois Lacenaire and his passion for crime. The point here is not to make an apology for

terrorism, but to recognize it as an action—the most pitiful action and at the same time the most noble—which is capable of fucking up and thus exposing the self-regulating mechanisms of the hierarchical social community. Inscribed in the logic of an unlivable society, murder thus conceived can only appear as the concave form of the *gift.* It is that absence of an intensely desired presence that Mallarme described; the same Mallarme who, at the trial of the Thirty, called the anarchists 'angels of purity'.

My sympathy for the solitary killer ends where tactics begin; but perhaps tactics needs scouts driven by individual despair. However that may be, the new revolutionary tactics—which will be based indissolubly on the historical tradition and on the practice, so widespread and so disregarded, of individual realisation—will have no place for people who only want to mimic the gestures of Ravachol or Bonnot. But on the other hand these tactics will be condemned to theoretical hibernation if they cannot, by other means, attract *collectively* the individuals whom isolation and hatred for the collective lie have already won over to the rational decision to kill or to kill themselves. No murderers—and no humanists either! The first accepts death, the second imposes it. Let ten men meet who are resolved on the lightning of violence rather than the long agony of survival; from this moment, despair ends and tactics begin. Despair is the infantile disorder of the revolutionaries of everyday life.

I still feel today my adolescent admiration for outlaws, not because of an obsolete romanticism but because they expose the alibis by which social power avoids being put *right* on the spot. Hierarchical social organization is like a gigantic racket whose secret, precisely exposed by anarchist terrorism, is to place itself out of reach of the violence it gives rise to, by consuming everybody's energy in a multitude of irrelevant struggles. (A 'humanised' power cannot allow itself recourse to the old methods of war and genocide.) The witnesses for the prosecution can hardly be suspected of anarchist tendencies. The biologist Hans Selye states that 'as specific causes of disease (microbes, undernourishment) disappear, a growing proportion of people die of what are called stress diseases, or diseases of degeneration caused by stress, that is, by the wear and tear resulting from conflicts, shocks, nervous tension, irritations, debilitating rhythms...' From now on, no-one can escape the necessity of conducting his own investigation into the racket which pursues him even into his thoughts, hunts him down even in his dreams. The smallest details take on a major importance. Irritation, fatigue, rudeness, humiliation...cui bono? Who profits by them? And who profits by the stereotyped answers that

Big Brother Common Sense distributes under the label of wisdom, like so many alibis? Shall I be content with explanations that kill me when I have everything to win in a game where *all* the cards are stacked against me?

TENSION HEADACHE

MIGRAINE HEADACHE

CLUSTER HEADACHE

Newsweek

Most common complaint; muscle tightening produces throbbing pain

Usually on one side; migraines begin with changes in blood vessels

Occurs as series of attacks; similar to the migraine but more painful

The handshake ties and unties the knot of encounters. A gesture at once curious and trivial which the French quite accurately say is *exchanged:* isn't it in fact the most simplified form of the social contract? What guarantees are they trying to seal, these hands clasped to the right, to the left, everywhere, with a liberality that seems to make up for a total lack of conviction? That agreement reigns, that social harmony exists, that life in society is perfect? But what still worries us is this need to convince ourselves, to believe it by force of habit, to reaffirm it with the strength of our grip.

Eyes know nothing of these pleasantries; they do not recognize exchange. When our eyes meet someone else's they become uneasy, as if they could make out their own empty, soulless reflection in the other person's pupils. Hardly have they met when they slip aside and try to dodge one another; their lines of flight cross in an invisible point, making an angle whose acuteness expresses the divergence, the deeply felt lack of harmony. Sometimes unison is achieved and eyes connect; the beautiful parallel stare of royal couples in Egyptian sculpture, the misty, melting gaze, brimming with eroticism, of lovers: eyes which devour one another from afar. But most of the time the eyes repudiate the superficial agreement sealed by the handshake. Consider the popularity of the energetic reiteration of social agreement (the phrase 'let's shake on it' indicates its commercial overtones): isn't it a trick played on the senses, a way of dulling the sensitivity of the eyes so that they don't revolt against the emptiness of the spectacle? The good sense of consumer society has brought the old expression 'see things my way' to its logical conclusion: whichever way you look, you see nothing but things.

Become as senseless and easily handled as a brick! That is what social organization is kindly inviting everyone to do. The bourgeoisie has managed to share out irritations more fairly, allowing a greater number of people to suffer them according to rational norms (economic, social, political, legal necessities...) The splinters of constraint produced in this way have in turn fragmented the cunning and the energy devoted collectively to evading or smashing them. The revolutionaries of 1793 were great because they dared to usurp the unitary hold of God over the government of men; the proletarian revolutionaries drew from what they were defending a greatness that they could never have seized from their bourgeois enemy—their strength derived from themselves alone.

A whole ethic based on exchange value, the pleasures of business, the dignity of labour, restrained desires, survival, and on their opposites, pure value, the gratuitous, parasitism, instinctive brutality and death: this is the filthy tub that

human faculties have been bubbling in for nearly two centuries. From these ingredients—refined a little, of course—the cybernéticians are dreaming of cooking up the man of the future. Are we quite sure that we haven't yet arrived at the security of perfectly adapted beings, moving about as unconsciously as insects? For some time now there have been experiments with subliminal advertising: the insertion into films of single frames lasting 1/24 of a second, which are seen by the eye but not registered by consciousness. The first slogans give more than a glimpse of what is to come: 'Don't drive too fast' and 'Go to church'. But what does a minor improvement like this represent in comparison with the whole immense conditioning machine, each of whose cogs—town planning, publicity, ideology, culture—is capable of dozens of comparable improvements? Once again, knowledge of the conditions which are going to *continue* to be imposed on people if they don't look out is less relevant than the sensation of living in such degradation *now.* Huxley's *Brave New World,* Orwell's *1984* and Touraine's *Cinquieme Coup de Trompette* push back into the future a shudder of horror which one look at the present would produce; and it is the present that develops consciousness and the will to refuse. Compared with my present imprisonment the future holds no interest for me.

*

The feeling of humiliation is nothing but the feeling of being an object. Once it has been understood as such, it becomes the basis for a combative lucidity for which the critique of the organisation of life cannot be separated from the immediate inception of the project of living differently. Construction can begin only on the foundation of individual despair and its transcendence; the efforts made to disguise this despair and pass it off under another wrapper are enough to prove it.

What is the illusion which stops us seeing the disintegration of values, the ruin of the world, inauthenticity, non-totality?

Is it that I think that I am happy? Hardly! Such a belief doesn't stand up to analysis any better than it withstands the blasts of anguish. On the contrary, it is a belief in the happiness of others, an inexhaustible source of envy and jealousy which gives us a vicarious feeling of existence. I envy, therefore I am. To define oneself by reference to others is to define oneself as other. And the other is always object. So that life is measured in degrees of humiliation. The more you choose your own humiliation, the more you 'live': the more you live the orderly life of things. Here is the cunning of reification, by which it passes undetected, like arsenic in the jam.

The gentleness of these methods of oppression throws a certain light on the perversion which prevents me from shouting out 'the emperor has no clothes' each time the sovereignty of my everyday life reveals its poverty. Obviously police brutality is still going strong, to say the least. Everywhere it raises its head the kindly souls of the left quite rightly condemn it. But what do they do about it? Do they urge people to arm themselves? Do they call for legitimate reprisals? Do they encourage pig-hunts like the one which decorated the trees of Budapest with the finest fruits of the AVO? No: they organize peaceful demonstrations at which their trade-union police force treats anyone who questions their orders as an agent provocateur. The new policemen are ready to take over. The social psychologists will govern without truncheons: no more tough cops, only con cops. Oppressive violence is about to be transformed into a host of reasonably distributed pinpricks. The same people who denounce police violence from the heights of their lofty ideals are urging us on towards a state based on polite violence. Humanism merely upholsters the machine in Kafka's "Penal Colony". Less grinding and shouting! Blood upsets you? Never mind: men will be bloodless. The promised land of survival will be the realm of peaceful death, and it is this peace-

ful death that the humanists are fighting for. No more Guernicas, no more Auschwitzes, no more Hiroshimas, no more Setifs. Hooray! But what about the impossibility of living, what about this stifling mediocrity and this absence of passion? What about the jealous fury in which the rankling of never being ourselves drives us to imagine that other people are happy? What about this feeling of never really being inside your own skin? Let nobody say these are minor details or secondary points. There are no negligible irritations: gangrene can start in the slightest graze. The crises that shake the world are not fundamentally different from the conflicts in which my actions and thoughts confront the hostile forces that entangle and deflect them. (How could it be otherwise when history, in the last analysis, is only important to me in so far as it affects my own life?). Sooner or later the continual division and re-division of aggravations will split the atom of unlivable reality and liberate a nuclear energy which nobody suspected behind so much passivity and gloomy resignation. That which produces the common good is always terrible.

3

From 1945 to 1960, colonialism was a fairy godmother to the left. With a new enemy on the scale of Fascism, the left never had to define itself positively, starting from itself (there was nothing there); it was able to affirm itself by negating something else. In this way it was able to accept itself as a thing, part of an order of things in which things are everything and nothing.

Nobody dared to announce the end of colonialism for fear that it would spring up all over the place like a jack-in-the-box whose lid doesn't shut properly. In fact, from the moment when the collapse of colonial power revealed the colonialism inherent in all power over men, the problems of race and colour became about as important as crossword puzzles. What effect did the clowns of the left have as they trotted about on

their anti-racialist and anti-anti-semitic hobbyhorses? In the last analysis, that of smothering the cries of tormented Jews and negroes which were uttered by all those who were not Jews or negroes, starting with the Jews and negroes themselves. Of course, I would not dream of questioning the spirit of generosity which has inspired recent anti-racialism. But I lose interest in the past as soon as I can no longer affect it. I am speaking here and now, and nobody can persuade me, in the name of Alabama or South Africa and their spectacular exploitation to forget that the epicentres of such problems lies in me and

in each being who is humiliated and scorned by every aspect of our own society.

I shall not renounce my share of violence.

Human relationships can hardly be discussed in terms of more or less tolerable conditions, more or less admissible indignities. Qualification is irrelevant. Do insults like 'wog' or 'nigger' hurt more than a word of command? When he is summoned, told off, or ordered around by a policeman, a boss, an authority, who doesn't feel deep down, in moments of lucidity, that *he* is a darkie and a gook?

The old colonials provided us with a perfect identi-kit portrait of power when they predicted the descent into bestiality and wretchedness of those who found their presence undesirable Law and order come first, says the guard to the prisoner. Yesterday's anti-colonialists are trying to humanise the generalised colonialism of power. They become its watchdogs in the cleverest way: by barking at all the after-effects of past inhumanity.

Before he tried to get himself made President of Martinique, Aime Cesaire made a famous remark: "The bourgeoisie has found itself unable to solve the major problems which its own existence has produced: the colonial problem and the problem of the proletariat." He forgot to add: "For they are one and the same problem, a problem which anyone who separates them will fail to understand."

I read in Gouy's **Histoire de France**: 'The slightest insult to the King meant immediate death'. In the American Constitution: 'The people are sovereign'. In Pouget's **Pere Peinard**: 'Kings get fat off their sovereignty, while we are starving on ours'. Courbon's **Secret du Peuple** tells me: 'The people today means the mass of men to whom all respect is denied'. Here we have, in a few lines, the misadventures of the principle of sovereignty.

Kings designated as *'subjects'* the objects of their arbitrary will. No doubt this was an attempt to wrap the radical inhumanity of its domination in a humanity of idyllic bonds. The respect due to the King's person cannot in itself be criticised. It is odious only because it is based on the right to humiliate by

subordination. Contempt rotted the thrones of kings. But what about the citizen's sovereignty: the rights multiplied by bourgeois vanity and jealousy, sovereignty distributed like a dividends to each individual? What about the divine right of kings democratically shared out?

Today, France contains twenty-four million mini-kings, of which the greatest—the bosses—are great only in their ridiculousness. The sense of respect has become degraded to the point where humiliation is all that it demands. Democratised into public functions and roles, the monarchic principle floats with its belly up, like a dead fish: only its most repulsive aspect is visible. Its will to be absolutely and unreservedly superior has disappeared. Instead of basing our lives on our sovereignty, we try to base our sovereignty on other people's lives. The manners of slaves.

3 ISOLATION

Para no sentirme solo
por los siglos de los siglos

All we have in common is the illusion of being together. And beyond the illusion of permitted anodynes there is only the collective desire to destroy isolation (1).—Impersonal relationships are the no man's land of isolation. By producing isolation, contemporary social organization signs its own death-sentence (2).

1

It was as if they were in a cage whose door was wide open without their being able to escape. Nothing outside the cage had any importance, because nothing else existed any more. They stayed in the cage, estranged from everything except the cage, without even a flicker of desire for anything outside the bars. It would have been abnormal—impossible in fact—to escape into something which had neither reality nor importance. Absolutely impossible. For inside this cage, in which they had been born and in which they would die, the only tolerable framework of experience was the Real, which was simply an irresistible instinct to act so that things should have importance. Only if things had some importance could one breathe, and suffer. It seemed that there was an understanding between them and the silent dead, that it should be so, for the habit of acting so that things had some importance had become a human instinct, and one which was apparently eternal. Life was the im-

portant thing, and the Real was part of the instinct which gave life a little meaning. The instinct didn't try to imagine what might lay beyond the Real, because there was nothing beyond it. Nothing important. The door remained open and the cage became more and more painful in its Reality which was so important for countless reasons and in countless ways.

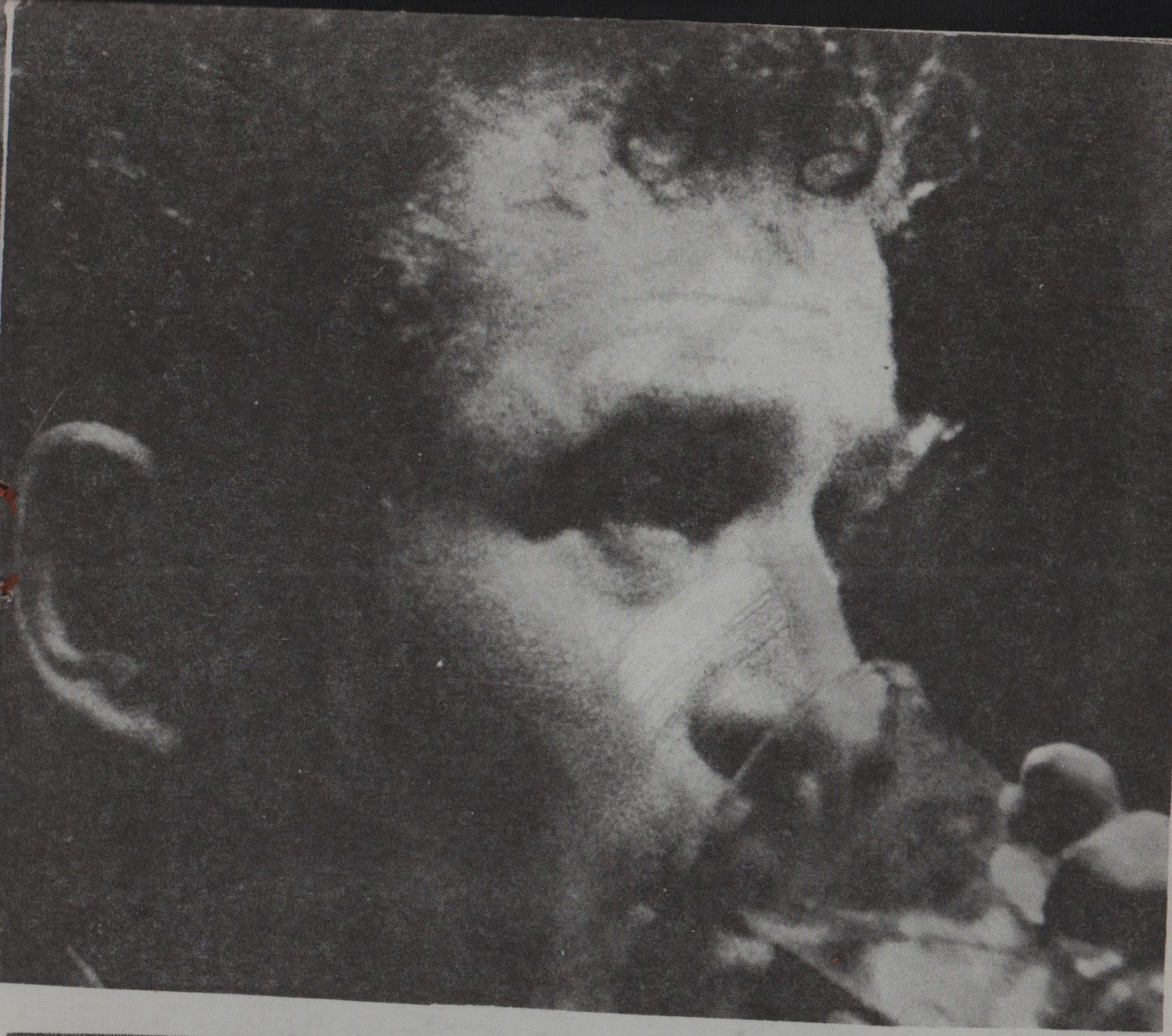
We have never emerged from the times of the slavers.

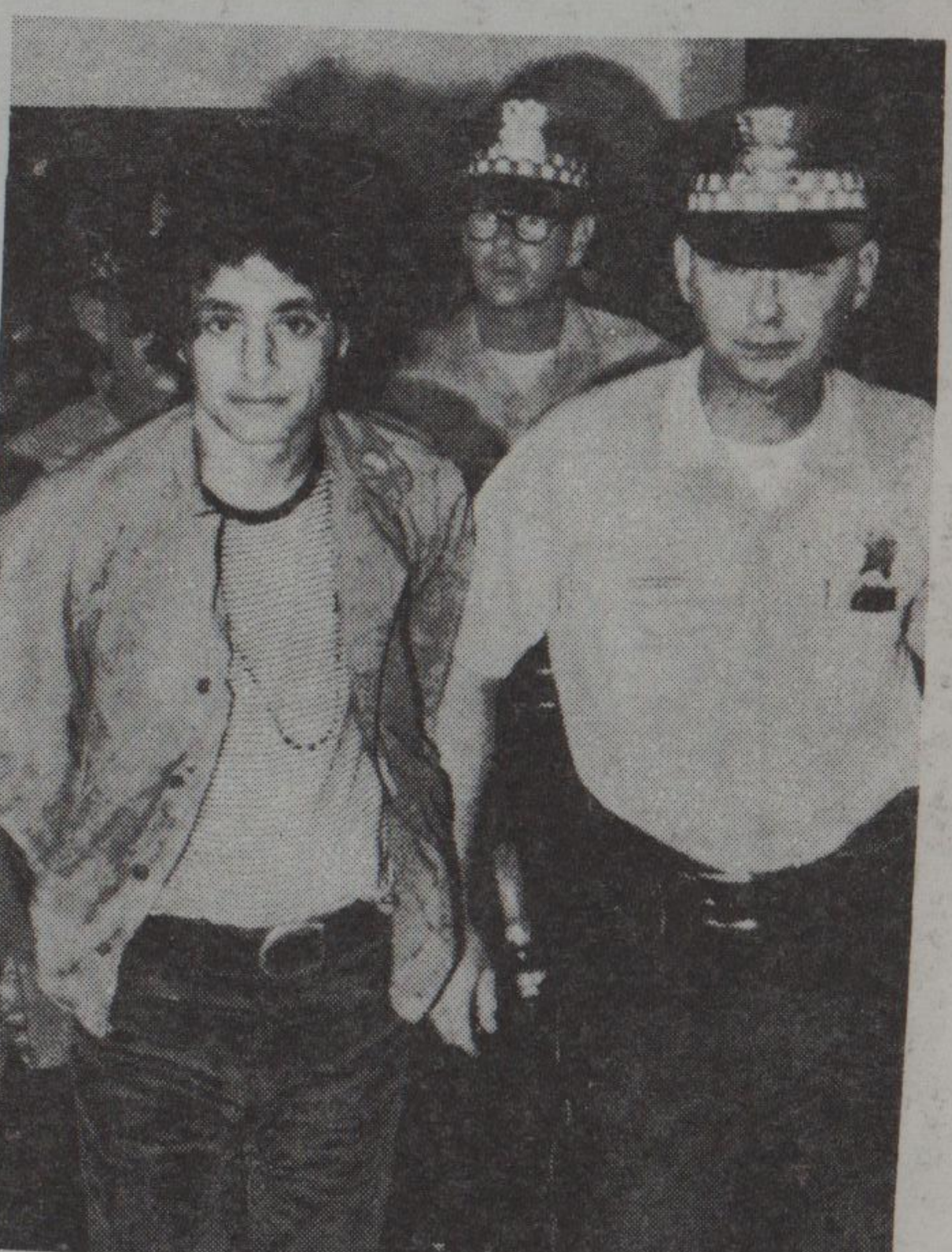
On the public transport which throws them against one another with statistical indifference, people wear an untenable expression of disillusion, pride, and contempt, like the natural effect of death on a toothless mouth. The atmosphere of false communication makes everyone the policeman of his own encounters. The instincts of flight and aggression trail the knights of wage-labour, who must now rely on subways and suburban trains for their pitiful wanderings. If men are transformed into scorpions who sting themselves and one another, isn't it really because nothing has happened, and human beings with empty eyes and flabby brains have 'mysteriously' become mere shadows of men, ghosts of men, and in some ways are no longer men except in name?

We have nothing in common except the illusion of being together. Certainly the seeds of an authentic collective life are lying dormant within the illusion itself—there is no illusion without a real basis—but real community remains to be created. The power of the lie sometimes manages to erase the bitter reality of isolation from men's minds. In a crowded street we can occasionally forget that suffering and separation are still present. And, since it is only the lie's power that makes us forget, suffering and separation are reinforced; but in the end the lie itself comes to grief through relying on this support. For a moment comes when no illusion can measure up to our distress.

Malaise invades me as the crowd around me grows. The compromises I have made with stupidity under the pressure of circumstances rush to meet me, swimming towards me in hallucinating waves of faceless heads. Edvard Munch's famous


JACKSON
PATRIOT





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painting, *The Cry*, evokes for me something I feel ten times a day. A man carried along by a crowd, which only he can see, suddenly screams out in an attempt to break the spell, to call himself back to himself, to get back inside his own skin. The tacit acknowledgements, fixed smiles, lifeless words, listlessness and humiliation sprinkled in his path suddenly surge into him, driving him out of his desires and his dreams and exploding the illusion of 'being together'. People touch without meeting; isolation accumulates but is never realised; emptiness overcomes us as the density of the crowd grows. The crowd drags me out of myself and installs thousands of little sacrifices in my empty presence.

Everywhere neon signs are flashing out the dictum of Plotinus: *All beings are together though each remains separate.* But we only need to hold out our hands and touch one another, to raise our eyes and meet one another, and everything comes into focus, as if by magic.

*

Like crowds, drugs, and love, alcohol can befuddle the most lucid mind. Alcohol turns the concrete wall of isolation into a paper screen which the actors can tear according to their fancy, for it arranges everything on the stage of an intimate theatre. A generous illusion, and thus still more deadly.

In a gloomy bar where everyone is bored to death a drunken young man breaks his glass, then picks up a bottle and smashes it against the wall. Nobody gets excited; the disappointed young man lets himself be thrown out. Yet everyone there could have done exactly the same thing. He alone made the thought concrete, crossing the first radioactive belt of isolation: interior isolation, the introverted separation between self and outside world. Nobody responded to a sign which he thought was explicit. He remained alone like the,

hooligan who burns down a church or kills a policeman, at one with himself but condemned to exile as long as other people remain exiled from their own existence. He has not escaped from the magnetic field of isolation; he is suspended in a zone of zero gravity. All the same, the indifference which greets him allows him to hear the sound of his own cry; even if this revelation tortures him, he knows that he will have to start again in another register, more loudly; with more *coherence.*

People will be together only in a common wretchedness as long as each isolated being refuses to understand that a gesture of liberation, however weak and clumsy it may be, always bears an authentic communication, an adequate personal message. The repression which strikes down the libertarian rebel falls on everyone: everyone's blood flows with the blood of a murdered Durruti. Whenever freedom retreats one inch, there is a hundredfold increase in the weight of the order of *things.* Excluded from authentic participation, men's actions stray into the fragile illusion of being together, or else into its opposite, the abrupt and total rejection of society. They swing from one to the other like a pendulum turning the hands on the clock-face of death.

*

Love in its turn swells the illusion of unity. Most of the time it gets fucked up and miscarries. Its songs are crippled by the fear of always returning to the same single note: whether there are two of us, or even ten, we will finish up alone as before. What drives us to despair is not the immensity of our unsatisfied desires, but the moment when our newborn passion discovers its own emptiness. The insatiable desire to fall in love with so many pretty girls is born in anguish and the fear of loving: we are so afraid of never escaping from meetings with *objects.* The dawn when lovers leave each other's arms is the same dawn that breaks on the execution of revolutionaries without a revolution. Isolation *a deux* can-

not confront the effect of general isolation. Pleasure is broken off prematurely and lovers find themselves naked in the world, their actions suddenly ridiculous and pointless. No love is possible in an unhappy world.

The boat of love breaks up in the current of everyday life.

Are you ready to smash the reefs of the old world before they wreck your desires? Lovers should love their pleasure with more consequence and more poetry. A story tells how Prince Shekour captured a town and offered it to his favourite for a smile. Some of us have fallen in love with the pleasure of loving without reserve,—passionately enough to offer our love the magnificent bed of a revolution.

To adapt to the world is a game of heads-you-win, tails-I-lose in which one decides a priori that the negative is positive and that the impossibility of living is an essential precondition of life. Alienation never takes such firm root as when it passes itself off as an inalienable good. Transformed into positivity, the consciousness of isolation is none other than the private consciousness, that entail of individualism which respectable people drag around like their most sacred birthright, unprofitable but cherished. It is a sort of pleasure-anxiety which prevents us both from settling down in the community of illusion and from remaining trapped in the cellar of isolation.

The no man's land of impersonal relationships stretches between the blissful acceptance of false collectivities and the total rejection of society. It is the morality of shopkeepers: 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours', 'you mustn't let people get too familiar': politeness, the art (for art's sake) of non-communication.

Let's face it: human relationships being what social hierarchy has made of them, impersonality is the least tiring form of contempt. It allows us to pass without useless friction through the mill of daily contacts. It does not prevent us from dream-

ing of superior forms of civility, such as the courtesy of Lacenaire, on the eve of his execution, urging a friend: 'Above all, please convey my gratitude to M. Scribe. Tell him that one day, suffering from the pangs of hunger, I presented myself at his house in order to worm some money out of him. He complied with my request with a touching generosity; I am sure he will remember. Tell him that he acted wisely, for I had in my pocket, ready to hand, the means of depriving France of a dramatist.'

But the sterilized zone of impersonal relationships only offers a truce in the endless battle against isolation, a brief transit which leads to communication, or more frequently towards the illusion of community. I would explain in this way my reluctance to stop a stranger to ask him the way or to 'pass the time of day': to seek contact in this doubtful fashion. The pleasantness of impersonal relationships is built on sand; and empty time never did me any good.

No love is possible in an unhappy world.

Life is made impossible with such cynical thoroughness that the balanced pleasure-anxiety of impersonal relationships, functions as a cog in the general machine for destroying people. In the end it seems better to start out right away with a radical and tactically worked-out refusal, rather than to go around knocking politely on all the doors where one mode of survival is exchanged for another.

'It would be a drag to die so young', wrote Jacques Vache two years before his suicide. If desparation at the prospect of surviving does not unite with a new grasp of reality to transform the years to come, only two ways out are left for the isolated man: the pisspot of parties and pataphysico-religious sects, or immediate death with Umour. A sixteen-year-old murderer recently explained: 'I did it because I was bored.' Anyone who has felt the drive to self-destruction welling up inside him knows with what weary negligence he might one day happen to kill the organizers of his boredom. One day. If he was in the mood.

After all, if an individual refuses both to adapt to the violence of the world, and to embrace the violence of the unadapted, what can he do? If he doesn't raise his will to achieve unity with the world and with himself to the level of coherent theory and practice, the vast silence of society's open spaces will raise around him the palace of solipsist madness.

From the depths of their prisons, those who have been convicted of 'mental illness' add the screams of their strangled revolt to the sum of negativity. What a potential Fourier was cleverly destroyed in this patient described by the psychiatrist Volnat: 'He began to lose all capacity to distinguish between himself and the external world. Everything that happened in the world also happened in his body. He could not put a bottle between two shelves in a cupboard, because the shelves might come together and break the bottle. And that would hurt inside his head, as if his head was wedged between the shelves. He could not shut a suitcase, because pressing the things in the case would press inside his head. If he walked into the street after closing all the doors and windows of his

house, he felt uncomfortable, because his brain was compressed by the air, and he had to go back home to open a door or a window. "For me to be at ease," he said, "I must have open space. [...] I must have the *freedom of my space.* It's the battle with the *things* all around me." '

The consul stopped. He read the inscription: 'No se puede vivir sin amor' (Lowry, *Under the Volcano*)

4 SUFFERING

Suffering caused by natural alienation has given way to suffering caused by social alienation, while remedies have become justifications (1). Where there is no justification, exorcism takes its place (2). But from now on no subterfuge can hide the existence of an organization of suffering, stemming from a social organization based on the distribution of constraints (3). Consciousness reduced to the consciousness of constraints is the antechamber of death. The despair of consciousness makes the murderers of Order; the consciousness of despair makes the murderers of Disorder (4).

The symphony of spoken and shouted words animates the decor of the streets. Over a rumbling basso continuo develop grave and cheerful themes, hoarse and singsong voices, nostalgic fragments of sentences. There is a sonorous architecture which overlays the outline of streets and buildings, reinforcing or counteracting the attractive or repulsive tone of a district. But from Notting Hill to Oxford Street the basic chord is the same everywhere: its sinister resonance has sunk so deeply into everyone's mind that it no longer surprises them. 'That's life', 'these things are sent to try us', 'you have to take the rough with the smooth', 'that's the way it goes'...this lament whose weft unites the most diverse conversations has so perverted our sensibility that it passes for the commonest of human dispositions. Where it is not accepted, despair disappears from sight. Nobody seems worried that *joy* has been absent from European music for nearly two centuries; which says everything. Consume, consume:

the ashes have consumed the fire.

How have suffering and its rites of exorcism usurped this importance? Undoubtedly because of the struggle to survive imposed on the first men by a hostile nature, full of crual and mysterious forces. In the face of danger, the weakness of men discovered in social agglomeration not only protection but a way of co-operating with nature, making a truce with her and even transforming her. In the struggle against natural alienation—death, sickness, suffering—alienation became social. We escaped the rigours of exposure, hunger and discomfort only to fall into the trap of slavery. We were enslaved by gods, by men, by language. And such a slavery had its positive side: there was a certain greatness in living in terror of a god who also made you invincible. This mixture of human and inhuman would, it is true, be a sufficient explanation of the ambiguity of suffering, its way of appearing right through history at once as shameful sickness and salutary evil—as a good thing, after a fashion. But this would be to overlook the ignoble slag of religion, above all christian mythology, which devoted all its genius to perfecting this morbid and depraved precept: protect yourself against mutilation by mutilating yourself!

'Since Christ's coming, we are delivered not from the evil of suffering but from the evil of suffering uselessly', writes the Jesuit father Charles. How right he is: power's problem has always been, not to abolish itself, but to give itself reasons so as not to oppress 'uselessly'. Christianity, that unhealthy therapeutic, pulled off its masterstroke when it married man to suffering, whether on the basis of divine grace or natural law. From prince to manager, from priest to expert, from father confessor to social worker, it is always the principle of useful suffering and willing sacrifice that forms the most solid base for hierarchical power. Whatever reasons it invokes–a better world, the next world, building communism or fighting communism—suffering accepted is always christian, *always*. Today the clerical vermin have given way to the missionaries of a christ dyed red. Everywhere official pronouncements bear in their watermark the disgusting image

of the crucified man, everywhere comrades are urged to sport the stupid halo of the militant martyr. And with their blood, the kitchen-hands of the good Cause are mixing up the sausage-meat of the future: less cannon-fodder, more doctrine-fodder!

To begin with, bourgeois ideology seemed determined to root out suffering with as much persistence as it devoted to the pursuit of the religions that it hated. Infatuated with progress, comfort, profit, wellbeing, it had enough weapons—if not real weapons, at least imaginary ones—to convince everyone of its will to put a scientific end to the evil of suffering and the evil of faith. As we know, all it did was to invent new anaesthetics and new superstitions.

Without God, suffering became 'natural', inherent in 'human nature'; it would be overcome, but only after more suffering: the martyrs of science, the victims of progress, the lost generations. But in this very movement the idea of natural suffering betrayed its social root. When Human Nature was removed, suffering became social, inherent in social existence. But of course, revolutions demonstrated that the social evil of pain was not a metaphysical principle: that a form of society could exist from which the pain of living would be excluded. History shattered the social ontology of suffering, but suffering, far from disappearing, found new reasons for existence in the exigencies of *History*, which had suddenly become trapped, in its turn, in a one-way street. 'China prepares chiidren for the classless society by teaching them love of their country, love of their family, and love of work. Thus historical ontology picks up the remains of all the metaphysical systems of the past: an sich, God, Nature, Man, Society. From now on, men will have to make history by fighting History itself, because History has become the last ontological earthwork of power, the last con by which it hides, behind the promise of a long weekend, its will to endure until the Saturday which will never come. Beyond fetishized history, suffering is revealed as stemming from hierarchical social organization. And when the will to put an end to hierarchical power has sufficiently tickled the

consciousness of men, everyone will admit that freedom in arms and the weight of constraints have nothing metaphysical about them.

2

While it was placing happiness and freedom on the order of the day, technological civilization was inventing the *ideology* of happiness and freedom. Thus it condemned itself to creating no more than the freedom of apathy, happiness in passivity. But at least this invention, perverted though it was, had denied that suffering was inherent in the human condition, that such an inhuman condition could last for ever. That is why bourgeois thought fails when it tries to provide consolation for suffering; none of its justifications are as powerful as the hope which was born from its initial bet on technology and wellbeing.

Desperate fraternity in sickness is the worst thing that can happen to a civilization. In the twentieth century, death terrifies men less than the absence of real life. All these dead, mechanised, specialised actions, stealing a little bit of life a thousand times a day, until the exhaustion of mind and body, until that death which is not the end of life but the final saturation with absence; this is what lends a dangerous charm to dreams of apocalypses, gigantic destructions, complete annihilations, cruel, clean and total deaths. Auschwitz and Hiroshima are indeed the 'comfort of nihilism'. Let impotence in the face of suffering become a collective sentiment, and the demand for suffering and death can sweep a whole community. Consciously or not, most people would rather die than live a permanently unsatisfying life. Look at anti-bomb marchers: most of them were nothing but penitents trying to exorcise their desire to disappear with all the rest of humanity. They would deny it, of course, but their miserable faces gave them away. The only real joy is revolutionary.

Perhaps it is in order to ensure that a universal desire to perish does not take hold of men that a whole spectacle is organized around particular sufferings. A sort of nationalised philanthropy impels each man to find consolation for his own infirmities in the spectacle of other people's.

Consider disaster photographs, stories of cuckolded singers, the ridiculous dramas of the gutter press; hospitals, asylums, and prisons: real museums of suffering for the use of those whose fear of entering them makes them happy to be outside. I sometimes feel such a diffuse suffering dispersed through me that I find relief in the chance misfortune that concretises and justifies it, offers it a legitimate outlet. Nothing will dissuade me of this: the sadness I feel after a separation, a failure, a bereavement doesn't reach me from the outside like an arrow but wells up from inside me like a spring freed by a landslide. There are wounds which allow the spirit to utter a long-stifled cry. Despair never lets go its prey; it is only the prey which isolates despair in the end of a love or the death of a child, where there is only its shadow. Mourning is a pretext, a convenient way of spitting out nothingness in small drops. The tears, the cries and howls of childhood remain imprisoned in the hearts of men. For ever? In you also the emptiness is growing.

3

Another word about the alibis of power. Suppose that a tyrant took pleasure in throwing prisoners who had been flayed alive into a small cell; suppose that to hear their screams and see them scramble each time they brushed against one another amused him a lot, at the same time causing him to meditate on human nature and the curious behaviour of men. Suppose that at the same time and in the same country there were philosophers and wise men who explained to the worlds of science and art that suffering had to do with the collective life of men, the inevitable presence of Others, society as such—wouldn't we be right to consider these men the tyrant's watchdogs? By proclaiming such theses as these,

a certain existentialist conception has demonstrated not only the collusion of left intellectuals with power, but also the crude trick by which an inhuman social organization attributes the responsibility for its cruelties to its victims themselves. A nineteenth-century critic remarked: 'Throughout contemporary literature we find the tendency to regard individual suffering as a social evil and to make the organization of our society responsible for the misery and degradation of its members. This is a profoundly new idea: suffering is no longer treated as a matter of fatality.' Certain thinkers steeped in fatalism have not been troubled overmuch by such novelties: consider Sartre's hell-is-other-people, Freud's death instinct, Mao's historical necessity. After all, what distinguishes these doctrines from the stupid 'it's just human nature'?

Hierarchical social organization is like a system of hoppers lined with sharp blades. While it flays us alive, power cleverly persuades us that we are flaying each other. It is true that to limit myself to writing this is to risk fostering a new fatalism; but I certainly intend in writing it that nobody should limit himself to reading it.

*

Altruism is the other side of the coin of 'hell-is-other-people'; only this time mystification appears under a positive sign. Let's put an end to this old soldier crap once and for all! For others to interest me I must first find in myself the energy for such an interest. What binds me to others must grow out of what binds me to the most exuberant and demanding part of my will to live; not the other way round. It is always myself that I am looking for in other people; my enrichment, my realisation. Let everyone understand this and 'each for himself' taken to its ultimate conclusion will be transformed into 'all for each'. The freedom of one will be the freedom of all. A community which is not built on the demands of individuals and their dialectic can only reinforce the oppressive violence of power. The Other in whom I do not find myself is nothing but a thing, and altruism leads me to the love of things, To the love of my isolation.

Seen from the viewpoint of altruism, or of solidarity, that altruism of the left, the sentiment of equality is standing on its head. What is it but the common anguish of associates who are lonely together, humiliated, fucked up, beaten, deprived, contented together, the anguish of unattached particles, hoping to be joined together, not in reality, but in a mystical union, any union, that of the Nation or that of the Labour Movement, it doesn't matter which so long as it makes you feel like those drunken evenings when we're all pals together? Equality in the great family of man reeks of the incense of religious mystification. You need a blocked-up nose to miss the stink.

For myself, I recognize no equality except that which my will to live according to my desires recognizes in the will to live of others. Revolutionary equality will be indivisibly individual and collective.

4

The perspective of power has only one horizon: death. And life goes to this well of despair so often that in the end it falls in and drowns. Wherever the fresh water of life stagnates, the features of the drowned man reflect the faces of the living: the positive, looked at closely, turns out to be negative, the young are already old and everything we are building is already a ruin. In the realm of despair, lucidity blinds just as much as falsehood. We die of not knowing, struck from behind. In addition, the knowledge of the death that awaits us only increases the torture and brings on the agony. The disease of attrition that checks, shackles, forbids our actions eats us away more surely than a cancer, but nothing spreads the disease like the acute consciousness of this attrition. I remain convinced that nothing could save a man who was continually asked: have you noticed the hand that, with all due respect, is killing you? To evaluate the effect of each tiny persecution, to estimate neurologically the weight of each constraint, would be enough to flood the strongest individual with a single feeling, the feeling of total

and terrible powerlessness. The maggots of constraint are spawned in the very depths of the mind; nothing human can resist them.

Sometimes I feel as if power is making me like itself: a great energy on the point of collapsing, a rage powerless to break out, a desire for wholeness suddenly petrified. An impotent order survives only by ensuring the impotence of its slaves: Franco and Batista demonstrated this fact with brio when they castrated captured revolutionaries. The regimes jokingly known as 'democratic' merely humanise castration. At first sight, to bring on old age prematurely seems less feudal than the use of knife and ligature. But only at first sight: for as soon as a lucid mind has understood that impotence now strikes through the mind itself, we might as well pack up and go home.

There is a kind of understanding which is allowed by power because it serves its purposes. To borrow one's lucidity from the light of power is to illuminate the darkness of despair, to feed truth on lies. Thus the aesthetic stage is defined: either death against power, or death in power: Arthur Cravan and Jacques Vache on one side, the S.S, the mercenary and the hired killer on the other. For them death is a logical and natural end, the final confirmation of a permanent state of affairs, the last dot of a lifeline on which, in the end, nothing was written. Everyone who does not resist the almost universal attraction of power meets the same fate: the stupid and confused always, very often the intelligent too. The same rift is to be found in Drieu and Jacques Rigaux, but they came down on different sides: the impotence of the first was moulded in submission and servility, the revolt of the second smashed itself prematurely against the impossible. The despair of consciousness makes the murderers of Order, the consciousness of despair makes the murderers of Disorder. The fall back into conformity of the so-called anarchists of the right is caused by the same gravitational pull as the fall of damned archangels into the iron jaws of suffering. The rattles of counterrevolution echo through the vaults of despair.

Suffering is the pain of constraints. An atom of pure delight, no matter how small, will hold it at bay. To work on the side of delight and authentic festivity can hardly be distinguished from preparing for a general insurrection.
In our times, people are invited to take part in a gigantic hunt with myths and received ideas as quarry, but for safety's sake they are sent without weapons, or, worse, with paper weapons of pure speculation, into the swamp of constraints where they finally stick. Perhaps we will get our first taste of delight by pushing the ideologists of demystification in front of us, so that we can see how they make out, and either take advantage of their exploits or advance over their bodies.

As Rosanov says, men are crushed under the wardrobe. Without lifting up the wardrobe it is impossible to deliver whole peoples from their endless and unbearable suffering. It is terrible that even one man should be crushed under such a weight: to want to breathe, and not be able to. The wardrobe rests on everybody, and everyone gets his inalienable share of suffering. And everybody tries to lift up the wardrobe, but not with the same conviction, not with the same energy. A curious, groaning civilization.

Thinkers ask themselves: 'What? Men under the wardrobe? However did they get there?' All the same, they got there. And if someone comes along and proves in the name of objectivity that the burden can never be removed, each of his words adds to the weight of the wardrobe, that object which he means to *describe* with the universality of his 'objective consciousness'. And the whole christian spirit is there, fondling suffering like a good dog and handing out photographs of crushed but smiling men. 'The rationality of the wardrobe is always the best', proclaim the thousands of books published every day to be stacked in the wardrobe. And all the while everyone wants to breathe and no-one can breathe, and many say 'We will breathe later', and most do not die, because they are already dead.

It is now or never.

5 THE DECLINE AND FALL OF WORK

The duty to produce alienates the passion for creation. Productive labour is part and parcel of the technology of law and order. The working day grows shorter as the empire of conditioning extends.

In an industrial society which confuses work and productivity, the necessity of producing has always been an enemy of the desire to create. What spark of humanity, of a possible creativity, can remain alive in a being dragged out of sleep at six every morning, jolted about in suburban trains, deafened by the racket of machinery, bleached and steamed by meaningless sounds and gestures, spun dry by statistical controls, and tossed out at the end of the day into the entrance halls of railway stations, those cathedrals of departure for the hell of weekdays and the nugatory paradise of weekends, where the crowd communes in weariness and boredom? From adolescence to retirement each 24-hour cycle repeats the same shattering bombardment, like bullets' hitting a window: mechanical repetition, time-which-is money, submission to bosses, boredom, exhaustion. From the butchering of youth's energy to the gaping wound of old age, life cracks in every direction under the blows of forced labour. Never before has a civilisation reached such a degree of contempt for life; never before has a generation, drowned in mortification, felt such a rage to live. The same people who are murdered slowly in the mechanised slaughterhouses of work are also arguing, singing, drinking, dancing, making love, holding the streets, picking up weapons and inventing a

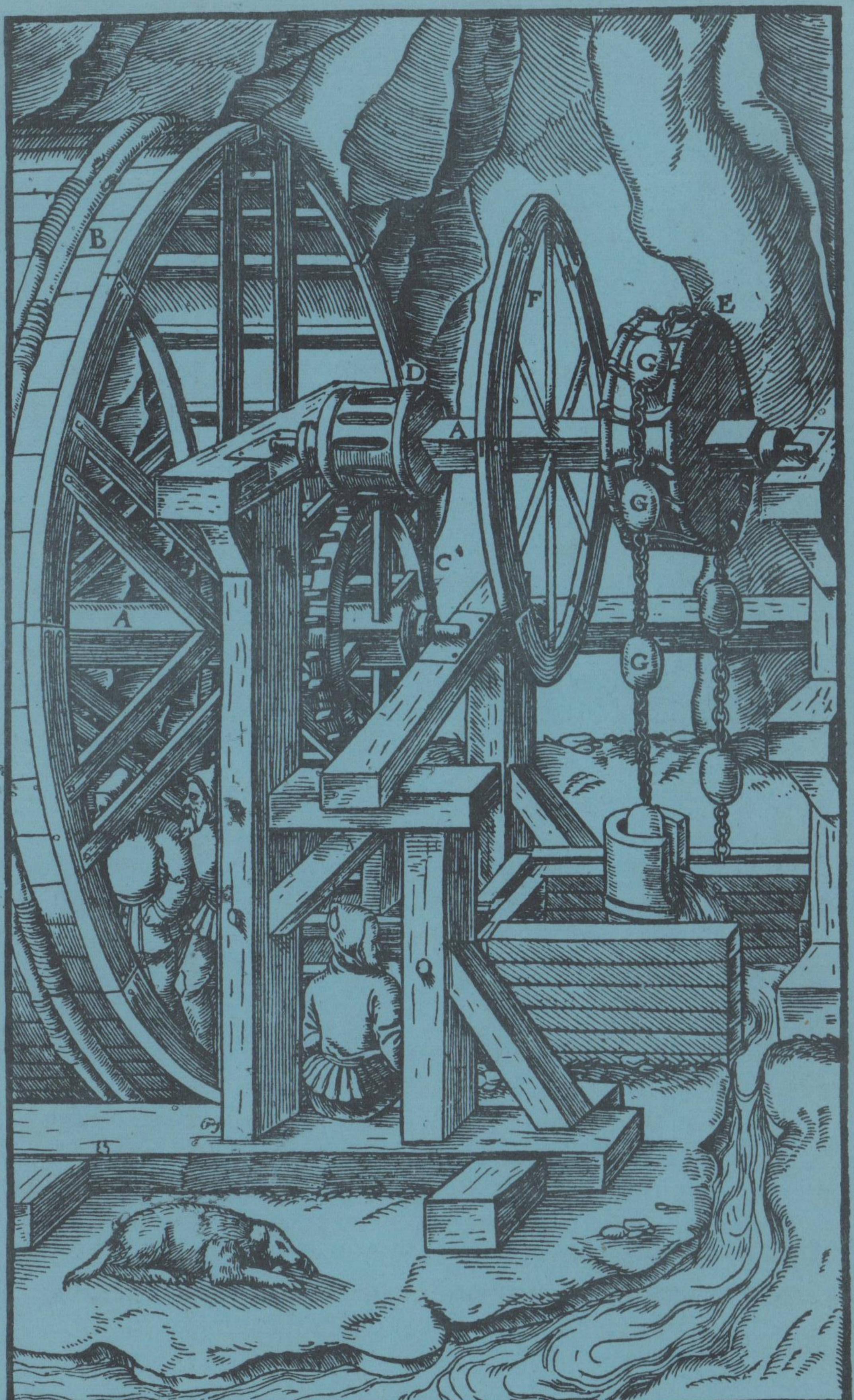
new poetry. Already the front against forced labour is being formed; its gestures of refusal are moulding the consciousness of the future. Every call for productivity in the conditions chosen by capitalist and Soviet economy is a call to slavery.

The necessity of production is so easily proved that any hack philosopher of industrialism can fill ten books with it. Unfortunately for these neo-economistic thinkers, these proofs belong to the nineteenth century, a time when the misery of the working classes made the right to work the counterpart of the right to be a slave, claimed at the dawn of time by prisoners about to be massacred. Above all it was a question of surviving, of not disappearing physically. The imperatives of production are the imperatives of survival; from now on, people want to live, not just to survive.

The *tripalium* is an instrument of torture. *Labor* means 'suffering'. We are unwise to forget the origin of the words 'travail' and 'labour'. At least the nobility never forgot their own dignity and the indignity which marked their bondsmen. The aristocratic contempt for work reflected the master's contempt for the dominated classes; work was the expiation to which they were condemned to all eternity by the divine decree which had willed them, for impenetrable reasons, to be inferior. Work took its place among the sanctions of Providence as the punishment for poverty, and because it was the means to a future salvation such a punishment could take on the attributes of pleasure. Basically, work was less important than submission.

The bourgeoisie does not dominate, it exploits. It does not need to be master, it prefers to *use*. Why has nobody seen that the principle of productivity simply replaced the principle of feudal authority? Why has nobody wanted to understand?

Is it because work ameliorates the human condition and saves the poor, at least in illusion, from eternal damnation? Undoubtedly, but today it seems that the carrot of happier tomorrows has smoothly replaced the carrot of salvation in the next world. In both cases the *present* is always under the heel of oppression.



A—Axles. B—Wheel which is turned by Treading. C—Toothed wheel. D—Drum made of Rundles. E—Drum to which are fixed iron clamps. F—Second wheel. G—Balls.

Is it because it transforms nature? Yes, but what can I do with a nature ordered in terms of profit and loss, in a world where the inflation of techniques conceals the deflation of the use-value of life? Besides, just as the sexual act is not intended to procreate, but makes children by accident, organized labour transforms the surface of continents as a by-product, not a purpose. Work to transform the world? Tell me another. The world is being transformed inthe direction prescribed by the existence of forced labour; which is why it is being transformed so badly.

Perhaps man realises himself in his forced labour? In the nineteenth century the concept of work retained a vestige of the notion of creativity. Zola describes a nailsmiths' contest in which the workers competed in the perfection of their tiny masterpiece. Love of the trade and the vitality of an already smothered creativity incontestably helped men to bear ten or fifteen hours which nobody could have stood if some kind of pleasure had not slipped into it. The survival of the craft conception allowed each worker to contrive a precarious comfort in the hell of the factory. But Taylorism, dealt the death-blow to a mentality which had been carefully fostered by archaic capitalism. It is useless to expect even a caricature of creativity from the conveyor-belt. Nowadays ambition and the love of a job well done are the indelible mark of defeat and the most mindless submission. Which is why, wherever submission is demanded, the old ideological fart wends its way, from the *Arbeit Macht Frei* of the concentration camps to the homilies of Henry Ford and Mao Tse-tung.

So what is the function of forced labour? The myth of power exercised jointly by the master and God drew its coercive force from the unity of the feudal system. Destroying the unitary myth, the power of the bourgeoisie inaugurated, under the flag of crisis, the reign of ideologies, which can never attain, separately or together, a fraction of the efficacy of myth. The dictatorship of productive work stepped into the breach. Its mission is to physically weaken the majority of men, to collectively castrate and stupefy them in order to

make them receptive to the least pregnant, least virile, most senile ideologies in the entire history of falsehood.

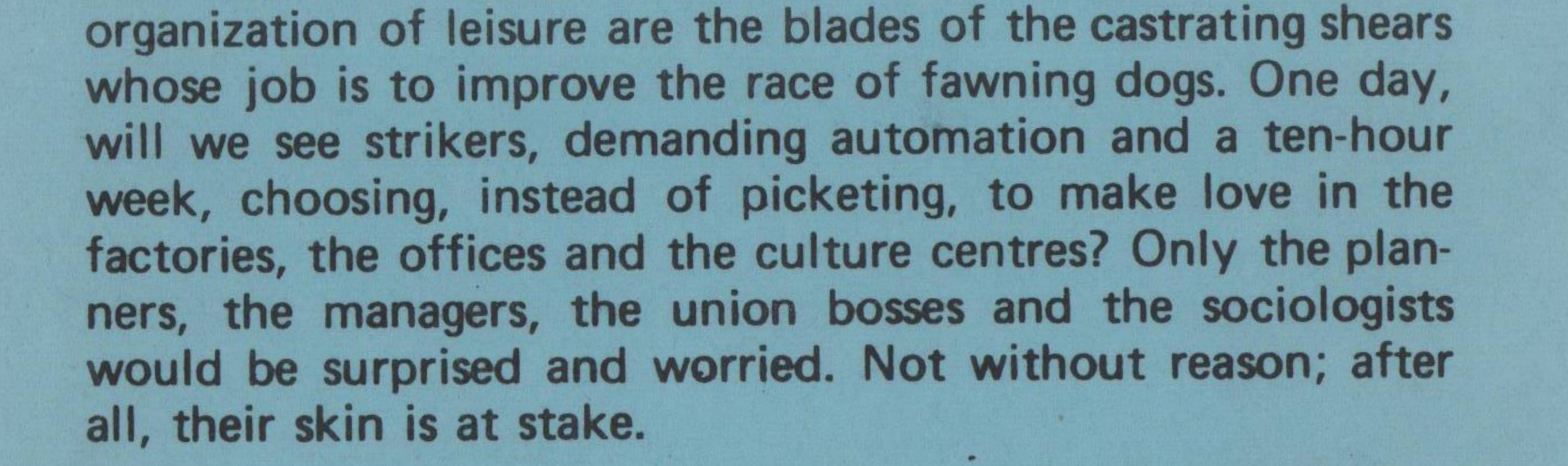
Most of the proletariat at the beginning of the nineteenth century had been physically enervated, systematically broken by the torture of the workshop. Revolts came from artisans, from privileged or unemployed groups, not from workers shattered by fifteen hours of labour. Isn't it disturbingthat the reduction of working time came just when the spectacular ideological miscellany produced by consumer society was beginning to effectively replace the feudal myths destroyed by the young bourgeoisie? (People really have worked for a refrigerator, a car, a television set. Many still do, 'invited' as they are to consume the passivity and empty time that the 'necessity' of production 'offers' them.)

Statistics published in 1938 indicated that the use of the most modern technology would reduce necessary working time to three hours a day. Not only are we a long way off with our seven hours, but after wearing out generations of workers by promising them the happiness which is sold today on the instalment plan, the bourgeoisie (and its Soviet equivalent) pursue man's destruction outside the workshop. Tomorrow they will deck out their five hours of necessary wear and tear with a time of 'creativity' which will grow just as fast as they can fill it with the impossibility of creating anything (the famous 'leisure explosion').

It has been quite correctly written: 'China faces gigantic economic problems; for her, productivity is a matter of life and death.' Nobody would dream of denying it. What seems important to me is not the economic imperatives, but the manner of responding to them. The Red Army in 1917 was a new kind of organization. The Red Army in 1960 is an army such as is found in capitalist countries. Circumstances have shown that its effectiveness has been far below the potential of a revolutionary militia. In the same way, the planned Chinese economy, by refusing to allow federated groups to organize their work autonomously, condemns itself to become another example of the perfected form of capitalism called socialism. Has anyone bothered to study the modes of

work of primitive peoples, the importance of play and creativity, the incredible yield obtained by methods which the application of modern technology would make a hundred times more efficient? Obviously not. Every appeal for productivity comes from above. But only creativity is spontaneously rich. It is not from 'productivity' that a full life is to be expected, it is not 'productivity' that will produce an enthusiastic collective response to economic needs. But what can we say when we know how the cult of work is honoured from Cuba to China, and how well the virtuous pages of Guizot would sound in a May Day speech?

To the extent that automation and cybernetics foreshadow the massive replacement of workers by mechanical slaves, forced labour is revealed as belonging purely to the barbaric practices needed to maintain order. Thus power manufactures the dose of fatigue necessary for the passive assimilation of its televised diktats. What carrot is worth working for, after this? The game is up; there is nothing to lose any more, not even an illusion. The organization of work and the organization of leisure are the blades of the castrating shears whose job is to improve the race of fawning dogs. One day, will we see strikers, demanding automation and a ten-hour week, choosing, instead of picketing, to make love in the factories, the offices and the culture centres? Only the planners, the managers, the union bosses and the sociologists would be surprised and worried. Not without reason; after all, their skin is at stake.



The truth of work: front gate of Auschwitz.

6 DECOMPRESSION AND THE THIRD FORCE

Up till now, tyranny has merely changed hands. In their common respect for rulers, antagonistic powers have always fostered the seeds of their future coexistence. (When the leader of the game takes the power of a Leader, the revolution dies with the revolutionaries.) Unresolved antagonisms fester, hiding real contradictions. Decompression is the permanent control of both antagonists by the ruling class. The third force radicalises contradictions and leads to their transcendence, in the name of individual freedom and against all forms of constraint. Power has no option but to smash or incorporate the third force without admitting its existence.

To sum up. Millions of men lived in a huge building with no doors or windows. The feeble light of countless oil lamps competed with the unchanging darkness. As had been the custom since remotest Antiquity, the upkeep of the lamps was the duty of the poor, so that the flow of oil followed the alternation of revolt and pacification. One day a general insurrection broke out, the most violent that this people had ever known. Its leaders demanded a fair allotment of the costs of lighting; a large number of revolutionaries said that what they considered a public utility should be free; a few extremists went so far as to clamour for the destruction of the building, which they claimed was unhealthy, even unfit for human habitation. As usual, the more reasonable combatants found themselves helpless before the violence of the conflict. During a particularly lively clash

with the forces of order, a stray bullet pierced the outer wall, leaving a crack through which daylight streamed in. After a moment of stupor, this flood of light was greeted with cries of victory. The solution had been found: all they had to do was to make some more holes. The lamps were thrown away or put in museums, and power fell to the window-makers, The partisans of radical destruction were forgotten, and even their discreet liquidation, it seems, went almost unnoticed. (Everyone was arguing about the number and position of the windows.) Then, a century or two later, their names were remembered, when the people, that eternal malcontent, had grown accustomed to plate-glass windows, and took to asking extravagant questions. 'To drag out your days in a greenhouse, is that living?' they asked

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The consciousness of our time oscillates between that of the walled-up man and that of the prisoner. For the individual, the oscillation takes the place of freedom; like a condemned man, he paces up and down between the blank wall of his cell and the barred window that represents the possibility of escape. If somebody knocks a hole in the cellar of isolation, hope filters in with the light. The good behaviour of the prisoner depends on the hope of escape which prisons foster. On the other hand, when he is trapped by a wall with no windows, a man can only feel the desperate rage to knock it down or break his head against it, which can only be seen as unfortunate from the point of view of efficient social organization (even if the suicide doesn't have the happy idea of going to his death in the style of an oriental prince, immolating all his slaves: judges, bishops, generals, policemen, psychiatrists, philosophers, managers, specialists, planners...)

The man who is walled up alive has nothing to lose; the prisoner still has hope. Hope is the leash of submission. When power's boiler is in danger of exploding, it uses its safety-valve to lower the pressure. It seems to change; in fact it only adapts itself and resolves its difficulties.

There is no authority which does not see, rising against it, an authority which is similar but which passes for its opposite. But nothing is more dangerous for the principle of hierarchical government than the merciless confrontation of two powers driven by a rage for total annihilation. In such a conflict, the tidal wave of fanaticism carries away the most stable values; no man's land eats up the whole map, establishing everywhere the interregnum of 'nothing is true, everything is permitted.' History, however, offers not one example of a titanic conflict which was not opportunely defused and turned into a comic-opera battle. What is the source of this decompression? The agreement on matters of principle which is implicitly reached by the warring powers.

The hierarchical principle remains common to the fanatics of both sides: opposite the capitalism of Lloyd George and Krupp appears the anticapitalism of Lenin and Trotsky. From the mirrors of the masters of the present the masters of the future are already smiling back. Heinrich Heine writes:

Lächelnd scheidet der Tyran
Denn er weiss, nach seinem Tode
Wechselt Willkür nur die Hände
Und die Knechtschaft hat kein Ende.

The tyrant dies smiling; for he knows that after his death tyranny will merely change hands, and slavery will never end. Bosses differ according to their modes of domination, but they are still bosses, owners of a power exercised as a private right. (Lenin's greatness has to do with his romantic refusal to assume the position of absolute master implied by his ultra-hierarchical organization of the Bolshevik party; and it is to this greatness also that the workers' movement is indebted for Kronstadt, Budapest and *batiuchka* Stalin.)

From this moment, the point of contact between the two powers becomes the point of decompression. To identify the enemy with Evil and crown one's own side with the halo of Good has the strategic advantage of ensuring unity of action by canalising the energy of the combatants. But this manoeuvre demands the annihilation of the enemy. Moderates hesitate before such a prospect; for the *radical* destruction

of the enemy would include the destruction of what their own side has in common with the enemy. The logic of Bolshevism demanded the heads of the leaders of social-democracy; the latter hastily sold out, and they did so precisely because they were leaders. The logic of anarchism demanded the liquidation of Bolshevik power; the latter rapidly crushed them, and did so inasmuch as it was hierarchical power. The same predictable sequence of betrayals threw Durruti's anarchists before the united guns of republicans, socialists and Stalinists.

As soon as the leader of the game turns into a Leader, the principle of hierarchy is saved, and the Revolution sits down to preside over the execution of the revolutionaries. We must never forget that the revolutionary project belongs to the masses alone; leaders help it, Leaders betray it. To begin with, the real struggle takes place between the leader of the game and the Leader.

The professional revolutionary measures the state of his forces in quantitative terms, just as any soldier judges an officer's rank by the number of men under his command. The leaders of so-called insurrectionary parties dismiss the qualitative in favour of a quantitative expertise. Had the 'reds' been blessed with half a million more men with modern weapons, the Spanish revolution would still have been lost. It died under the heel of the people's commissars. The speeches of La Pasionaria already sounded like funeral orations; pathetic whining drowned the language of deeds, the spirit of the collectives of Aragon—the spirit ofa radical minority resolved to sever with a single stroke all the heads of the hydra, not just its fascist head.

Never, and for good reason, has an absolute confrontation been carried through. So far the last fight has only had false starts. Everything must be begun again from scratch. History's only justification is to help us do it.

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Under the process of decompression, antagonists who seemed irreconcilable at first sight grow old together, become frozen in purely formal opposition, lose their substance, neutralize and moulder into each other. Who would recognize the Bolshevik with his knife between his teeth in the gagarinism of doting Moscow? Today, by the grace of the ecumenical miracle, the slogan 'Workers of the world, unite' celebrates the union of the world's bosses. A touching scene. The common element in the antagonism, the seed of power, which a radical struggle would have rooted out, has grown up to reconcile the estranged brothers.

Is it as simple as this? Of course not; the farce would lose its entertainment value. On the international stage, those two old hams, capitalism and anticapitalism, carry on their lovers' banter. How the spectators tremble when they begin to quarrel, how they stamp with glee when peace blesses the loving couple! Is interest flagging? A brick is added to the Berlin wall; the bloodthirsty Mao gnashes his paper teeth, while in the background a choir of little Chinese nitwits sings paeons to fatherland, family and work. Patched up like this, the old melodrama is ready to hit the road. The ideological spectacle keeps up with the times by bringing out harmless plastic antagonisms; are you for or against Brigitte Bardot, the Beatles, mini-cars, hippies, nationalisation, spaghetti, old people, the TUC, mini-skirts, pop art, thermonuclear war, hitch-hiking? There is no-one who is not accosted at every moment of the day by posters, news flashes, stereotypes, summoned to take sides over each of the prefabricated trifles that conscientiously stop up all the sources of everyday creativity. In the hands of power these particles of antagonism are moulded into a magnetic ring whose function is to make everybody lose their bearings, to pull everyone out of himself and to scramble lines of force.

Decompression is simply the control of antagonisms by power. The opposition of two terms is given its real meaning by the introduction of a third. As long as there are only two

equal and opposite polarities, they neutralize each other, since each is defined by the other; as it is impossible to choose between them, we are led into the domain of tolerance and relativity which is so dear to the bourgeoisie. One can well understand the importance for the apostolic hierarchy of the dispute between Manicheism and Trinitarianism! In a merciless confrontation between God and Satan, what would have been left of ecclesiastical authority? Nothing, as

the millenarian crises demonstrated. That is why the secular arm carried out its holy offices, and the pyres crackled for the mystics of God or the devil, those overbold theologians who questioned the principle of Three in One. The temporal masters of christianity were resolved that only they should be entitled to treat of the difference between the master of Good and the master of Evil. They were the great intermediaries through which the choice of one side or the other had to pass; they controlled the paths to salvation and damnation, and this control was more important to them than salvation

and damnation themselves. On earth, they proclaimed themselves judges without appeal, since they had also decided to be the judged in an afterlife whose laws they had invented.

The christian myth defused the bitter Manichean conflict by offering to the believer the possibility of individual salvation; this was the breach opened up by the Poor Bugger of Nazareth. Thus man escaped the rigours of a confrontation which necessarily led to the destruction of values, to nihilism. But the same stroke denied him the opportunity to reconquer himself by means of a general upheaval, the chance of taking his place in the universe by chasing out the gods and their slavemasters. Therefore, the movement of decompression appears to have the function of shackling man's most irreducible desire, the desire to be completely himself.

In all conflicts between opposing sides an irrepressible upsurge of individual desires takes place and often reaches a threatening intensity. To this extent we are justified in speaking of a *third force*. From the individual's point of view, the third force is what the force of decompression is

from the point of view of power. The small change of every struggle, it radicalises insurrections, denounces false problems, threatens power in its very structure. It is what Brecht was referring to in one of his Keuner stories: 'When a proletarian was brought to court and asked if he wished to take the oath in the ecclesiastical or the lay form, he replied: 'I'm out of work.' The third force does not hope for the withering away of constraints, but aims to transcend them. Prematurely crushed or incorporated, it becomes by inversion a force of decompression. Thus, the salvation of the soul is nothing but the will to live, incorporated through myth, mediated, emptied of its real content. On the other hand, their peremptory demand for a full life explains the hatred incurred by certain gnostic sects or by the Brothers of the Free Spirit. During the decline of christianity, the struggle between Pascal and the Jesuits spotlighted the opposition between the reformist doctrine of individual salvation and compromise with heaven and the project of realising God by the nihilist destruction of the world. And, once it had got rid of the dead wood of theology, the third force survived to inspire Babeuf's struggle against the *million dore*, the Marxist project of the complete man, the dreams of Fourier, the explosion of the Commune, and the violence of the anarchists.

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Individualism, alcoholism, collectivism, activism...the variety of ideologies shows that there are a hundred ways of being on the side of power. There is only one way to be radical. The wall that must be knocked down is immense, but it has been cracked so many times that soon a single cry will be enough to bring it crashing to the ground. Let the formidable reality of the third force emerge at last from the mists of history, with all the individual passions that have fuelled the insurrections of the past! Soon we shall find that an energy is locked up in everyday life which can move mountains and abolish distances. The long revolution is

preparing to write works in the ink of action whose unknown or nameless authors will flock to join Sade, Fourier, Babeuf, Marx, Lacenaire, Stirner, Lautréamont, Léhautier, Vaillant, Henry, Villa, Zapata, Makhno, the communards, the insurrectionaries of Hamburg, Kiel, Kronstadt, Asturias—all those who have not yet played their last card in a game which we have only just joined: the great gamble whose stake is freedom.