E REVOLUTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

RAOUL VANEIGEM

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO [illegible]
AND NOTHING TO LOSE BUT BOREDOM

EL PRESS

Raoul Vaneigem

The Revolution *of* Everyday Life

Translated by
Donald Nicholson-Smith

Rebel Press
2001

The Revolution of Everyday Life is a translation from French of Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations, which was first published by Gallimard in 1967.

Vaneigem's preface to the first French paperback edition was published by Gallimard in 1992.

This translation was first published in 1983 jointly by Left Bank Books and Rebel Press.

Second, revised edition published in 1994 by Left Bank Books and Rebel Press.

Reprinted 2001 by Rebel Press.

ISBN 0 9 946061 01 7

Printed by
Aldgate Press
Units 5 & 6
Gunthorpe Street Workshops
3 Gunthorpe Street
London E1 7RQ

Cover design by N. Westin

Contents

Translator's preface

THIS TRANSLATION OF Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-faire à l'usage des jeunes générations* was done a few years ago at the suggestion of Free Life Editions, New York. Although Free Life ceased all publication before the book could be brought out, I would like to thank them for sponsoring the project and for assisting me in a variety of ways while work was in progress.

I am also indebted to earlier translators of all or parts of the *Traité*, among them John Fullerton and Paul Sieveking, who in 1972 published the only full-length version that I know of (London: Practical Paradise Publications). I have stolen shamelessly from all such precursors, and I am especially obliged to CW, CG and BE.

Thanks are due too, for various forms of essential aid, to PL and YR in Paris; to RE and TJC in the United States; and to Rebel Press in London.

I must also express my gratitude to Raoul Vaneigem, who authorised the translation and answered all my queries without betraying the slightest sign of fatigue.

The Revolution of Everyday Life is not a title I care for; I would have preferred *The Rudiments of Savoir-Vivre: A Guide for Young Persons Recently Established in the World*, or more simply *The Facts of Life for Younger Readers*. The publishers are doubtless right, however, in preferring not to depart from the title by which the work has by now become known to the English-speaking public.

I have obstinately resisted the well-intentioned urgings of many people that I should overstep the role of translator and become an editor as well, by adding footnotes, glosses, biographical sketches of 'obscure personages', etc, etc. Nobody, I am afraid, has persuaded me of the need for any such spoonfeeding of the reader.

I wish it were not necessary to state (though I am quite sure it is) that my part in the publication of this book does not imply my adherence to

any or all of its theses, much less my affiliation with any real or conjectured, 'Vaneigemist' or 'Debordist', post-, pro-, crypto-, neo- (or, for that matter, anti-) situationist tendency or clique. The ardent student of the Situationist International, who is not such a *rara avis* as common sense might lead one to expect, may readily ascertain that I was expelled from that organisation in 1967. That parting of the ways seemed to me then — and still seems to me — thoroughly justified on both sides.

It is nonetheless my earnest hope that this new edition of Vaneigem's book will serve both to enlighten another 'younger generation' and, by increasing the work's warts-and-all accessibility to English-language readers, militate against those absurd hagiographical impulses which mystify the Situationist International's doughty contributions instead of rescuing them from the clutches of enemies and pillagers with a shared interest in consigning them to oblivion.

I should like to dedicate this translation to Cathy Pozzo di Borgo.

Donald Nicholson-Smith
October 1982

Translator's note to the second Rebel Press/Left Bank edition

I HAVE TAKEN this opportunity to make a considerable number of revisions to the translation. My thanks to MNR — and, once again, to Rebel Press.

D. N.-S.
September 1993

Preface to the first French paperback edition[1]

The everyday eternity of life

THE *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* heralded the emergence of a radically new era from the bosom of a waning world.

With the quickening of the current that has for a short while now been carrying beings and things along, the *Traité* has grown, so to speak, ever more clairvoyant.

The stratified past still clung to by those who grow old with time is ever more easy to distinguish from the alluvia, timeless in their fertility, left by others who awake to themselves (or at least strive to) every day.

For me, these are two moments of a single fluctuating existence in which the present is continually divesting itself of its old forms.

A book that seeks to interpret its time can do no more than bear witness to a history imprecise in its becoming; a book that wreaks change on its time cannot fail to sow the seeds of change in the field of future transformations. If the *Traité* has something of both, it owes this to its radical bias, to the preponderance in it of that 'self' which is in the world without being of the world, that 'self' whose emancipation is a *sine qua non* for anyone who has discovered that learning to live is not the same thing as learning to survive.

In the early 1960s I conjectured that the examination of my own subjectivity, far from constituting an isolated activity, would resonate with other, like endeavours; and that if this examination was in tune with the times, it would in some way modulate those times in harmony with our desires.

To extend the *ennui* that textured my own everyday existence to a few others, and to enlist them in the dismal task of denouncing its causes, was not a little presumptuous on my part. But this consideration only increased the allure of betting on my presentiment that a passion for life was on the increase, a passion the impossibility of defining which contrasted dramati-

cally with the acuteness of the criticism then being directed at the conditions ranged against it.[2]

In 1968 the barrier of prevailing sensibilities was brutally shattered by the vivisection of survival — a veritable alchemical *opus nigrum.* Thirty years on, consciousness is slowly opening itself up to a reversal of perspective in the light of which the world ceases to be apprehended as prey to a negative fate and begins instead to be ordered on the basis of a new positivity, on the basis of the recognition and expansion of the living forces within it.

Violence has changed its meaning. Not that the rebel has grown weary of fighting exploitation, boredom, poverty and death: the rebel has simply resolved no longer to fight them with the weapons of exploitation, boredom, poverty and death. For the first victim of any such struggle is anyone who engages in it full of contempt for their own life. Suicidal behaviour is naturally an integral part of a system that battens on the dilapidation of human nature as of nature *tout court.*

If the ancient cry "Death to the Exploiters" no longer echoes through the streets, it is because it has given way to another cry, one harking back to childhood and issuing from a passion which, though more serene, is no less tenacious. That cry is "Life First!"

The refusal of commodities implicit in the shattered plate-glass windows of 1968 marked such a clear and public breach in a millennia-old economic boundary-line drawn around individual destiny that archaic reflexes of fear and impotence immediately obscured the insurrectionary movement's truly radical character. I say 'truly radical' because here at long last was a chance to make the will to live that exists in each of us the basis for a society which for the first time in history would attain an authentic humanity.

Many people, however, treated this moment as an opportunity to set up shop as merchandisers of opposition, ignoring any need to change behaviour wedded to the mechanics of the commodity's rule. Among the *Traité*'s readers there were thus some who seized upon my account of a certain *mal de vivre* (from which I wanted above all to free myself) as an excuse for offering no resistance whatsoever to the state of survival to which they were in thrall (and which the comforts of the welfare state, its abundant and bitter consolations, had until then concealed from them).

It was not long before these people had run up new character

armour for themselves at the verbal forge of militant terrorism. Later still (without ever abandoning their incendiary rhetoric) they became career bureaucrats and covered themselves with glory as cogs in the *apparat* of State and marketplace.

✧

In the 1960s a mutation of the economy took hold whose effects are increasingly evident today. With the benefit of hindsight I can now see much more easily how I was able to take advantage, in effect, of a kind of interregnum — during which the old authority was losing its grip but the new had still not thoroughly consolidated its power — to rescue subjectivity from the general opprobrium which then covered it and to propose, as the basis of a projected society, *an enjoyment of self that proclaimed itself one with enjoyment of the world.*

To begin with there were three or four of us who partook of, and shared amongst us, the passion for 'constructing situations'. The way each cultivated this passion at that time depended on each's goals for his own existence, but it has lost nothing of its urgency, as witness both the inexorable advance of the life forces and the investments that an ecological neo-capitalism is obliged to make in them.

The last thirty years have visited more upheavals upon the world than the several millennia that proceeded them. That the *Traité* should in the slightest way have contributed to the acceleration thus suddenly imposed upon events is in the end far less a source of satisfaction to me than the sight of the paths now being opened up, within some individuals and some societies, that will lead from the primacy now at long last accorded to life to the likely creation of an authentically human race.

May 1968 was a genuine decanting, from the kind of revolution which revolutionaries make against themselves, of that permanent revolution which is destined to usher in the sovereignty of life.

There has never been a revolutionary movement not governed from start to finish by the expanding empire of the commodity. The economy, with its iron collar of archaic forms, has always smashed revolution by means of freedoms, modelled on the freedom of commerce, which because of the

inherent constraints of the law of profit swiftly become the building-blocks of new tyrannies.

In the end the economy picks up whatever it has put in at the outset, plus appreciation. This is the whole meaning of the notion of 'recuperation'. Revolutions have never done anything but turn on themselves and negate themselves at the velocity of their own rotation. The revolution of 1968 was no exception to this rule. The commodity system, finding generalised consumption more profitable than production, itself speeds up the shift from authoritarianism to the seductions of the market, from saving to spending, from puritanism to hedonism, from an exploitation that sterilises the earth and mankind to a lucrative reconstruction of the environment, from capital as more precious than the individual to the individual as the most precious capital.

The impetus of the 'free' market has reunified the capitalist system by precipitating the collapse of bureaucratic, so-called communist, state capitalism. The Western model has made *tabula rasa* of the old forms of oppression and instated a democracy of the supermarket, a self-service autonomy, a hedonism whose pleasures must be paid for. Its racketeering has exploded all the great ideological balloons of earlier times, so laboriously inflated from generation to generation by the winds of the political seasons. A flea market of religion has been set up alongside the sleaze merchants and the shopping centres. The system has realised in the nick of time that a living human being is more of a paying proposition than a dead human being — or one riddled by pollutants. A fact proved, if proof were needed, by the rise of a vast market of the affections — an industry for extracting profits from the heart.

Even the critique of the spectacle has now been travestied as 'critical' spectacle. With the saturation of the market for denatured, tasteless, useless products, consumers unable to proceed any farther down the road of stupidity and passivity find themselves propelled into a competing market where profitability is predicated on the suggestions of quality and 'naturalness'. Suddenly we are obliged willy-nilly to demonstrate discernment — to retrieve the shreds of intelligence that old-style consumerism forebade us to use.

Power, State, religion, ideology, army, morality, the Left, the Right —

that so many abominations should have been sent one after another to the wrecker's yard by the imperialism of the market, for which there is no black and no white, might seem at first glance good reason to rejoice; but no sooner does the slightest suspicion enter one's mind than it becomes obvious that all these forces have simply redeployed, and are now waging the same war under different colours. Green, lest we forget, is also the colour of the dollar bill. The new and improved consumerism may be democratic, it may be ironic, but it always presents its bill, and the bill must always be paid. A life governed by a sanctioned greed is by no means freed thereby from the old tyranny of having to forfeit one's life simply to pay for it.

If there is one area where the achievement of consciousness comes into its own as a truly essential act, it is the realm of everyday life, where every passing instant reveals once again that the dice are loaded and that as per usual we are being taken for a ride.

From the agrarian structures that gave birth to the first City-States, to the world-wide triumph of the free market, the history of the commodity system has continually oscillated between a closed economy and an open one, between withdrawal into protectionism and embrace of the free circulation of goods. Each advance of the commodity has engendered on the one hand formal liberties, and on the other a consciousness enjoying the incalculably great advantage over those liberties of potential incarnation within the individual, potential conflation with the very movement of desire.

The first reaction of the ideology of freedom which rode the wave of all past revolutions, from the communalist insurrections of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to 1789, 1848, 1871, 1917 and 1936, was to drown all libidinal exuberance in blood (such exuberance was in any case itself largely restricted to bloody violence as a way of letting off steam).

Only one revolution (apropos of which it will someday be acknowledged that, in sharp contrast to all its predecessors, it truly wrote finis to several millennia of inhumanity) did not end in the whirlwind of repressive violence. In fact it simply did not end at all.

In 1968 the economy closed the circle: it reached its apogee and plunged into nothingness. This was the moment when it abandoned the authoritarian puritanism of the production imperative for the (more profitable)

market in individual satisfaction. The suffusion of attitudes and *mores* by permissiveness echoed the official world's recognition of pleasure — so long, of course, as the pleasure in question was a profitable one, tagged with an exchange value and wrested from the gratuitousness of real life to serve a new commodity order.

And then the game was over. Cool calculation had drawn too close to the heat of passion. The danger was that the will to live, aroused and denied simultaneously, would end by exposing the artificiality of the market's definition of freedom. Where was the silver-tongued lie that would serve business's ecological new look by promoting the timidest imaginable defence of life forces while still preventing individuals from reconstructing both their desires and their environment as part of an indivisible process?

A fate that has enthralled fomentors of revolution from time immemorial dictated that the 1968ers must eventually go where the economy beckoned: to modernity for the economy — and to ruin for them. If this fate was defied in 1968, it was thanks to a subjective consciousness of where real life lay. The rejection of work, sacrifice, guilt, separation, exchange, survival, so easily co-optable by an intellectual discourse, drew nourishment on this occasion from a lucidity that went far beyond *contestation* (or perhaps rather stopped far short of it) by hewing to the quest for a honing of desire, by remaining beholden to the everyday childhood of a life locked in combat with everything that sought to exhaust and destroy it.

A consciousness severed from the living forces is blind. The dark glasses of the negative at first obscure the fact that what seems like progress is working against us. The only consistency in the social analyses of our fashionable thinkers is the formidable tenacity with which they cling to their laughable claims. Revolution, self-management, workers' councils — so many words held up to public opprobrium at the very moment when state power is put on the defensive by groups whose collective decision-making admits of no intrusion by political representatives, shuns all organisers or leaders and combats all hierarchy.

I do not mean to downplay the shortcomings of a practice of this kind, which has for the most part been confined to reactions of a defensive nature. It cannot be denied, however, that it is a manifestation, bearing no *appellation d'origine controlée*, of a type of behaviour that breaks utterly with the

old mass movements: a coming together of individuals in no way reducible to a crowd manipulable at will.

Everyday life itself is even more full of shortcomings — one has but to consider how little light is shed on it by those who wander about at the whim of its pleasures and pains.

After all, the Judaeo-Christian era itself had to end before we found out that the grimy word 'life' concealed a reality long overlain by that mere survival to which all life had been reduced by the cycle of the commodity, which mankind produces and which reproduces mankind in its own image.

There is *no one* who is not embarked upon a process of personal alchemy, yet so inattentive, so short-sighted are those who call their own passivity and resignation 'fate' that the magistery cannot operate in the light, cannot emerge from the atmosphere of putrefaction and death which characterises the daily grind of desires forced to deny themselves.

The feeling (inevitably a desperate one) of having fallen victim to a universal conspiracy of hostile circumstances is contrary to any will to autonomy. The negative is nothing but an excuse for resigning oneself never to be oneself, never to grasp the riches of one's own life. My goal, instead, has been a lucidity grounded in my desires; by continually illuminating the struggle between the living forces and living death, such a lucidity must surely combat the commodity's logic of etiolation.

As a sort of research report, a single book has neither the best nor yet the most insignificant role to play in the passionate day-to-day struggle to winnow out from my life whatever blocks or depletes it. The present work, *Le Livre des plaisirs* and *L'Adresse aux vivants* may be seen as three phases of a continuum in which a number of concordances have emerged between a mutating world and footholds secured from time to time in the persistent attempt to create myself and reconstruct society at the same time.

The falling rate of a profit derived from the exploitation and destruction of nature has been the determining factor in the late-twentieth century development of an ecological neo-capitalism and of new modes of production. The profitability of the living forces is no longer founded upon their exhaustion but rather on their reconstruction. Consciousness of the life to be created progresses because the sense of things themselves contributes to it. Never have desires, returned now to their childhood, enjoyed such power

within each individual to smash everything that turns them upside down, everything that denies them and reifies them and makes them into commodities.

Something is taking place today which no imagination has ever dared speculate upon: the process of individual alchemy is on the point of transmuting an inhuman history into nothing less than humanity's self-realisation.

September 1991

1 Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folio/Actuel, 1992.

2 The *Traité* was written between 1963 and 1965, and the manuscript sent to thirteen publishers, all of whom rejected it. The last refusal was from Gallimard, on whose reading committee the book was supported only by Raymond Queneau and Louis-René Des Forêts. As it happened, on the day the returned manuscript and Gallimard's rejection letter reached me, *Le Figaro littéraire* published an article decrying the influence of the situationists on the Provos of Amsterdam. That same evening Queneau sent me a telegram requesting that the manuscript be resubmitted. As a result I cut short a closing discussion of workers' councils as a social model (the book's second postscript, added in 1972, shows signs of an attempt to redress this). The *Traité* eventually appeared on 30 November 1967, six months before those 'events' which — precisely because their most innovative aspects are even now only just beginning to manifest themselves — are still not referred to as the Revolution of May 1968.

When the book came out, many readers claimed vociferously that the state of economic well-being then prevailing flatly contradicted my analysis of survival.

A comparable scepticism greeted *Le Livre des plaisirs* (Paris: Encre, 1979; English translation: *The Book of Pleasures*, London: Pending Press, 1983), published at a time when working and making money seemed to overshadow all other concerns. Likewise in the case of my *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne et l'opportunité de s'en*

défaire (Address to the Living Concerning the Death that Rules over Them, and the Opportuneness of the Present Moment for Ridding Themselves Thereof) (Paris: Seghers, 1990): the object of mockery now was no longer the critique of survival but rather the raising of the banner of a movement calling ever more clearly for "Life First!"

In 1967 many people deemed the notion of the 'quality of life' vague and incomprehensible. It was not long before they were proved right, for a French government ministry shortly came into being with this very realm as its bailiwick. All the same, everything today suggests an urgent need, both individually and collectively, to give the quality of life practical definition and ensure its dominion. Much the same might be said of the notions of transparency, participation, reversal of perspective and creativity — which last term, incidentally, I was asked at that time to replace on the grounds that it 'doesn't exist'.

Introduction

MY AIM IS NOT to make the real experience contained in this book comprehensible to readers who have no real interest in reliving it. I fully expect this experience to be lost — and rediscovered — in a general alteration of consciousness, just as I am convinced that the present conditions of our lives will one day be no more than a memory.

The world is going to be remade, not reconditioned. All its would-be renovators are powerless to stop this. If these experts do not understand me, so much the better; I certainly have no desire to understand *them*.

As for my other readers, I pray their indulgence with a humility that should not be hard to see. I should have wished a book such as this accessible to minds quite unschooled in the jargon of ideas. I hope I have not failed entirely. Out of this confusion will one day come formulations capable of firing point-blank on our enemies. In the meanwhile, let sentences remembered here or there have what effect they may. The path of simplicity is the most tortuous of all and, especially here, it seemed better not to wrench commonplaces from a tangle of roots which we may transplant to another soil and cultivate to our own profit.

I have never claimed to have anything new to say; I am not trying to launch novelties on the culture market. One tiny adjustment in what is essential has much greater import than a hundred incidental improvements. The only truly new thing here is the direction of the stream carrying commonplaces along.

Ever since men grew up and learned to read Lautréamont, everything has been said, yet few have taken advantage of it. Since all our knowledge is essentially banal, it can only be of value to minds that are not.

The modern world has to learn what it already knows, become what it already is, through a great exorcism of obstacles, through practice. We can escape the commonplace only by manipulating it, controlling it, thrusting it into our dreams or surrendering it to the free play of our subjectivity. I

realise that I have given subjective will an easy time in this book, but let no one reproach me for this without first considering the extent to which the objective conditions of the contemporary world advance the cause of subjectivity day after day. Everything starts from subjectivity, but nothing stays there. Today less than ever.

The struggle between subjectivity and everything that corrupts it is about to widen the terrain of the old class struggles. It will revitalise it and make it more bitter. The desire to live is a political decision. Who wants a world in which the guarantee that we shall not die of starvation entails the risk of dying of boredom?

The man of survival is a man ground up in the machinery of hierarchical power, caught in a net of interferences, a chaos of oppressive techniques whose ordering only awaits patient programming by programmed experts.

The man of survival, however, is also the self-united man, the man of absolute refusal. Not a moment passes without each one of us experiencing, on every level of reality, the contradiction between oppression and freedom; without each one of us being caught up and weirdly twisted by two antagonistic perspectives simultaneously: the perspective of power and the perspective of transcendence. So, although the two parts of this book deal in turn with each of these perspectives, they should not really be treated as separate. Instead the reader must imagine that they are synchronic; for description of the negative underpins the positive project, and the positive project attests to negativity. Ideally a book would have no order to it, and the reader would have to discover his own.

My shortcomings as a writer also reflect on the reader — as a reader and even more as a human being. If the element of boredom I experienced in writing finds an echo in the reader, here is but one more proof of our failure to live. For the rest, the gravity of the times must excuse the gravity of my tone. Levity always lies either before words or beyond them. For our purposes irony will consist in never forgetting this.

This work is part of a subversive current of which the last has not yet been heard. It constitutes one contribution among others to the reconstruction of the international revolutionary movement. Its significance should escape no one; in any case, as time will show, no one is going to escape its implications.

Part one

Power's perspective

Chapter one

The insignificant signified

Because of its increasing triviality, daily 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 time calls to mind those Walt Disney characters who rush madly over the edge of a cliff without seeing it: 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. Daily 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. 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 — that same self-contempt that the very comfort of philosophy has taught him. After somersaulting onto his own shoulders to shout his message to the world from a greater height, the philosopher finishes by seeing the world upside down; and everything in it obligingly goes askew, and walks on its head, to persuade him that he is standing upright. But he is the centre of his delusional state, and struggling to escape merely renders his situation more uncomfortable.

The moralists of the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries ministered over a vast stock of platitudes, but so active were their efforts to conceal this fact

that a veritable stuccoed palace of speculation arose above it, an ideal palace to shelter yet imprison real life. From its gates emerged a conviction and sincerity upheld by a sublime tone and by the fiction of the 'universal man', yet contaminated by a breath of 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, in that the concrete was in some ways brought to power with the revolutionary bourgeoisie. From the ruins 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 so 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 of, isn't this the old lie reconditioned, the highest stage of mystification?

From now on the analysts are in the streets. Lucidity is not 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 14th 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 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 thought that is not trapped in the net of received ideas. The slow fall-out of participles 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 is no longer ensured by means of priestly magic, it results from a mass of minor hypnoses: news, culture, city planning, advertising, mechanisms of conditioning and suggestion ready to serve 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 surest chances of liberation lie 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 self-evasion, it grasps your shoulder, catches your eye, and the dialogue begins. Win or lose, it goes with you.

3

TOO MANY CORPSES strew the paths of individualism and collectivism. Two apparently contrary rationalities cloak an identical gangsterism, an identical oppression of the isolated man. The hand which smothered Lautréamont returned to strangle Sergei Esenin; one died in the lodging-house of his landlord Jules-François Dupuis, the other hung himself in a nationalised hotel. Everywhere the law is validated: "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 negates 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 everyone's immediate experience. Nothing is so valuable that it need not be started afresh, nothing is too rich to need constant enrichment.

✧

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 organisation 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 cultivate about themselves and in themselves. Indeed they come from the same source: the dominant ideas, which are the ideas of the dominant class, even if they 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 Kronstadt-the-Red 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 vulgarise their initial atrocity with more ponderous proofs: concentration camps, Lacoste's Algeria, Budapest. The great collective illusions, anaemic from shedding the blood of so many, have since 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 bloodshed to show that a hundred 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 another? Once 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 spaces behind the waterfall of gadgets, family cars and paperback books.

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 VW, TV, a promotion, time to kill . . . . But 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 finger and thumb that in turn rotates the kaleidoscope. There was no VW, only an ideology almost unconnected with automobiles. Flushed with Chivas Regal, whisky of the élite, 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, of survival. Beyond the prefabricated scandals — Scandale perfume, scandal in high places — a real scandal appears, the scandal of actions drained of their substance to the profit of an illusion which becomes more odious every day as its effectiveness wanes. Actions weak and pale from nourishing dazzling imaginary compensations; actions pauperised by enriching lofty speculations to which they contribute in servile fashion, while being ignominiously categorised as 'trivial' or 'banal'; actions which today are free but exhausted, ready to lose their way once more, or expire from sheer weakness. There they are, in every one of you: familiar, sad, newly returned to the immediate living reality which is their 'spontaneous' environment. And here you are, bewildered and lost in a new prosaicness, a perspective in which near and far coincide.

4

IN ITS CONCRETE and tactical form, the concept of class struggle constituted the first marshalling of responses to the shocks and injuries which men live individually; it was born in the whirlpool of suffering which the reduction of human relationships to the 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 nevertheless shown to concern all those who sought, in the refusal to be slaves, a full life and a total humanity. Lacenaire, Borel, Lassailly, Büchner, Baudelaire, Hölderlin — wasn't this also poverty 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, and it drives 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.

The impossibility of participation: power as sum of constraints

The mechanisms of attrition and destruction: humiliation (two), isolation (three), suffering (four), work (five), decompression (six).

Chapter two

Humiliation

The economy of daily life is based on a continual exchange of humiliations and aggressive attitudes. It conceals a technique of attrition itself prey to the gift *of destruction which paradoxically it invites (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

TRAVELLING THROUGH a busy village one day, Rousseau was mocked by a yokel whose barbs delighted the crowd. Confused and discountenanced, Rousseau couldn't think of a word in reply and was forced to take to his heels amidst the jeers of the villagers. 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 at a stroke, he was two hours' distance from the village.

Aren't most of the trivial incidents of daily 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 relationships 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, 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. Don't talk to me about innocent and good-natured crowds. Look how they bristle up, threatened on every side, clumsy and embarrassed in enemy territory, far, very far, from themselves. Lacking knives, they learn to use their elbows and their eyes as weapons.

There is no remission, no truce between attackers and attacked. A flux of barely perceptible signs assails the stroller, who is anything but solitary. Remarks, gestures, glances tangle and collide, miss their aim, ricochet like bullets fired at random, killing even more surely by the continuous nervous tension they produce. All we can do is enclose ourselves in embarrassing parentheses; like these fingers (I am writing this on a café 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, daily 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 free trade thus finds its realisation in the customs of a democracy given new life by the lack of imagination of the left. Is it not strange, at first sight, to see the fury with which 'progressives' attack the ruined edifice of liberalism, as if the capitalists, its official demolition gang, had not themselves already planned liberalism's 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 fulfilment 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 organise life along bourgeois lines? Everywhere it's hats off to family, marriage, sacrifice, work, inauthenticity, while simplified and rationalised homoeostatic mechanisms reduce human relationships to 'fair' exchanges of deference and humiliation. And soon, in the ideal democracy of the cyberneticians, everyone will, without apparent effort, earn 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 sickness. Planning is merely the other face of the free market. The only thing subject to planning is exchange — and with it the mutual

sacrifice it entails. But if the word 'innovation' means anything it means transcendence, not camouflage. In fact, a truly 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 movements. At such times the wish to make an end of free trade in human behaviour shows itself spontaneously, but in the form of negation. When malaise is challenged, 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 empathy for Pierre-François Lacenaire and the passion for crime. The point here is not to make an apology for terrorism, but to recognise it as an action — a most pathetic yet noble action — which is capable of sabotaging and exposing the self-regulating mechanisms of the hierarchical social community. Intrinsic to 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 Mallarmé described — the same Mallarmé 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 need 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 self-realisation — will have no place for people who want only 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 people meet who are resolved on the lightning of violence rather than the agony of survival; from this moment, despair ends and tactics begin. Despair is the infantile disorder of the revolutionaries of daily life.

Even today I still feel my adolescent admiration for outlaws, not so much out of a regressive romanticism as because they expose the alibis by which social power avoids being compromised *directly*. Hierarchical social organisation is like a gigantic racket whose secret, exposed precisely 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 notes 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, frustrations, 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, since all the cards are stacked against me, I have everything to win?

2

THE HANDSHAKE ties and unties the knot of encounters. A gesture at once curious and trivial which we 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? What more disturbing than this need to convince ourselves of these lies, to believe them by force of habit, to assert them with the strength of our grip. Our glances convey nothing of these accommodations, affecting not to see the 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 at an invisible point, making an angle whose width expresses the divergence, the deeply-felt lack of harmony. Sometimes unison is achieved and eyes connect: the beautiful parallel gaze of royal couples in Egyptian statuary, the misty, melting gaze, brimming with eroticism, of lovers: eyes which devour one another from afar. But most of the time eyes give the lie to the superficial agreement sealed by the handshake. All the backslapping that goes on could not be more phoney. Its commercial overtones are not hard to find, of course: the handshake clinches a deal. More important, though, is the fact that this energetically reiterated affirmation of social concord is an attempt to trick our senses — to 'adjust' our perception to the emptiness of the spectacle. "You have to face up to things", people used to say; the received wisdom of consumer society has given this sentence a new force, for things have indeed become the only available reality.

Become as senseless and easily handled as a brick! That is what the social order benevolently asks everyone to do. The bourgeoisie has continued to share out frustrations more fairly, allowing a greater number of people to suffer them according to 'rational' norms, to economic, social, political, or legal requirements. 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, gratuitousness, 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 cyberneticians are dreaming of cooking up the man of the future. Are we quite sure that we haven't yet achieved the security of perfectly adapted beings, moving about as uncertainly and unconsciously as insects? For some time now there have been experiments with subliminal advertising: the insertion into films of single frames lasting one twenty-fourth 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 — city planning, advertising, 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 *Cinquième Coup de Trompette* push back into the future a shudder of horror which one straight 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 understood as such, it becomes the basis for a combative lucidity in 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 proof enough of this, if proof were needed. 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 perceive oneself

as other. And the other is always object. Thus 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, the means whereby 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 my sovereignty over daily life is exposed in all 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? To take appropriate reprisals? Do they encourage cop-hunts like the one which decorated the trees of Budapest with the most loyal servants of the AVO? No: they organise peaceful demonstrations at which their trade-union police force treats anyone who questions their orders as an *agent provocateur*. The new-style police are already with us, waiting to take over. Psychosociological cops have need neither of truncheons nor of morgues. Oppressive violence is about to be transformed into a host of equitably distributed pinpricks. Meanwhile, the high-minded people who denounce the cynicism of the police are the very ones who urge us to live in a state of well-policed cynicism.

Humanism merely upholsters the machine described 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 that the humanists are fighting for. No more Guernicas, no more Auschwitzes, no more Hiroshimas, no more Sétifs. 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 conflict 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 insofar 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 (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-racist and anti-anti-semitic hobbyhorses? In the last analysis, the effect of smothering the cries of all those who are not Jews or blacks — starting with the Jews and blacks themselves. Of course, I would not dream of questioning the spirit of generosity which inspires anti-racism. 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 epicentre of such problems lies in human beings, in each person who is humiliated and scorned by every aspect of our own society.

I will 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 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 today's generalised colonialism. 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, Aimé Césaire 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."

4

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 *Père Peinard:* "Kings get fat off their sovereignty, while we are starving on ours." Corbon'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 vicissitudes of the principle of sovereignty.

Monarchism designated as 'subjects' the objects of its 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 while subordinating. The thrones of kings were rotted by contempt. But what about the citizen's sovereignty: the rights multiplied by bourgeois vanity and jealousy, sovereignty distributed like a dividend 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 the right to humiliate is all that it demands. Democratised into public functions and roles, the monarchic principle floats 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.

Chapter three

Isolation

Para no sentirme solo
Por los siglos de los siglos

All we have in common is the illusion of being together. And the only resistance to the illusions of the permitted painkillers come from the collective desire to destroy isolation (1). Impersonal relationships are the no-man's-land of isolation. By producing isolation, contemporary social organisation 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 important thing, and the Real was part of the instinct which gave life a little meaning. The instinct didn't try to imagine what might lie 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 time of the slavers.

On public transport, which throws them against one another with statistical indifference, people assume an unbearable expression of mixed disillusion, pride and contempt — an expression much 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 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 suddenly becomes near and far, 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 remain locked in its opposite, the brutal, total rejection of social life. They swing from one to the other like a pendulum turning the hands on the clockface of death.

✧

Love in its turn swells the illusion of unity. Most of the time it founders and is aborted in triviality. Its songs are crippled by the fear of always returning to the same single note: the icy fear, whether there are two of us or ten, of finishing 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. My 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 *à deux* cannot overpower the 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.

Love's boat breaks up on the reefs of the everyday.

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.

2

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 potential 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 from either settling down in the community of illusion or remaining trapped in the cellar of isolation.

The no-man's-land of impersonal relationships stretches from the blissful acceptance of false collectivities to the total rejection of society. It is the

morality of shopkeepers: "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours", "There's good and bad everywhere", "Things aren't so bad really": 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 dreaming 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 Monsieur 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 sterilised 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.

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 going around knocking politely on all the doors where one mode of survival is exchanged for another.

"It would be a shame to die so young", wrote Jacques Vaché two years before his suicide. If desperation 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 political 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 organisers 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 desire 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 erect the palace of solipsist madness around him.

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 consciously 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 a battle with the *things* all around me'."

The Consul stopped. He read the inscription: *"No se puede vivir sin amar."*

Chapter four

Suffering

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

1

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 one end of the city to the other, the basic chord is the same: its sinister resonance has sunk so deeply into everyone's mind that it no longer surprises. "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 recognised, despair disappears from sight. Nobody seems worried that joy has been absent from European music for nearly two centuries; which says everything. Consume, consume: we take ashes for fire.

Why have suffering and its rites of exorcism acquired this importance? Undoubtedly because of the struggle to survive imposed on the first men by a hostile nature, full of cruel 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, of 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 all through history as at once 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 resign itself 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 of 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 willingly accepted is always Christian, *always*. Today the clerical vermin have given way to the missionaries of a Christ dyed red. Everywhere official pronouncements bear as their watermark the disgusting image of the crucified Christ, 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, well-being, reason, it had enough weapons — if not real weapons, then at least the weapons of

illusion — 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 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 tendency the idea of natural suffering betrayed its social root. When Human Nature too 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 pretexts for existence in the exigencies of *History*, which had suddenly become trapped in its turn in a one-way street. China prepares children 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 dregs of all the metaphysical systems, all the *an sich*, of the past: God, Nature, Man, Society. From now on, people will have to make history by fighting History itself, because History has become the last ontological earthwork of power, the last ruse whereby it hides, behind the promise of a long weekend, its will to endure until the Saturday which will never come. Beyond fetishised history, suffering is revealed as stemming from hierarchical social organisation. And when the will to put an end to hierarchical power has sufficiently tickled people's consciousness, everyone will have to admit that armed freedom 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 civilisation was also inventing the *ideology* of happiness and freedom. Thus it condemned itself to creating no more than the freedom of apathy, than happiness in passivity. But at least these inventions, perverted though they were, gave the lie on a universal scale to the notion that suffering was inherent in the human condition, that such an *in*human condition had anything eternal about it. 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 well-being.

Desperate fraternity in sickness is the worst thing that can happen to a civilisation. 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 mind and body are exhausted, 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 feeling, 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 peace marchers: aside from an active minority of radicals, most of them are 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 give them away. The only real joy is revolutionary.

Perhaps it is to ensure that a universal desire to perish does not take hold of men that a whole spectacle is organised around particular sufferings. A sort of nationalised philanthropy impels each person to find consolation for his own infirmities in the spectacle of other people's. Consider disaster photographs, stories of cuckolded singers, or the grotesque dramas of the gutter press. And, at the other end of the scale, the hospitals, asylums and prisons — real museums of suffering for the use of those whose fear of going in there makes them rejoice to be on the outside. I sometimes feel such a diffuse suffering dispersed through me that I find relief in the chance misfortune that concretises and justifies it, offering it a legitimate outlet. Nothing will dissuade me of one thing: the sadness I feel after a separation, a failure, a bereavement does not reach me from the outside like an arrow, but wells up from inside 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 just that the prey seizes upon a love lost or a child's death to see despair in what is really only its cast shadow. Mourning is a pretext, a convenient way of ejaculating 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, in a small cell; suppose that to hear their screams and see them scramble each time they brushed against one another amused him no end, and caused him to meditate on human nature and the curious behaviour of human beings. 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, existentialism has exemplified not only the collusion of left intellectuals with power, but also the crude trick by which an inhuman social organisation 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 organisation 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. Witness 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 organisation 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 flipside of 'hell-is-other-people', only here the mystification occurs in its positive form. It is time that appeals to an abstract camaraderie were reserved for disabled war veterans. 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 individual demands 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. It urges me to love my isolation.

The viewpoint of altruism, or of solidarity (which is merely the left's name for the same thing), turns the meaning of equality on its head. It becomes nothing but the common anguish of isolated associates who are humiliated, fucked over, beaten down, cuckolded and content with it. This is the anguish of monads aspiring to unity— not a real unity but a mystical one. Anything will do: the Nation, the Labour Movement — no matter what, so long as it purveys that drunken Saturday-night feeling that we are 'all brothers'. Equality in the great family of man reeks of the incense of religious mystification. You need a stuffed-up nose to miss the stink.

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

4

POWER'S PERSPECTIVE 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 down from behind. And the knowledge of the death that awaits us only increases the torture and hastens the agony. The disease of attrition that checks, shackles and forbids our actions eats us away more surely than cancer, but nothing spreads the disease like the acute consciousness of this attrition. What can save a man who is 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 force 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 referred to 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 once a lucid mind has understood that impotence now strikes through the mind itself, it becomes easy to say that the game is as good as over.

There is a kind of consciousness that is allowed by Power because it serves its purposes. To attain one's lucidity from the light of Power only unveils the darkness of despair, feeding one's truth on lies. Aesthetically, the choice is clear: either death against power, or death in power: Arthur Cravan and Jacques Vaché on one side, the SS, 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, the intelligent very often too. The same rift is to be found in Drieu la Rochelle and Jacques Rigaut, 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 murderers for Order, the consciousness of despair makes murderers for Disorder. The relapse into conformity of the so-called anarchists of the right is caused by the same gravitational pull as the fall of the damned archangels into the iron jaws of suffering. The rattle of counter-revolution inhabits through the vaults of despair.

Suffering results from constraint. A portion of pure delight, no matter

how tiny, will hold it at bay. To work for delight and authentic festivity is barely distinguishable from preparing for a general insurrection.

The times are propelling us into a gigantic search-and-destroy mission in pursuit of myths and received ideas. But let there be no mistake, we are sent out defenceless — or what is worse, armed only with the paper weapons of pure speculation — into the swamp of constraints, and it will very likely engulf us. Perhaps we will get our first taste of joy 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, people are crushed under the wardrobe. Without lifting the wardrobe it is impossible to deliver whole peoples from their endless and unbearable suffering. It is terrible that even one person should be crushed under such a weight: that he should want to breathe, and not be able to. The wardrobe rests on everybody, and everyone tries to lift it up, but not with the same conviction, not with the same energy. An odd, groaning civilisation.

Thinkers ask themselves: "What? People 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* thanks to the universality of his 'objective consciousness'. And the whole Christian spirit is here, fondling suffering like a good dog and handing out photographs of crushed but smiling people. "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.

Chapter five

The decline and fall of work

The obligation 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 expands.

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 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 a brutish weariness? From adolescence to retirement each twenty-four-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 crushing 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, taking to the streets, picking up weapons and inventing a new poetry. Already the front against forced labour is forming; its gestures of refusal are moulding the consciousness of the future. Every call for productivity under the conditions chosen by capitalist and Soviet economics is a call to slavery.

That it is necessary to produce is so obvious a fact that even a hack like Jean Fourastié can easily fill a dozen tomes with proofs of it. Unfortunately for neo-political economists, the proofs they adduce are nineteenth-century

ones, harking back to a time when the misery of the working classes made the right to work analogous to the right to slavery, as claimed from 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 survive.

The *tripalium* is an instrument of torture. The Latin word *labor* means 'suffering'. We are unwise to forget this 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 for 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, though, 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 this?

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.

Is it because work transforms nature? Yes, but what can I do with a nature ordered in terms of profit and loss, 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, organised labour transforms the surface of continents as a by-product, not a purpose. Work to transform the world? Bullshit. The world is being transformed in the direction prescribed by the existence of forced labour; which is why it is being transformed so badly.

Perhaps man realises himself through 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 people to bear ten or fifteen hours of effort, which nobody could have stood if some kind of pleasure had not slipped in. 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 of the most mindless submission. Which is why, wherever submission is demanded, the stale fart of ideology makes headway, 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 fragmented 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 weaken the majority of people physically, to castrate and stupefy them collectively and so make them receptive to the feeblest, 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 diminished, 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. Significantly, the reduction of working time came just when the ideological variety show produced by consumer society seemed able to provide an effective replacement for 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 the 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 said that "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 organisation. The Red Army of the 1960s is an army such as is found in capitalist countries. Events have shown that its effectiveness remains far below the potential of a revolutionary militia. In the same way, the planned Chinese economy, by refusing to allow federated groups to organise their work autonomously, condemns itself to becoming another example of the perfected form of capitalism called socialism. Has anyone bothered to study the approaches to 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 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. 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 organisation of work and the organisation of leisure are the blades of the castrating shears whose job is to improve the race of fawning dogs. One day, perhaps, we shall 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.

Chapter six

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.

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 lighting waxed and waned with 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 elements found themselves helpless in face of 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 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 began to ask.

✧

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 organisation (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 and taking a few people with him: 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 inter-regnum 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 principle 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 anti-capitalism 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 methods 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 organisation of the Bolsheviks; and it is to this greatness also that the workers' movement is indebted for Kronstadt, Budapest and *batiuchka* Stalin.)

Thus 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 channelling 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 revolutionaty 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 revolutionary careerist measures the relation of forces in quantitative

terms, just as an officer's rank is measured 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 of a 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 fought through to the end. So far the 'final conflict' has only had false starts. Everything must be begun again from scratch. History's only justification is to help us do it.

✧

Under the process of decompression, antagonists who seemed irreconcilable at first sight grow old together, become frozen in purely formal opposition, lose their substance, neutralise and moulder into each other. Who would recognise 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 anti-capitalism, 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 Chinese children's choir sings paeans 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 Rolling Stones, small cars, hippies, nationalisation, spaghetti, old people, the United Nations, 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, and 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, that glacial fetish, such particles of antagonism form a magnetic ring whose function it is to make everybody lose their bearings, to abstract individuals from themselves and scramble all 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 neutralise each other, since each is defined by the other; as it is impossible to choose between them, we are led into that 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 Manichaeanism and Trinitarianism! In a truly 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 of salvation and damnation and this control was more important to them than salvation and damnation themselves. On earth they proclaimed themselves judges without appeal, while submitting themselves to judgement only in an afterlife whose laws they invented.

The Christian myth defused the bitter Manichaean conflict by offering to the believer the possibility of individual salvation; this was the breach opened up by the Poor Schlemiel of Nazareth. Thus man escaped the rigours of 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. Thus the movement of decompression appears to have the essential 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 desire 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. A spontaneous feature 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, it aims to transcend them. Prematurely crushed or co-opted, it becomes by inversion a force for 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 Brethren 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 doré*, the Marxist project of the complete man, the dreams of Fourier, the explosion of the Commune, and the violence of the anarchists.

✧

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, works whose unknown or nameless authors will

flock to join de 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.

The impossibility of communication: power as universal mediation

In the realm of Power, mediation is the false necessity wherein people learn to lose themselves rationally. Mediation's power to alienate is now being reinforced, and also brought into question, by the dictatorship of consumption (seven), by the predominance of exchange over gift (eight), by cybernetisation (nine), and by the reign of the quantitative (ten).

Chapter seven

The age of happiness

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

1

THE FACE OF HAPPINESS vanished from art and literature as it began to be reproduced along endless walls and billboards, offering to each passerby the universal image in which to recognise himself. With Volkswagen your problems are over! Choose Mercedes-Benz: where good taste makes good sense.

Three cheers for Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham: happiness is not a myth! "The more we produce, the better we shall live", writes the humanist sociologist Fourastié, and another genius, General Eisenhower, takes up the refrain: "To save the economy, we must buy, buy anything." Production and consumption are the nipples of modern society. Thus suckled, humanity grows in strength and beauty; rising standard of living, all modern conveniences, distractions of all kinds, culture for all, the comfort of your dreams. On the horizon of the Khrushchev report, the rosy dawn of communism is breaking at last, a new era heralded by two revolutionary decrees: the abolition of taxes and free transport for all. Yes, the golden age is in sight, almost within spitting distance.

In this upheaval one thing has disappeared: the proletariat. Where on earth can it be? Spirited away? Gone underground? Or has it been put in a museum? *Sociologi disputant.* We hear from some quarters that in the advanced industrial countries the proletariat no longer exists, that it has

disappeared forever under an avalanche of sound systems, TVs, small cars and planned communities. Others denounce this as sleight of hand and indignantly point out a few remaining workers whose low wages and wretched conditions do undeniably evoke the nineteenth century. "Backward sectors", comes the retort, "in the process of re-absorption. Surely you must admit that the direction of economic development is towards Sweden, Czechoslovakia, the welfare state, and not towards India?"

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

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

Only the present is left out of the reckoning. Ungrateful and uncouth, the younger generation doesn't want to know about the glorious past which is offered as a free gift to every consumer of Trotskyist-reformist ideology. They claim that to make demands means to make demands for the here and now. They recall that the meaning of past struggles is rooted in the present of the men who fought them, and that despite different historical conditions they themselves are living in the same present. In short, one might say that radical revolutionary currents are inspired by one unchanging project: the project of being a whole man, a will to live totally which Marx was the first to provide with scientific tactics. But these are pernicious theories which the holy churches of Christ and Stalin never miss a chance

to condemn. More money, more freezers, more holy sacraments and more GNP, that's what is needed to satisfy our revolutionary appetites.

Are we condemned to the state of welfare? Peace-loving citizens will inevitably deplore expressions of opposition to a programme with which everybody agrees, from Khrushchev to Albert Schweitzer, from the Pope to Fidel Castro, from Aragon to the late Mr Kennedy.

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

A French worker summed up his difference of opinion with the proponents of welfare-statism and other watchdogs of the future in the following terms: "Since 1936 I have been fighting for higher wages. My father before me fought for higher wages. I've got a TV, a fridge and a VW. If you ask me, it's been a dog's life from start to finish."

In action, as in words, the new poetry just doesn't hit it off with the welfare state.

2

IN THE KINGDOM of consumption the citizen is king. A democratic monarchy: equality before consumption, fraternity in consumption, and freedom through consumption. The dictatorship of consumer goods has finally destroyed the barriers of blood, lineage and race; this would be good cause for celebration were it not that consumption, with its logic of *things*, forbids all qualitative differences and recognises only differences of quantity between values and between people. The distance has not changed between those who possess a lot and those who possess a small but ever-increasing

amount; but the intermediate stages have multiplied, and have so to speak brought the two extremes, rulers and ruled, closer to the same level of mediocrity. To be rich nowadays means to possess a large number of poor objects.

Consumer goods are tending to lose all use-value. Their nature is to be consumable at all costs, like the nothing-box. And as General Eisenhower so candidly explained, the present economic system can only be rescued by turning man into a consumer, by identifying him with the largest possible number of consumable values, which is to say, non-values, or empty, fictitious, abstract values. After being "the most precious kind of capital", in Stalin's happy phrase, man must now become the most valued of consumer goods. The stereotyped images of the star, the poor man, the communist, the murderer-for-love, the law-abiding citizen, the rebel, the bourgeois, will replace man, putting in his place a system of multicopy categories arranged according to the irrefutable logic of robotisation. Already the idea of 'teenager' tends to define the buyer in conformity with the product he buys, to reduce his variety to a varied but limited range of objects in the shops (records, guitars, Levis . . .). You are no longer as old as you feel or as old as you look, but as old as what you buy. The time of production-society where 'time is money' will give way to the time of consumption, in every sense of the word, a time measured in terms of products bought, worn out and thrown away: a time of premature old age, which is the eternal youth of trees and stones.

The truth of the theory of immiseration is demonstrated today, not, as Marx expected, in the sphere of goods necessary for survival, since these, far from becoming scarce, have become more and more abundant; but rather in terms of survival itself, which is always the enemy of real life. Affluence had seemed to promise to all men the *dolce vita* previously lived by the feudal aristocracy. But in the event affluence and its comforts are only the children of capitalist productivity, children doomed to age prematurely as soon as the market system has transformed them into mere objects of passive consumption. Work to survive, survive by consuming, survive to consume: the hellish cycle is complete. Under the reign of 'economism', survival is both necessary and sufficient. This is the fundamental truth of bourgeois society. But it is also true that a historical period based on such an

anti-human truth can only be a period of transition, an intermediate stage between the life that was lived, if obscurely, by the feudal masters and the life that will be constructed rationally and passionately by masters without slaves. Only thirty years are left if we want to end the transitional period of slaves without masters before it has lasted two centuries.

3

WITH REGARD TO DAILY LIFE, the bourgeois revolution looks more like a counter-revolution. The market in human values has rarely known such a collapse; never has man's conception of existence undergone such rapid devaluation. The aristocratic life with its wealth of passions and adventures suffered the fate of a palace partitioned off into furnished rooms, gloomy holes made even more unbearable by the sign outside which proclaimed, like a challenge hurled at the Universe, that this was the age of freedom and well-being. From now on hatred would give way to contempt, love to attachment, the ridiculous to the stupid, passion to sentimentality, desire to envy, reason to calculation, the taste for life to the fear of death. The utterly contemptible morality of profit came to replace the utterly detestable morality of honour; the mysterious and quite ridiculous power of birth and blood gave way to the quite Ubuesque power of money. The children of 4th August 1789 took bankers' orders and sales charts as their coats of arms; mystification came to reside in the account book.

Wherein lies the mystery of money? Clearly in the fact that it represents a sum of beings and things that can be appropriated. The nobleman's coat of arms expresses God's choice and the real power exercised by his elect; money is only a sign of what might be acquired, it is a draft on power, a possible choice. The feudal God, who appeared to be the basis of the social order, was really only its extravagant crowning excuse. Money, that odourless god of the bourgeois, is also a mediation, a social contract. It is a god swayed not by prayers or by promises, but by science and specialised know-how. Its mystery no longer lies in a dark and impenetrable totality, but in the sum of an infinite number of partial certainties; no longer in the quality of lordship, but in the number of marketable people and things that half a million dollars, say, puts within the reach of its possessor.

In the economy of free-trade capitalism, dominated by the imperatives

of production, wealth alone confers power and honour. Master of the means of production and of labour-power, it controls the development of productive forces and consumer goods and thus its owners have the pick of the myriad fruits of an infinite progress. But as this capitalism undergoes transformation into its opposite, into a state-planned economy, the old prestige of the capitalist playing the market with his millions fades away, and with it the caricature of the pot-bellied, cigar-puffing merchant of human flesh. Today we have managers who derive their power from their talent for organisation; and already computers are doing them out of a job. Managers do, of course, get their fat monthly pay cheques. But how can they vaunt their wealth? Xanadus, harems and all the trappings of unbounded riches are beyond their reach. For, unfortunately for them, the imperatives of consumption have so democratised the need to display power, that the symbolic force of wealth has been lost. Under the dictatorship of consumer goods, money melts away like a snowball in hell, its significance passes to objects with more representational value, more tangible objects better adapted to the spectacular ideology of creeping state socialism. Consumer goods encroach on the power of money because, wrapped in ideology, they are the true signs of power. Before long, money's only remaining justification will be the quantity of objects and useless gadgets it enables one to acquire and throw away at an ever-accelerating pace; only the quantity and the pace matter, because mass distribution automatically wipes out quality and rarity appeal. Only the ability to consume faster and faster — cars, alcohol, houses, TVs and playmates — shows how far you've got up the hierarchical ladder. From blue blood to the power of money, from the superiority of money to the power of the gadget, the *nec plus ultra* of Christian/socialist civilisation: a civilisation of prosaism and vulgar detail. A perfect nest for Nietzsche's 'little men'.

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

consumption becomes the consumption of ideology. East-West cultural *détente* is no accident. On the one hand, *homo consumator* buys a bottle of whiskey and gets as a free gift the lie that accompanies it. On the other hand, communist man buys ideology and gets a bottle of vodka for free. Paradoxically, Soviet and capitalist regimes are taking a common path, the first thanks to an economy of production, the second thanks to an economy of consumption.

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

In capitalist countries, the material profit reaped by the employer from both production and consumption remains distinct from the ideological profit which the employer is not alone in deriving from the organisation of consumption. This is all that prevents us from reducing the difference between a manager and worker to the difference between a new Rolls Royce every year and a VW lovingly maintained for five. All the same, the tendency is towards planning, and planning tends to quantify social differences in terms of ability to consume and to make others consume. With the differences growing in number and shrinking in significance, the real distance between rich and poor is diminishing, and mankind is levelled into mere variations on poverty. The culmination of the process would be a cybernetic society composed of specialists ranked hierarchically according to their aptitude for consuming, and making others consume, the doses of power necessary for the functioning of a gigantic social computer of which

they themselves would be at once program and print-out. A society of exploited exploiters where some slaves are more equal than others.

There remains the 'third world'. There remain the old forms of oppression. That the serfs of the *latifundia* should be the contemporaries of the new proletariat seems to me a perfect formula for the explosive mixture from which the total revolution will be born. Who could dare to suppose that the peons and Indians of South America will be satisfied with land reform and lay down their arms when the best paid workers in Europe are demanding a radical change in their way of life? The revolt against the welfare state will set the minimum demands for world revolution. You can choose to forget this, but you forget it at your peril. As Saint-Just said, those who make a revolution by halves are only digging their own graves.

Chapter eight

Exchange and gift

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

1

THE BOURGEOISIE administers a precarious and none-too-glorious interregnum between the sacred hierarchy of feudalism and the anarchic order of future classless societies. The bourgeois no-man's-land of exchange is the uninhabitable region separating the old, unhealthy pleasure of giving oneself, in which the aristocrats indulged, from the pleasure of giving through self-love, which the new generations of proletarians are little by little beginning to discover.

The notion that 'to get you must give' is the favourite absurdity of capitalism and its essentially similar competitors. The USSR 'offers' its hospitals and technicians, the USA 'offers' investments and good offices, breakfast cereals 'offer' free gifts.

The fact is that the meaning of giving has been rooted from our minds, our feelings and our actions. Think of Breton and his friends handing out

roses to the pretty girls on the Boulevard Poissonnière and immediately arousing the suspicion and hostility of the public.

The blighting of human relationships by exchange and bargaining is clearly linked to the existence of the bourgeoisie. The fact that exchange persists in a part of the world where it is claimed that there is a classless society suggests that the shadow of the bourgeoisie continues to rule under the red flag. Meanwhile, among the people of all industrialised countries, the pleasure of giving clearly marks the frontier between the world of calculation and the world of exuberance, of festivity. This style of giving has nothing to do with the prestige-enhancing giving of the nobility, which was hopelessly circumscribed by the notion of sacrifice. The proletariat really does nurture the project of human fullness, the project of total life; a project in which the aristocracy failed, albeit magnificently. But to give the devil his due, it is through the historical presence and mediation of the bourgeoisie that such a future becomes accessible to the proletariat. Is it not thanks to the technical progress and the productive forces developed by capitalism that the proletariat is in a position to realise, through the scientifically worked-out project of a new society, its egalitarian visions, its dreams of omnipotence and its desire to live without dead time? Today everything points up the mission, or rather the historical opportunity, of the proletariat: the destruction and transcendence of feudalism. And it will achieve this by trampling underfoot the bourgeoisie, which is doomed to represent merely a transitional period in the development of humanity — albeit a transitional period without which the transcending of the feudal project would have been inconceivable. This was an essential stage without which unitary power would never have been overthrown, and above all could never have been transformed and corrected according to the project of the whole man. The invention of God shows that the system of unitary power was already a world for the whole man, but for a whole man standing on his head. He merely had to be set back on his feet, no more, no less.

No liberation was possible before the reign of the economy; yet under this reign the only economy that is possible is the abstract economy of survival. With these two truths the bourgeoisie is spurring mankind on towards the supersession of economics, towards a point beyond history. Putting technology at the service of poetry will not have been the meanest

of the bourgeoisie's achievements. This class will never have been so great as at the moment of its demise.

2

EXCHANGE IS LINKED to the survival of primitive hordes in the same way as privative appropriation; both together constitute the bedrock on which the history of mankind has been built.

When the first humans found that it gave them more security in the face of a hostile nature, the demarcation of hunting territories laid the foundations of a social organisation which has imprisoned us ever since (see Raoul and Laura Makarius, *Totem et exogamie*). Primitive man's unity with nature is essentially magical. Man only really separates himself from nature by transforming it through technology, and as he transforms it he deconsecrates it. But the use of technology is determined by social organisation. The birth of society coincides with the intervention of the tool. More: organisation itself is the first coherent technique of struggle against nature. Social organisation — hierarchical since it is based on privative appropriation — gradually destroys the magical bond between man and nature, but it preserves the magic for its own use; it creates between itself and mankind a mythical unity modelled on the original participation in the mystery of nature. Framed by the 'natural' relations of prehistoric man, social organisation slowly dissolves this frame that defines and imprisons it. From this point of view history is just the transformation of natural alienation into social alienation: a process of disalienation transformed into a process of social alienation, a movement of liberation producing new chains. Eventually, though, the will for human liberation will launch a direct attack on the whole collection of paralysing mechanisms, that is, on the social organisation based on privative appropriation. This is the movement of disalienation which will at once undo history and realise it in new modes of life.

The bourgeoisie's accession to power signals man's victory over natural forces. But as soon as this happens, hierarchical social organisation, born out of the struggle against hunger, sickness and material distress, loses its justification, and is obliged to take full responsibility for the malaise of industrial civilisations. Today people no longer blame their sufferings on the hostility of nature, but on the tyranny of a perfectly inadequate and

perfectly anachronistic form of society. When it destroyed the magical power of the feudal lords, the bourgeoisie passed a death sentence on the magic of hierarchical power itself. The proletariat will execute this sentence. What the bourgeoisie began by historical processes will now be finished off in opposition to its own narrow conception of history. But it will still be a historical struggle, a class struggle which will realise history.

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

✧

As soon as the members of a horde mark out a hunting territory and claim private ownership of it, they find themselves confronted by a hostility which is no longer the hostility of wild animals, weather, inhospitable regions, or sickness, but that of human groups who are excluded from the hunting-grounds. The animal dilemma — destroy the rival group or be destroyed by it — was successfully circumvented by human genius. Pacts, contracts and exchange were the basis of primitive communities. Between the period of nomadic food-gathering hordes and that of agricultural societies, the survival of clans depended on a triple exchange: exchange of women, exchange of food, exchange of blood. Magical thinking provides this operation with a supreme controller, a master of exchange, a power beyond and above the contracting parties. The birth of gods coincides with the twin birth of sacred myth and hierarchical power.

Of course the exchange was never of equal benefit to both clans. The problem was always to ensure the neutrality of the excluded clan without actually letting it into the hunting territory. And agricultural societies refined these tactics. The excluded class, who were tenants before they became slaves, enter the landowning group not as landowners, but as their degraded reflection (the famous myth of the Fall), the mediation between the land and its masters. Why do they submit? Because of the coherent hold over them exercised by the myth — although this is not the deliberate intention of the masters (to say so would credit them with a rationality that was still foreign to them). This myth conceals the cunning of exchange, the imbalance in the sacrifice which each side agrees to make. The excluded

class *really* sacrifice an important part of their life to the landowner: they accept his authority and work for him. The master *mythically* sacrifices his authority and his power as landowner to the dominated class: he is ready to pay for the safety of his people. God is the underwriter of the transaction and the defender of the myth. He punishes those who break the contract, while those who keep it he rewards with power: mythical power for those who sacrifice themselves in reality, real power for those who sacrifice themselves in myth. History and mythology show that the master could go so far as to sacrifice his life to the mythical principle. The fact that he paid the price of the alienation which he imposed on others reinforced the master's divine character. But it seems that a make-believe execution, or one in which he was replaced by a deputy, soon released the master from such a hard bargain. When the Christian God delegated his son to the world, he gave generations of bosses a perfect model by which to authenticate their own sacrifice.

Sacrifice is the archaic form of exchange. It is a magical exchange, unquantified, irrational. It dominated human relationships, until mercantile capitalism and its money as measure-of-all-things had carved out such a large area in the world of slaves, serfs and, finally, burghers, that the economy came to appear as a particular zone, a domain separated from life. When money appears, the element of exchange in the feudal gift begins to win out. The sacrifice-gift, the potlatch — the *game* of exchange or loser-take-all, in which the size of the sacrifice determined the prestige of the giver — obviously had no place in a rationalised trading economy. Forced out of the sectors dominated by economic imperatives, it re-emerged in values such as hospitality, friendship and love: refuges doomed to disappear as the dictatorship of quantified exchange (market value) colonised everyday life and turned this too into a market.

Mercantile and industrial capitalism accelerated the quantification of exchange. The feudal gift was strictly rationalised on the model of commerce. Exchange-as-gamble was replaced by calculation. The playful Roman promise to sacrifice a cock to the gods in exchange for a peaceful voyage remained outside the grasp of commercial measurement because of the disparity of the things that were exchanged. And we can well imagine that the age in which a man like Fouquet could ruin himself to shine more

brightly in the eyes of his contemporaries (and to outshine Louis XIV) produced a poetry which has disappeared from our times, whose model of a human relationship is the exchange of *x* pounds and *y* pence for *n* grams of meat.

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

In a society where quantities of appliances and ideologies indicate the quantity of power consumed, apportioned and used up, magical relations evaporate and leave hierarchical power naked — a matador without a cape. The last ramparts of the sacred are tottering: if we demolish them rapidly we shall bring a world to an end; if we do not, humanity will be crushed beneath them as they fall.

Strictly quantified, first by money and then by what might be called 'sociometric units of power', exchange pollutes all our relationships, feelings and thoughts. Where exchange dominates, only *things* are left, a world plugged into the organisation charts of cybernetic power: the world of reification. Yet this world is also, paradoxically, the jumping-off point for a total reconstruction of life and thought. A rock bottom on which we can *really* start to build.

✧

The feudal mind seemingly conceived of the gift as a sort of haughty refusal to exchange — a will to deny interchangeability. This attitude entailed a contempt for money and any form of common measure. Sacrifice excludes pure giving, of course, yet so much room was left for play, humanity, gratuitousness, that inhumanity, religion and solemnity came at times to appear as secondary to such preoccupations as war, love, friendship or hospitality.

Through their gift of self the nobility identified their power with the totality of cosmic forces and at the same time claimed control over the totality hallowed by myth. The bourgeoisie traded in *being* for *having*, and so destroyed the mythical unity of being and the world as the basis of power. The totality fell into fragments. The semi-rational exchange of production

equated creativity, reduced to labour-power, with an hourly wage-rate. The semi-rational exchange of consumption equates consumable life — life reduced to the activity of consumption — with the quantity of power needed to lock the consumer into his place in the hierarchical organisation chart.

The sacrifice of the masters is followed by the last stage in the history of sacrifice: the sacrifice of specialists. In order to consume, the specialist makes others consume according to a cybernetic programme whose hyper-rationality of exchange is destined to abolish sacrifice — and man along with it. The day pure exchange comes to regulate the modes of existence of the robot citizens of the cybernetic democracy, sacrifice will cease to exist. Objects need no justification to make them obedient. Sacrifice is no more part of the programme of machines than it is of a quite opposite project, the project of the whole human being.

✧

The crumbling away of human values under the influence of exchange mechanisms leads to the crumbling of exchange itself. The insufficiency of the feudal gift means that new human relationships must be built on the principle of pure giving. We must rediscover the pleasure of giving: giving because you have so much. What beautiful potlatches the affluent society will see — whether it likes it or no — when the exuberance of the younger generation discovers the pure gift. The growing passion for stealing books, clothes, food, weapons or jewellery simply for the pleasure of giving them away, offers a glimpse of what the will to live has in store for consumer society.

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

We will have to renew our acquaintance with feudal imperfection, not in order to perfect it, but in order to transcend it. We will have to rediscover

the harmony of unitary society while freeing it from the phantom of divinity and from hierarchy sanctified. The new innocence is not so far removed from the ordeals and judgements of God: the inequality of blood is closer to the equality of free individuals, irreducible to one another, than bourgeois equality. The cramped style of the nobility was only a crude sketch of the grand style which will be invented by masters without slaves. Yet it was a style of life nonetheless — a world away from the wretched forms of mere *survival* which ravage the individual's existence in our time.

Chapter nine

Technology and its mediated use

Contrary to the interest of those who control its use, technology tends to demystify the world. The democratic reign of consumption deprives commodities of any magical value. At the same time, organisation — the technology of new technologies — deprives modern productive forces of their subversive and seductive qualities. Such organisation is simply the organisation of authority (1). Alienated mediations weaken men by making themselves indispensable. A social mask conceals people and things, transforming them, in the present stage of privative appropriation, into dead things — into commodities. Nature is no more. The rediscovery of nature will be its reinvention as a worthy adversary by building new social relationships. The shell of the old hierarchical society will be burst open from within by the cancerous expansion of its technical apparatus (2).

1

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

Rousseauism and pastoral idylls accompany the first throbbings of the industrial machine. The ideology of progress, found in Condorcet or Adam Smith, emerged from the old myth of the four ages. Just as the age of iron preceded the golden age, it seemed 'natural' that progress should fulfil itself as a return: a return to the state of innocence before the Fall.

Belief in the magical power of technology goes hand in hand with its opposite, the tendency to deconsecration. The machine is the model of the intelligible. There is no mystery, nothing obscure in its drive-belts, cogs and gears; it can all be explained perfectly. But the machine is also the miracle that is to transport man into the realms of happiness and freedom. Besides,

this ambiguity is useful to the masters: the old con about happy tomorrows and the green grass over the hill operates at various levels to justify the rational exploitation of people today. Thus it is not the logic of desanctification that shakes people's faiths in progress so much as the inhuman use of technical potential, the way that the cheap mystique surrounding it begins to grate. So long as the labouring classes and underdeveloped peoples were still offered the spectacle of their slowly-decreasing material poverty, the enthusiasm for progress still drew ample nourishment from the troughs of liberal ideology and its extension, socialism. But, a century after the spontaneous demystification of the Lyons workers, when they smashed the looms, a general crisis broke out, springing this time from the crisis of big industry; fascist regression, sickly dreams of a return to artisanry and corporatism, the Ubuesque master-race of blond beasts.

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

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

But the distance between Fourier and the cyberneticians who control the operational organisation of technology is the distance between freedom and slavery. Of course, the cybernetic project claims that it is already sufficiently developed to be able to solve all the problems raised by the appearance of any new technique. A dubious claim indeed, for several reasons:

— The constant development of productive forces, the exploding mass production of consumer goods, promises nothing. Musical air-conditioners and solar ovens stand unheralded and unsung. We see a weariness coming, one that is already so striking that sooner or later it is bound to develop into a critique of organisation itself.

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

By laying the basis for a perfect power structure, the cyberneticians will only stimulate the perfection of its refusal. Their programming of new techniques will be shattered by the same techniques turned to its own use by another kind of organisation. A revolutionary organisation.

2

TECHNOCRATIC ORGANISATION raises technical mediation to its highest point of coherence. It has been known for ages that the master uses the slave as a means to appropriate the objective world, that the tool only alienates the worker as long as it belongs to a master. Similarly in the realm of consumption: it is not the goods that are inherently alienating, but the conditioning that leads their buyers to choose them and the ideology in which they are wrapped. The tool in production and the conditioning of choice in consumption are the mainstays of the fraud: they are the mediations which move man the producer and man the consumer to the illusion of *action* in a real *passivity* and transform him into an essentially dependent being. Controlled mediations separate the individual from himself, his desires, his dreams, and his will to live; and so people come to believe in the legend that you can't do without them, or the power that governs them. Where Power fails to paralyse with constraints, it paralyses by suggestion,

by forcing everyone to use crutches of which it is the sole owner and purveyor. Power as the sum of alienating mediations awaits only the holy water of cybernetics to baptise it into the state of Totality. But total power does not exist, only totalitarian powers. And cyberneticians make such pitiful priests that their baptism of organisation will be laughed off the stage.

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

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

In the realm of exploitation of man by man, the real transformation of nature takes place only through the real transformation of the social fraud. At no point in their struggle have man and nature ever been really face to face. They have been united yet kept apart by what mediates this struggle: hierarchical social power and its organisation of appearances. The transformation of nature is its socialisation and it has been socialised badly. If all nature is social, this is because history has never known a society without power.

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

And death: death also strikes people socially. Not only because the energy and resources poured down the drain of militarism and wasted in the anarchy of capitalism and bureaucracy could make a vital contribution to

the scientific struggle against death. But also, and above all, because it is in the vast laboratory of society (and under the benevolent eye of science) that the foul brew of culture in which the germs of death are spawned is kept on the boil (stress, nervous tension, conditioning, pollution, cures worse than the disease, etc). Only animals are still allowed to die a natural death — some of them.

Could it be that, after disengaging themselves from the higher animal world by means of their history, men might come to envy the animal's contact with nature? This is, I think, the implicit meaning of the current puerile cult of the 'natural'. The desire which this cult mobilises, however, is one which in its mature and untwisted form makes the quite reasonable demand that thirty thousand years of history should be transcended.

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

✧

Technological organisation cannot be destroyed from without. Its collapse will result from internal decay. Far from being punished for its Promethean aspirations, it is dying because it never escaped from the dialectic of master and slave. Even if the cybernauts did come to power they would have a hard time staying there. Their complacent vision of their own rosy future calls for a retort along the lines of these words from a black worker to a white boss (*Présence Africaine*, 1956): "When we first saw your trucks and planes we thought you were gods. Then, after a few years, we learned how to drive your trucks, as we shall soon learn how to fly your planes, and we understood that what interested you most was manufacturing trucks and planes and making money. For our part, what we are interested in is using them. Now, you are just our blacksmiths."

Chapter ten

Down quantity street

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

1

THE SYSTEM OF commercial exchange has come to govern all of people's everyday relations with themselves and with their fellows. Every aspect of public and private life is dominated by the quantitative.

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

The calculation of a man's capacity to produce or to make others produce, to consume or to make others consume, concretises to a T that expression so dear to our philosophers: *the measure of man.* Even the simple pleasures of a drive in the country are generally measured in terms of miles on the clock, speeds reached and gas consumed. With the rate at which economic 'imperatives' are buying up feelings, desires and needs, and falsifying them, people will soon be left with nothing but the memory of

having once been alive. Living in the past: the memories of days gone by will be our consolation for living on. How could spontaneous laughter, let alone real joy, survive in a space-time that is measurable and constantly measured? At best, the dull contentment of the man-who's-got-his-money's-worth, and who exists by that standard. Only objects can be measured, which is why exchange always reifies.

✧

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

The qualitative is slowly taking on the aspect of an infinite quantity, an endless series whose momentary end is always the negation of pleasure, the profound and irremediable dissatisfaction of a Don Juan. If only contemporary society would encourage such dissatisfaction, and allow total licence to the delirious and devastating attractions of insatiable appetite! Who would deny a certain charm to the life of the idler, a trifle blasé perhaps, but enjoying at his leisure everything that can make passivity sweet: a *seraglio* of beautiful women, witty and sophisticated friends, subtle drugs, exotic meals, brutal liquors and sultry perfumes. This is a man whose desire is not so much to change life as to seek refuge in the greatest attractions it has to offer: a libertine in the grand style.

Realistically, of course, this kind of option no longer exists for *anyone*, for in both Western and Eastern societies even quantity is rationed. A tycoon with only one month left to live would still refuse to blow his entire fortune on one huge orgy . . . the morality of exchange and profit doesn't let go that easily. Capitalist economics, even if you buy it in a jumbo-sized container, still comes down to one thing: niggardliness. What stroke of fortune it was for mystification that it managed for so long to dress up quantity in quality's clothing, to maintain the powerful illusion that a mere *aggregate* of possibilities was the basis of a multidimensional world. This was precisely what the bourgeoisie could not do, however: it could not let exchange be subsumed by the gift, nor give free rein between Heaven and Earth to every kind of adventure from Gilles de Rais's to Dante's. This was

the door that it closed on itself in the name of industry and commerce. All that remained to it was a vast nostalgia. The bourgeoisie is a wretched yet vital catalyst — at once all and nothing — destined to precipitate the emergence of that classless, non-authoritarian society which will make the illusions of the aristocratic era real.

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

In fact, ideology draws its essence from quantity: it is simply an idea reproduced again and again in time (Pavlovian conditioning) and in space (where the consumers take over). Ideology, the media and culture tend more and more to lose their content and become pure quantity. The less importance a piece of news has, the more it is repeated, and the more it distracts people from their real problems. Goebbels said that the bigger the lie, the more easily it is swallowed. But ideology takes us away from the Big Lie by constantly bidding against itself. One after another it lays before us a hundred paperbacks, a hundred washing powders, a hundred political ideas, and with equal conviction proves that each of them is incontestably superior to any of the others. Even in ideology quantity is being destroyed by quantity itself: conflicting conditionings end by cancelling each other out. Is this the way to rediscover the power of the qualitative, a power that can move mountains?

Quite the contrary. Contradictory conditioning is more likely to produce trauma, inhibition and a radical refusal to be brainwashed any further. Admittedly ideology still has one trick up its sleeve — that of posing false questions, raising false dilemmas and leaving the conditioned individual, poor sucker, with the worry of sorting out which is the truer of two lies. But

such pointless diversions can do precious little to alleviate the survival sickness to which consumer society exposes its members.

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

2

IN UNITARY REGIMES the sacred was the cement that held together the social pyramid in which each particular being, from the highest lord to the lowest serf, had his place according to the will of Providence, the order of the world and the King's pleasure. The cohesion of the structure soon disappeared, dissolved by the corrosive criticism of the youthful bourgeoisie, but, as we know, the shadow of the divine hierarchy remains. The dismantling of the pyramid, far from destroying the inhuman cement, only pulverises it. We see tiny individual beings becoming absolute: little 'citizens' released by social atomisation. The inflated imagination of egocentricity creates a universe on the model of one point, a point just the same as thousands of other points, grains of sand, all free, equal and fraternal, scurrying here and there like so many ants when their nest is broken open. All the lines have gone haywire since God disappeared, depriving them of their point of convergence; they weave and collide in apparent disorder. But make no mistake, despite the anarchy of competition and the isolation of individualism, class and caste interests are beginning to join up, structuring a geometry able and eager to rival the old divine geometry in coherence.

The coherence of unitary power, though based on the divine principle, is a palpable coherence, which each individual lives and knows intimately. Paradoxically the *material* principle of fragmentary power can only furnish an abstract coherence. How could the organisation of economic survival hope to substitute itself smoothly for an immanent, omnipresent God who is called on to witness the most trivial gestures, like sitting down to eat or

sneezing? The omnipotence of the feudal mode of domination was quite relative anyway, but let us suppose that with the aid of cyberneticians it could be equalled by a secularised government of men. Even so, how could anyone replace the mythic and poetic ethos which enveloped the life of communities that were cohesive, an ethos that provided them with some kind of third dimension? The bourgeoisie is well and truly caught in the trap of its own half- revolution.

✧

Quantification implies linearity. The qualitative is plurivalent, the quantitative univocal. Life quantified becomes a measured route march towards death. The radiant ascent of the soul towards heaven is replaced by inane speculations about the future. Moments of time no longer radiate, as they did in the cyclical time of earlier societies; time is a thread stretching from birth to death, from memories of the past to expectations of the future, on which an eternity of survival strings out a row of instants and hybrid presents nibbled away by what is past and what is yet to come. The feeling of living in symbiosis with cosmic forces — the sense of the simultaneous — revealed joys to our forefathers which our passing presence in the world is hard put to it to provide. What remains of such a joy? Only vertigo, giddy transience, the effort of keeping up with the times. You must move with the times — the motto of those who make a profit if you do.

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

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

What do I want? Not a succession of moments, but one huge instant. A totality that is lived, and without the experience of 'time passing'. The feeling of 'time passing' is simply the feeling of growing old. And yet, since one must survive in order to live, virtual moments, possibilities, are necessarily rooted in that time. When we try to federate moments, to bring out the pleasure in them, to release their promise of life, we are already learning how to construct 'situations'.

✧

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

We think we are living in the world, when in fact we are being positioned in a perspective. No longer the simultaneous perspective of primitive painters, but the perspective of the Renaissance rationalists. It is hardly possible for looks, thoughts and gestures to escape the attraction of the distant vanishing point which orders and deforms them, situating them in its spectacle. Power is the great city planner. It parcels out public and private survival, buys up vacant lots cheap, and permits no construction that does not abide by its norms. This monolithic style is the envy of its actual builders of cities, who ape it assiduously as they replace the old mumbo-jumbo architecture of the sacred hierarchy with stockbroker belts, white-collar high-rise 'communities' and workers' housing projects.

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

Chapter eleven

Mediated abstraction, abstracted mediation

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

1

WHAT IS THIS DETOUR whereby I get lost when I try to find myself? What is this screen that separates me from myself under the pretence of protecting me? And how can I ever rediscover myself in this crumbling fragmentation of which I am composed? I move forward into a terrible doubt of ever coming to grips with myself. It is as though my path were already marked out in front of me, as though my thoughts and feelings were following the contours of a mental landscape which they imagine they are creating, but which in fact is moulding them. An absurd force — all the more absurd for being inscribed in the rationality of the world and seeming

incontestable — keeps me jumping in an effort to reach a solid ground which my feet have never left. And by this useless hopping towards myself I succeed only in losing my grip on the present: most of the time I live out of step with what I am, marking time with dead time.

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

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

"Mediation," says Hegel, "is self-identity in movement." But what moves can lose itself. And when he adds, "It is the moment of dying and becoming", the same words differ radically in meaning according to the

perspective in which they are placed: that of totalitarian power or that of the total man.

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

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

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

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

Human energy does not let itself be led away into the inhuman without a fight. Where is the field of battle? Always in the immediate extension of lived experience, in spontaneous action. I am not suggesting that the 'abstraction' of mediations has to be countered by some wild, 'instinctive' spontaneity: that would be merely to reproduce on a higher level the idiotic

choice between pure speculation and mindless activism, the disjunction between theory and practice. I am saying that tactical adequacy involves launching the attack at the very spot where the highwaymen of experience lay their ambush, the spot where the attempt to act is transformed and perverted, at the precise moment when spontaneous action is sucked up by misinterpretation and misunderstanding. At this point there is a momentary crystallisation of consciousness which illuminates both the demands of the will to live and the fate that social organisation has in store for them: living experience and its co-optation by the machinery of authoritarianism. The point where resistance begins is the look-out post of subjectivity. For identical reasons, my knowledge of the world exists effectively only at the moment when I act to transform the world.

2

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

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

strained after individual access to the exuberance and energy of unrestrained life.

The feudal idea cared little about survival as such: famines, plagues and massacres swept millions of beings from that best of all possible worlds without unduly disturbing the generations of *literati* and subtle hedonists. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, finds in survival the raw material of its economic interests. The need to eat and subsist materially cannot but be good for trade. Indeed it is not excessive to see in the primacy of the economy, that axiom of bourgeois thought, the very source of its celebrated humanism. If the bourgeoisie prefers man to God, it is because only man produces and consumes, supplies and demands. The divine universe, which is pre-economic, incurs their disapproval just as much as the post-economic world of the whole man.

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

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

3

EVERY TIME THE TOTAL and immediate consummation of an action is deferred, Power is confirmed in its function of grand mediator. Spontaneous poetry, on the other hand, is the anti-mediation *par excellence*.

Broadly speaking, it is true to say that the characterisation of the bourgeois or soviet forms of fragmentary power as a 'sum of constraints' is

becoming less and less apt as these systems come to depend increasingly upon alienating mediations. Ideological hypnosis is replacing the bayonet. This perfected mode of government has a computer-like aspect. Following the prudent directives of the technocratic specialised left, an electronic Argus is planning to eliminate the middlemen (spiritual leaders, putschist generals, Stalinoid Franco-ites and other sons of Ubu) and wire up his Absolute State of well-being. But the more mediations are alienated, the more the thirst for the immediate rages, the more the savage poetry of revolutions tramples down frontiers.

In its final phase, authority will culminate in the union of abstract and concrete. Power is already making the concrete abstract, even if it still occasionally resorts to the electric chair. The very face of the world, as illuminated by Power, is about to be organised according to a metaphysic of reality; and it is manna from heaven to have the faithful philosophers lining up and showing off their new uniforms as technocrats, sociologists, or specialists of this or that.

The pure form which is haunting social space is the visible aspect of the death of humanity. It is the neurosis which precedes necrosis, survival sickness spreading slowly as living experience is replaced by images, forms, objects, as alienated mediation transmutes experience into a thing, madreporises it. It is a man or a tree or a stone — in Lautréamont's prophetic phrase.

Gombrowicz too pays due respect to Form, Power's old go-between, now promoted to the place of honour among pimps of State: "You have never really been able to recognise or explain the importance of Form in your life. Even in psychology you have been unable to accord to Form its rightful place. We continue to believe that it is feeling, purposes or ideas that govern our behaviour, considering Form to be at most a harmless ornamental addition. When the widow weeps tenderly beside her husband's coffin, we think that she is crying because she feels her loss so keenly. When some engineer, doctor or lawyer murders his wife, his children, or a friend, we suppose that he was driven to the deed by violent or bloodthirsty impulses. When some politician expresses himself vacuously, deceitfully or shabbily in a public speech, we say that he is stupid because he expresses himself stupidly. But the fact of the matter is this: a human being does not

externalise himself in an immediate manner, according to his nature, but always through a definite Form and this Form, this way of being, this way of speaking and reacting, does not issue solely from himself but is imposed on him from outside.

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

4

IN HIS *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* Marx writes: "Theory becomes a material force once it has got hold of the masses. Theory is capable of getting hold of men once it demonstrates its truth with regard to man, once it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp something at its roots. But for man the root is man himself."

In short, radical theory gets hold of the masses because it comes from them in the first place. It is the repository of spontaneous creativity, and its task is to ensure the striking power of this creativity. It is revolutionary technique at the service of poetry. Any analysis of revolutions past or present that does not presuppose a determination to resume the struggle more coherently and more effectively plays fatally into the hands of the enemy: it is incorporated into the dominant culture. The only time to talk about revolutionary moments is when you have them waiting in the wings. A stricture well worth applying to the wandering bellringers of our "planetary" left.

Those who are able to end a revolution are always the most eager to explain it to those who have made it. The arguments they use to explain it are as good as their argument for ending it, one can say that much. When theory escapes from the makers of a revolution it turns against them. It no longer gets hold of them, it dominates and conditions them. Theory no longer amplified by the force of arms of the people can only strengthen the people's disarmers. The revolution "explained" in bullets to the Kronstadt sailors or the followers of Makhno — that too was Leninism. Not theory but ideology.

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

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

✧

The fight is unfair. Words serve Power better than they do men; they serve it more faithfully than most men do, and more scrupulously than the other mediations (space, time, technology . . .). For all transcendence depends on language and is developed through a system of signs and symbols (words, dance, ritual, music, sculpture, building . . .). When a half-completed action, which has been suddenly obstructed, tries to carry on further in a form which it hopes will sooner or later allow it to finish and realise itself — like a generator transforming mechanical energy into electrical energy which will be reconverted into mechanical energy by a motor miles away — at this moment language swoops down on living experience, ties it hand and foot, robs it of its substance, *abstracts* it. It always has categories ready to condemn to incomprehensibility and nonsense anything which they cannot contain, to summon into existence-for-Power that which slumbers in nothingness because it has no place as yet in the system of Order. The repetition of familiar signs is the basis of ideology.

And yet people still try to use words and signs to perfect their aborted gestures. It is because they do that a poetic language exists: a language of lived experience which, for me, merges with radical theory, the theory which

penetrates the masses and becomes a material force. Even when it is co-opted and turned against its original purpose, poetry always gets what it wants in the end. The 'Proletarians of all lands, unite' which produced the Stalinist State will one day realise the classless society. No poetic sign is ever completely turned by ideology.

The language that neglects radical actions, creative actions, human actions *par excellence*, from their realisation, becomes anti-poetry. It defines the linguistics of power: its science of information. This information is the model of false communication, the communication of the inauthentic, non-living. There is a principle that I find holds good: as soon as language no longer obeys the desire for realisation, it falsifies communication; it no longer communicates anything except that false promise of truth which is called a lie. But this lie is the truth of what destroys me, infects me with its virus of submission. Signs are thus the vanishing points from which diverge the antagonistic perspectives which carve up the world and define it: the perspective of power and the perspective of the will to live. Each word, idea or symbol is a double agent. Some, like the word 'fatherland' or the policeman's uniform, usually work for authority; but make no mistake, when ideologies clash or simply begin to wear out, the most mercenary sign can become a good anarchist (think of the splendid title that Bellegarigue chose for his newspaper: *L'Anarchie, Journal de l'Ordre*).

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

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

Power cannot be overthrown like a government. The united front against authority covers the whole spectrum of everyday life and enlists the vast

majority of people. To know how to live is to know how to fight against renunciation without ever giving an inch. Let nobody underestimate Power's skill in stuffing its slaves with words to the point of making them the slaves of words.

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

— 'Information' should be corrected in the direction of poetry, the news decoded, official terms translated (so that 'society', in the perspective opposed to Power, becomes a 'racket' or 'area of hierarchical power') — leading eventually to a glossary or encyclopaedia (Diderot was well aware of the importance of such a project — and so were the situationists).

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

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

✧

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

An aside. History has often been accused of happening back-to-front;

the question of language becoming superfluous and turning into language-game is another example. A baroque current runs through the history of thought, making fun of words and signs with the subversive intention of disturbing the semiological order and Order in general. The series of attempts on the life of language by the rabble of tumbling nonsense-rhymers whose prize fools were Lear and Carroll finds its finest expression in the Dada explosion. In 1916, the desire to have it out with signs, thought and words corresponded for the first time to a real crisis of communication. The liquidation of language that had so often been undertaken speculatively had a chance to find its historical realisation at last.

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

✧

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

The impossibility of realisation: power as sum of seductions

Where constraint breaks people, and mediation makes fools of them, the seduction of power is what makes them love their oppression. Because of it people give up their real riches: for a cause that mutilates them (twelve); for an imaginary unity that fragments them (thirteen); for an appearance that reifies them (fourteen); for roles that wrest them from authentic life (fifteen); for a time whose passage defines and confines them (sixteen).

Chapter twelve

Sacrifice

There is such a thing as a reformism of sacrifice that is really a sacrifice to reformism. Humanistic self-mortification and fascistic self-destruction both leave us nothing — not even the option of death. All causes are equally inhuman. But the will to live raises its voice against this epidemic of masochism wherever there is the slightest pretext for revolt; for what appear to be merely partial demands actually conceal the process whereby a revolution is being prepared: the nameless revolution, the revolution of everyday life (1). The refusal of sacrifice is the refusal to be bartered: human beings are not exchangeable. Henceforward the appeal to voluntary self-sacrifice is going to have to rely on three strategies only: the appeal to art, the appeal to human feelings and the appeal to the present (2).

1

WHERE PEOPLE ARE NOT broken — and broken in — by force and fraud, they are seduced. What are Power's methods of seduction? Internalised constraints which ensure a good conscience based on a lie: the masochism of the *honnête homme*. Thus Power castrates but calls castration self-denial; it offers a choice of servitudes but calls this choice liberty. The feeling of having done one's duty is Power's reward for self-immolation with honour.

As I showed in 'Banalités de base' (*Internationale situationniste*, issues 7-8; English version: *The Totality for Kids*), the master-slave dialectic implies that the mythic sacrifice of the master embodies within itself the real sacrifice of the slave: the master makes a spiritual sacrifice of his real power to the general interest, while the slave makes a material sacrifice of his real life to a power which he shares in appearance only. The framework of *generalised appearances* or, if you will, the essential lie required for the development of privative appropriation (ie, the appropriation of things by means of the appropriation of beings) is an intrinsic aspect of the dialectic of sacrifice, and the root of the infamous separation that this involves. The

mistake of the philosophers was that they built an ontology and the notion of an unchanging human nature on the basis of a mere social accident, a purely contingent necessity. History has been seeking to eliminate privative appropriation ever since the conditions which called for it ceased to exist. But the metaphysical maintenance of the philosophers' error continues to work to the advantage of the masters, of the 'eternal' ruling minority.

✧

The decline and fall of sacrifice parallels the decline and fall of myth. Bourgeois thought exposes the materiality of myth, deconsecrating and fragmenting it. It does not abolish it, however, because if it did the bourgeoisie would cease to exploit — and hence to exist. The fragmentary spectacle is simply one phase in the decomposition of myth, a process today being accelerated by the dictates of consumption. Similarly, the old sacrifice-gift ordained by cosmic forces has shrivelled into a sacrifice-exchange minutely metered in terms of social security and social-democratic justice. And sacrifice attracts fewer and fewer devotees, just as fewer and fewer people are seduced by the miserable show put on by ideologies. The fact is that today's tiny masturbations are a feeble replacement indeed for the orgiastic heights offered by eternal salvation. Hoping for promotion is a far cry from hoping — albeit insanely— for life everlasting. Our only gods are heroes of the fatherland, heroes of the shop floor, heroes of the frigidaire, heroes of fragmented thought . . . . How are the mighty fallen!

Nevertheless. The knowledge that an ill's end is in sight is cold comfort when you still have to suffer it in the immediate. And the praises of sacrifice are still sung on every side. The air is filled with the sermonising of red priests and ecumenical bureaucrats. Vodka mixed with holy water. Instead of a knife between our teeth we have the drool of Jesus Christ on our lips. Sacrifice yourselves joyfully, brothers and sisters! For the Cause, for the Established Order, for the Party, for Unity, for Meat and Potatoes!

The old socialists used to like saying, "They say we are dying for our country, but really we are dying for Capital". Today their heirs are berated in similar terms: "You think you're fighting for the proletariat, but really you die for your leaders". "You are not building for the future; men and steel are the same thing in the eyes of the five-year plan." And yet, what do

young leftist radicals do after stating these obvious truths? They enter the service of a Cause — the 'best' of all Causes. The time they have for creative activity they squander handing out leaflets, putting up posters, demonstrating or heckling local politicians. They become militants, fetishising action because others are doing their thinking for them. Sacrifice seems to have an endless series of tricks up its sleeve.

The best cause is one in which the individual can lose himself body and soul. The principle of death is simply the denial of the principle of the will to live. One or other of these principles must win out, however. There is no middle ground, no possibility of compromise between them on the level of consciousness. And you have to fight for one or for the other. Fanatics of established orders — Chouans, Nazis, Carlists — display their unequivocal choice of the party of death with absolute consistency. The fascist slogan *Viva la muerte!* must at least be given credit for pulling no punches. By contrast, our reformists of death in small doses and socialists of *ennui* cannot even claim the dubious honour of having an aesthetic of total destruction. All they can do is mitigate the passion for life, stunting it to the point where it turns against itself and changes into a passion for destruction and self-destruction. They oppose concentration camps, but only in the name of moderation — in the name of moderate power and moderate death.

Great despisers of life that they are, the partisans of absolute self-sacrifice to State, Cause or Führer do have one thing in common with those whose passion for life challenges the ethos and techniques of renunciation. Though antagonistic, their respective perceptions of revelry are equally sharp. Life being so Dionysian in its essence, it is as though the partisans of death, their lives twisted by their monstrous asceticism, manage to distil all the joy that has been lost to them into the precise moment of their death. Spartan legions, mercenaries, fanatics, suicide squads — all experience an instant of bliss as they die. But this is a *fête macabre*, frozen, aestheticised, caught for eternity in a camera flash. The paratroopers that Bigeard speaks of leave this world through the portal of aesthetics: they are petrified figures, madrepores — conscious, perhaps, of their ultimate hysteria. For aesthetics is carnival paralysed, as cut off from life as a Jibaro head, the carnival of death. The aesthetic element, the element of *pose*, corresponds to the element of death secreted by everyday life. Every apocalypse is beautiful, but this beauty is a

dead one. Remember the song of the Swiss Guard that Céline taught us to love.

The end of the Commune was no apocalypse. The difference between the Nazis dreaming of bringing the world down with them and the Communards setting Paris on fire is the difference between total death brutally affirmed and total life brutally denied. The Nazis merely operated the mechanism of logical annihilation already designed by humanists preaching submission and abnegation. The Communards knew that a life constructed with passion cannot be taken away; that there is more pleasure in destroying such a life than in seeing it mutilated; and that it is better to go up in flames with a glad heart than to give an inch, when giving an inch is the same as giving up all along the line. "Better die on our feet than live on our knees!" Despite its repulsive source — the lips of the Stalinist Ibarruri — it seems to me that this cry eloquently expresses the legitimacy of a particular form of suicide, a good way of taking leave. And what was valid for the Communards holds good for individuals today.

Let us have no more suicides from weariness, which come like a final sacrifice crowning all those that have gone before. Better one last laugh, *à la* Cravan, or one last song *à la* Ravachol.

✧

The moment revolution calls for self-sacrifice it ceases to exist. The individual cannot give himself up for a revolution, only for a fetish. Revolutionary moments are carnivals in which the individual life celebrates its unification with a regenerated society. The call for sacrifice in such a context is a funeral knell. Jules Vallès fell short of his own train of thought when he wrote: "If the submissive do not outlive the rebellious, one might as well revel in the name of an idea." For a militant can only be a revolutionary *in spite of* the ideas which he agrees to serve. The real Vallès, the Communard Vallès, is first the child, then the student, making up in one long Sunday for all the endless weeks that have gone before. Ideology is the rebel's tombstone, its purpose being to prevent his coming back to life.

When the rebel begins to believe that he is fighting for a higher good, the authoritarian principle gets a fillip. Humanity has never been short of justifications for giving up what is human. In fact some people possess a

veritable reflex of submission, an irrational terror of freedom; this masochism is everywhere visible in everyday life. With what agonising facility we can give up a wish, a passion, stemming from the most essential part of ourselves. With what passivity, what inertia, we can accept living or acting for some *thing* — 'thing' being the operative word, a word whose dead weight always seems to carry the day. It is hard to be oneself, so we give up as quickly as possible, seizing whatever pretext offers itself: love of children, of reading, of artichokes, etc, etc. Such is the abstract generality of the ill that our desire for a cure is overwhelmed.

And yet, the reflex of freedom also knows how to exploit a pretext. Thus a strike for higher wages or a rowdy demonstration can awaken the carnival spirit. As I write, thousands of workers around the world are downing tools or picking up guns, ostensibly in obedience to directives or principles, but actually, at the profoundest level, in response to their passionate desire to change their lives. The real demand of all insurrectionary movements is the transformation of the world and the reinvention of life. This is not a demand formulated by theorists: rather, it is the basis of poetic creation. Revolution is made everyday despite, and in opposition to, the specialists of revolution. This revolution is nameless, like everything springing from lived experience. Its explosive coherence is being forged constantly in the everyday clandestinity of acts and dreams.

No other problem is as important to me as a difficulty I encounter throughout the long daylight hours: how can I invent a passion, fulfil a wish or construct a dream in the daytime in the way my mind does spontaneously as I sleep? What haunts me are my unfinished actions, not the future of the human race or the state of the world in the year 2000. I could not care less about hypothetical possibilities, and the meandering abstractions of the futurologists leave me cold. If I write, it is not, as they say, 'for others'. I have no wish to exorcise other people's ghosts. I string words together as a way of getting out of the well of isolation, because I need others to pull me out. I write out of impatience, and with impatience. I want to live without dead time. What other people say interests me only in as much as it concerns me directly. They must use me to save themselves just as I use them to save myself. We have a common project. But it is out of the question that the project of the whole man should entail a reduction in individuality. There

are no degrees in castration. The apolitical violence of the young, and its contempt for the interchangeable goods displayed in the supermarkets of culture, art and ideology, are a concrete confirmation of the fact that the individual's self-realisation depends on the application of the principle of 'every man for himself', though this has to be understood in collective terms — and above all in *radical* terms.

At that stage in a piece of writing where people used to look for explanations, I would like them from now on to find a settling of scores.

2

THE REFUSAL OF SACRIFICE is the refusal to be bartered. There is nothing in the world of things, exchangeable for money or not, which can be treated as equivalent to a human being. The individual is irreducible. He is subject to change but not to exchange. Now, the most superficial examination of movements for social reform shows that they have never demanded anything more than a cleaning-up of exchange and sacrifice, making it a point of honour to humanise inhumanity and make it attractive. And every time slaves try to make their slavery more bearable they are striking a blow for their masters.

The 'road to socialism' consists in this: as people become more and more tightly shackled by the sordid relations of reification, the tendency of the humanitarians to mutilate people in an *egalitarian* fashion grows ever more insistent. And with the deepening crisis of the virtues of self-abnegation and of devotion generating a tendency towards radical refusal, the sociologists, those watchdogs of modern society, have been called in to peddle a subtler form of sacrifice: art.

✧

The great religions succeeded in turning people's wretched earthly existence into a time of voluptuous expectation: at the end of this valley of tears lay life eternal in God. According to the bourgeois conception, art is better equipped than God to bestow eternal glory on people. The art-in-life-and-in-God of unitary social systems (Egyptian statuary, African art, etc) gave way to an art which complemented life and sought to make up for the absence of God (fourth century Greece, Horace, Ronsard, Malherbe, the Romantics, etc). The builders of cathedrals cared as little for posterity

as did de Sade. Their salvation was guaranteed by God, as de Sade's was guaranteed by himself: neither sought a place in the museum of history. They worked for a supreme state of being, not for the temporal survival of their work or for the admiration of centuries to come.

History is the earthly paradise of the bourgeois idea of transcendence. This realm is accessible not through commodities but through apparent gratuity: through the sacrifice called for by the work of art, through activity seemingly undetermined by the immediate need to increase capital. The philanthropist does good works; the patriot produces heroism; the soldier fashions victory; the poet or scholar creates works of literary or scientific value, and so on. But there is an ambiguity in the very idea of 'making a work of art', for it embraces both the lived experience of the artist and the sacrifice of this experience to the abstraction of a creative substance, ie, to the aesthetic form. The artist relinquishes the lived intensity of the creative moment in exchange for the durability of what he creates, so that his name may live on in the funereal glory of the museum. And his desire to produce a durable work is the very thing that prevents him from living imperishable instants of real life.

Actually, aside from the case of purely academic art, artists never succumb completely to aesthetic assimilation. Though he may abdicate his immediate experience for the sake of appearances, any artist — and anyone who tries to live is an artist — must also follow his desire to increase his share of dreams in the objective world of others. In this sense he entrusts the thing he creates with the mission of completing his personal self-realisation within the collectivity. And in this sense creativity is revolutionary in its essence.

The function of the spectacle in ideology, art and culture is to turn the wolves of spontaneity into the sheepdogs of knowledge and beauty. Literary anthologies are replete with insurrectionary writings, the museums with calls to arms. But history does such a good job of pickling them in perpetuity that we can neither see nor hear them. In this area, however, consumer society performs a salutary task of dissolution. For today art can only construct plastic cathedrals. The dictatorship of consumption ensures that every aesthetic collapses before it can produce any masterpieces. Premature burial is an axiom of consumerism, imperfection a precondition of planned

obsolescence. Sensational aesthetic departures occur only because someone briefly finds a way to outdo the spectacle of artistic decomposition in its own terms. And any such originality soon turns up mass-marketed in every five-and-dime. Bernard Buffet, pop art, Andy Warhol, rock music — where are you now? To talk of a modern work of art enduring is sillier than talking of the eternal values of Standard Oil.

As for the progressive sociologists, once they had finished shaking their heads sadly over the discovery that the value of the art object had become nothing but its market price, and that the artists were working according to the norms of profitability, they decided that we should return to the source of art, to everyday life — not in order to change it, of course, for such is not their function, but rather to make it the raw material for a new aesthetic which would defy packaging techniques and so remain independent of buying and selling. As though there were no such thing as consuming on the spot! The result? Sociodramas and happenings which supposedly provoke spontaneous participation on the part of the spectators. The only thing the spectators participate in, though, is an aesthetic of nothingness. The only thing that can be expressed in the mode of the spectacle is the emptiness of everyday life. And indeed, what better commodity than an aesthetic of emptiness? The accelerating decomposition of values has itself become the only available form of entertainment. The trick is that the spectators of the cultural and ideological vacuum are here enlisted as its organisers. The show's inanity is made up for by forcing its spectators — passive agents *par excellence* — to participate in it. The ultimate logic of the happening and its derivatives is to supply the society of masterless slaves, which the cyberneticians have planned for us, with the spectatorless spectacle it will require. For artists in the strict sense of the word, the road to complete recuperation is well posted: they have merely to follow the progressive sociologists and their ilk into the super-corporation of specialists. They may rest assured that Power will reward them well for applying their talents to the job of dressing up the old conditioning to passivity in bright new colours.

From the perspective of Power, everyday life is a latticework of renunciations and mediocrity. A true void. An aesthetic of daily life would make us all into artists responsible for organising this nothingness. The final ploy

of official art will be the attempt to lend therapeutic features to what Freud, in a dubious simplification, referred to as the death instinct — ie, rapturous submission to authority.

Wherever the will to live fails to spring spontaneously from individual poetry, there falls the shadow of the crucified Toad of Nazareth. The artist in every human being can never be brought out by regression to artistic forms defined by the spirit of sacrifice. We have to go back to square one.

✧

The surrealists — or some of them at any rate — understood that the only valid transcendence of art lay in direct experience, in works that no ideology could assimilate into its internally consistent lie. They came to grief, of course, precisely because of their complaisant attitude towards the cultural spectacle. Admittedly, the current process of decomposition of thought and art has made the danger of aesthetic assimilation much less than it was in the thirties. The present state of affairs tends to favour situationist agitation.

Much mournful wailing has gone on — since surrealism's demise, in fact — over the disappearance of idyllic relationships such as friendship, love and hospitality. But make no mistake: all this nostalgia for the more human virtues of the past answers to one thing and one thing only, namely, the impending need to revive the idea of sacrifice, which has been coming under too heavy fire. The fact is that there will never be any friendship, or love, or hospitality, or solidarity, so long as self-abnegation exists. The call for self-denial always amounts to an attempt to make inhumanity attractive. Here is an anecdote of Brecht's that makes the point perfectly. To illustrate the proper way of doing a service for friends, and to entertain his listeners, Herr K tells a story. Three young people once came to an old Arab and said: "Our father is dead. He left us seventeen camels, but he laid down in his will that the eldest son should have a half, the second son a third, and the youngest a ninth part of his possessions. Try as we will, we cannot agree on how to divide up the camels. So we'd like to leave it up to you to decide." The old man thought it over before replying: "I see that you need another camel before you can share them out properly. Take mine, divide the beasts up, and bring me back whatever you have left over." The young men thanked him for his friendly offer, took his camel and divided up the

eighteen animals as follows: the eldest took a half, which was nine camels, the second son took a third, which was six, and the youngest took his ninth, which was two. To everyone's surprise, there was still one camel remaining, and this they promptly returned with renewed thanks to their old friend. According to Herr K, this was the perfect example of the correct way to do a friend a service, because nobody had to make a sacrifice. Here is a model which should be made axiomatic and strictly applied to all of everyday life.

It is not a question of opting for the art of sacrifice as opposed to the sacrifice of art, but rather of putting an end to sacrifice as art. The triumph of an authentic *savoir-vivre* and of the construction of authentically lived situations exists everywhere as a potentiality, but everywhere these tendencies are distorted by the falsification of what is human.

✧

Perhaps the sacrifice of the *present* will turn out to be the last stage of a rite that has maimed humanity since its beginnings. Our every moment crumbles into bits and pieces of past and future. We never really give ourselves over completely to what we are doing, except perhaps in orgasm. Our present is grounded in what we are going to do later and in what we have just done, with the result that it always bears the stamp of unpleasure. In collective as well as in individual history, the cult of the past and the cult of the future are equally reactionary. Everything which has to be built has to be built in the present. According to a popular belief, the drowning man relives his whole life in the instant of his death. For my part I am convinced that we have intense flashes of lucidity which distil and remake our entire lives. Future and past are docile pawns of history which merely cover up the sacrifice of the present. I want to exchange nothing — not for a thing, not for the past, not for the future. I want to live intensely, for myself, grasping every pleasure firm in the knowledge that what is radically good for me will be good for everyone. And above all I would promote this one watchword: "Act as though there were no tomorrow."

Chapter thirteen

Separation

Privative appropriation, the basis of social organisation, keeps individuals separated from themselves and from others. Artificial unitary paradises seek to conceal this separation by co-opting more or less successfully people's prematurely shattered dreams of unity. To no avail. People may be forced to swing back and forth across the narrow gap between the pleasure of creating and the pleasure of destroying, but this very oscillation suffices to bring Power to its knees.

PEOPLE LIVE SEPARATED from one another, separated from what they are in others, and separated from themselves. The history of humanity is the history of one basic separation which precipitates and determines all the others: the social distinction between masters and slaves. By means of history men try to find one another and attain unity. The class struggle is but one stage, though a decisive one, in the struggle for the whole man.

Just as the ruling class has every reason in the world to deny the existence of the class struggle, so the history of separation is necessarily indistinguishable from the history of the dissimulation of separation. This mystification results less from a deliberate intent than from a long drawn out and confused battle in which the desire for unity has generally ended up being transformed into its opposite. Wherever separation is not totally eliminated it is reinforced. When the bourgeoisie came to power, fresh light was shed on the factors which divide men in this most essential way, for the bourgeois revolution laid bare the social and material character of separation.

✧

What is God? The guarantor and quintessence of the myth used to justify the domination of man by man. This repellent invention has no other *raison d'être*. As myth decomposes and passes into the stage of the spectacle, the Grand External Object, as Lautréamont called him, is shat-

tered by the forces of social atomisation and degenerates into a remedy for intimate use only — a sort of salve for social diseases.

At the high point of the crisis brought on by the end of classical philosophy and of the ancient world, Christianity's genius lay in the fact that it subordinated the recasting of a mythic system to one fundamental principle: the doctrine of the Trinity. What does this dogma of Three in One, which caused so much ink and blood to flow, really mean?

Man belongs to God in his soul, to the temporal authority in his body, and to himself in his spirit. His salvation depends on his soul, his liberty on his spirit, his earthly existence on his body. The soul envelops the body and the spirit, and without the soul these are as nothing. If we look more closely at this scheme, we find an analogy for the union of master and slave under the principle of man envisaged as a divine creature. The slave is the body, the labour power appropriated by the lord; the master is the spirit, which governs the body and invests it with a small part of its higher essence. The slave sacrifices himself in body to the power of the master, while the master sacrifices himself in spirit to the community of his slaves (eg, the king 'serving' his people, de Gaulle 'serving' France, the Pope washing the feet of the poor). The slave abdicates his earthly life in exchange for the feeling of being free, that is, for the spirit of the master come down into him. Consciousness mystified is mythic consciousness. The master makes a notional gift of his master's power to all those whom he governs. By drenching the alienation of bodies in the subtler alienation of the spirit, he economises on the amount of violence needed to maintain slavery. The slave identifies in spirit, or at least he may, with the master to whom he gives up his life force. But whom can the master identify with? Not with his slaves *qua* possessions, *qua* bodies, certainly: rather, with his slaves *qua* emanation of the spirit of mastery itself, of the master supreme. Since the individual master must sacrifice himself on the spiritual plane, he has to find someone or something within the coherent mythic system to make this sacrifice *to*: this need is met by a notion of mastery-in-itself of which he partakes and to which he submits. The historically contingent class of masters had thus to create a God to bow down to spiritually and with whom to identify. God validated both the master's mythic sacrifice to the public good and the slave's real sacrifice to the master's private and privative power. God is the

principle of all submission, the night which makes all crimes lawful. The only illegal crime is the refusal to accept a master. God is a harmony of lies, an ideal form uniting the slave's voluntary sacrifice (Christ), the consenting sacrifice of the master (the Father; the slave as the master's son), and the indissoluble link between them (the Holy Ghost). The same model underlies the ideal picture of man as a divine, whole and mythic creature: a *body* subordinated to a guiding *spirit* working for the greater glory of the *soul*—the soul being the all-embracing synthesis.

We thus have a type of relationship in which two terms take their meaning from an absolute principle, from an obscure and inaccessible norm of unchallengeable transcendence (God, blood, holiness, grace, etc). Innumerable dualities of this type were kept bubbling for century after century like a good stew on the fire of mythic unity. Then the bourgeoisie took the pot off the fire and was left with nothing but a vague nostalgia for the warmth of the unitary myth and a set of cold and flavourless abstractions: body and spirit, being and consciousness, individual and society, private and public, general and particular, etc, etc. Ironically, though moved by class interests, the bourgeoisie destroyed the unitary myth and its tripartite structure to its own detriment. The wish for unity, so effectively fobbed off by the mythic thinking of unitary regimes, did not disappear along with those regimes: on the contrary, the wish became all the more urgent as the material nature of separation became clearer and clearer to people's consciousness. By laying bare the economic and social foundations of separation, the bourgeoisie supplied the arms which will serve to end separation once and for all. And the end of separation means the end of the bourgeoisie and of all hierarchical power. This is why no ruling class or caste can effect the transformation of feudal unity into real unity, into true social participation. This mission can only be accomplished by the new proletariat, which must forcibly wrest the *third force* (spontaneous creation, poetry) from the gods, and keep it alive in the everyday life of all. The transient period of fragmentary power will then be seen in its true light as a mere moment of insomnia, as the vanishing point prerequisite to the reversal of perspective, as the step back preparatory to the leap of transcendence.

✧

History testifies to the struggle waged against the unitary principle

and to the ways in which a dualistic reality began to emerge. The challenge was voiced to begin with in a theological language, the official language of myth. Later the idiom became that of ideology, the idiom of the spectacle. In their preoccupations, the Manichaeans, the Cathari, the Hussites, the Calvinists, etc, have much in common with such figures as Jean de Meung, La Boétie or Vanino Vanini. We find Descartes desperately locating the soul, for want of any better place, in the pineal gland. The Cartesian God is a funambulist balancing for some perfectly unaccountable reason atop a perfectly intelligible world. Pascal's, by contrast, hides himself from view, so depriving man and the world of a justification without which they are left in meaningless confrontation, each being the only criterion for judging the other: and how can something be measured against nothing?

By the close of the eighteenth century the fabric was rending in all directions as the process of decomposition began to speed up. This was the beginning of the era of 'little men' in competition. Fragments of human beings claimed the status of absolutes: matter, mind, consciousness, action, universal, particular — what God could put this Humpty Dumpty together again?

The spirit of feudal lordship had found an adequate justification in a certain transcendence. But a capitalist God is an absurdity. Whereas lordship called for a trinitarian system, capitalist exploitation is dualistic. Moreover, it cannot be dissociated from the material nature of economic relationships. The economic realm is no mystery: the nearest things to miracles here are the element of chance in the functioning of the market and the perfect programming of computerised planning. Calvin's rational God is much less attractive then the loans with interest that Calvinism authorises so readily. As for the God of the Anabaptists of Münster and of the revolutionary peasants of 1525, he is a primitive expression of the irrepressible thrust of the masses towards a society of whole men.

The mystical authority of the feudal lord was very different from that instituted by the bourgeoisie. For the lord did not simply change his role and become a factory boss: once the mysterious superiority of blood and lineage is abolished, nothing is left but a mechanics of exploitation and a race for profit which have no justification but themselves. Boss and worker are separated not by any qualitative distinction of birth but merely by

quantitative distinctions of money and power. Indeed, what makes capitalist exploitation so repulsive is the fact that it occurs between 'equals'. All the same, the bourgeoisie's work of destruction — though quite unintentionally, of course — reveals the justification for every revolution. When peoples stop being fooled they stop doing what they are told.

✦

Fragmentary power carries fragmentation to the point where the human beings over which it holds sway themselves become contradictory. At the same time, the unitary lie breaks down. The death of God democratises the consciousness of separation. What was the 'Romantic agony' if not a response to the pain of this split? Today we see it in every aspect of life: in love, in the human gaze, in nature, in our dreams, in reality. Hegel spoke of the tragedy of consciousness; he would have been nearer the mark had he spoken of a consciousness of tragedy. We find such a consciousness in revolutionary form in Marx. A far more comforting picture, from the viewpoint of Power, is offered by Peter Schlemiel setting off in search of his own shadow so as to forget that he is really a shadow in search of a body. The bourgeoisie's invention of artificial unitary paradises is a self-defensive reflex which is more or less successful in retrieving the old enchantment and reviving prematurely shattered dreams of unity.

Thus in addition to the great collective onanisms — ideologies, illusions of social unity, herd mentalities, opiums of the people — we are offered a whole range of marginal solutions lying in the no-man's-land between the permissible and the forbidden: individualised ideology, obsession, monomania, unique (and hence alienating) passions, drugs and other highs (alcohol, the cult of speed and rapid change, of rarefied sensations, etc). All these pursuits allow us to lose ourselves completely while preserving the impression of self-realisation, but the corrosiveness of such activities stems above all from their partial quality. The passion for play is no longer alienating if the person who gives himself up to it seeks play in the whole of life — in love, in thought, in the construction of situations. In the same way, the wish to kill is no longer megalomania if it is combined with revolutionary consciousness.

Unitary palliatives thus entail two risks for Power. In the first place they fail to satisfy, and in the second they tend to foster the will to build a real

social unity. Mystical elevation led only to God; by contrast, horizontal historical progression towards a dubious spectacular unity is infinitely finite. It creates an unlimited appetite for the absolute, yet its quantitative nature is limiting by definition. Its mad rush, therefore, must sooner or later debouch into the qualitative, whether in a negative way or — should a revolutionary consciousness prevail — through the transformation of negativity into positivity. The negative road does not lead to self-realisation: it precipitates us into a wilful self-destruction. Madness deliberately sought, the voluptuousness of crime and cruelty, the convulsive lightning of perversity — these are the enticing paths open to such unrepentant self-annihilation. To take them is merely to respond with unusual enthusiasm to the gravitational pull of Power's own tendency to dismember and destroy. But if it is to last, Power has to shackle its destructiveness: the good general oppresses his men, he does not execute them. On the other hand, it remains to be seen whether nothingness can be successfully doled out drop by drop. The limited pleasures derived from self-destruction could end up bringing down the power which sets such limits to pleasure. We only have to look at Stockholm or Watts to see that negative pleasure is forever on the point of tipping over into total pleasure — a little shove, and negative violence releases its positivity. I believe that *all* pleasure embodies the search for total, unitary satisfaction, in every sphere — a fact which I doubt Huysmans had the humour to see when he solemnly described a man with an erection as 'insurgent'.

The complete unchaining of pleasure is the surest way to the revolution of everyday life, to the construction of the whole man.

Chapter fourteen

The organisation of appearances

The organisation of appearances is a system for protecting the facts. A racket. It represents the facts in a mediated reality to prevent them emerging in unmediated form. Unitary power organised appearances as myth. Fragmentary power organises appearances as spectacle. Challenged, the coherence of myth became the myth of coherence. Magnified by history, the incoherence of the spectacle turns into the spectacle of incoherence (eg, pop art, a contemporary form of consumable putrefaction, is also an expression of the contemporary putrefaction of consumption) (1). The poverty of 'the drama' as a literary genre goes hand in hand with the colonisation of social space by theatrical attitudes. Enfeebled on the stage, theatre battens on to everyday life and attempts to dramatise everyday behaviour. Lived experience is poured into the moulds of roles. The job of perfecting roles has been turned over to experts (2).

1

"THE IDEAL WORLD," says Nietzsche, "is a lie invented to deprive reality of its value, its meaning, its truth. Until now the ideal has been the curse of reality. This lie has so pervaded humanity that it has been perverted and has falsified itself even in its deepest instincts, even to the point where it bows down to values directly opposed to those which formerly ensured progress by ensuring the self-transformation of the present." The lie of the ideal is of course merely the truth of the masters. When theft needs legal justification, when authority raises the banner of the general interest while pursuing private ends with impunity, is it any wonder that the lie fascinates the minds of men, twisting them to fit its laws until their contortions come to resemble 'natural' human postures? And it is true that man lies because in a world governed by lies he cannot do otherwise: he is falsehood himself, he is trapped in his own falsehood. Common sense never underwrites anything except the decree promulgated in the name of everyone against the truth. Common sense is the lie put into lay terms.

All the same, nobody lies groaning under the yoke of inauthenticity twenty-four hours a day. There are always a few radical thinkers in whom a truthful light shines briefly through the lie of words; and by the same token there are very few alienations which are not shattered every day for an instant, for an hour, for the space of a dream, by subjective refusal. Words are never completely in the thrall of Power, and no one is ever completely unaware of what is destroying him. When these moments of truth are extended they will turn out to have been the tip of the iceberg of subjectivity destined to sink the *Titanic* of the lie.

✧

After shattering myth, the tide of materialism has washed its fragments out to sea. Once the motor force of this tide, the bourgeoisie will end up as so much foam drifting out along with all the flotsam. When he describes the mechanism whereby the king's hired assassin returns in due time to carry out his orders upon the one who gave them, Shakespeare seems to offer us a curiously prophetic account of the fate reserved for the class that killed God. Once the hired killers of the established order lose their faith in the myth, or, if you will, in the God who legalises their crimes, the machinery of death no longer knows its master. Revolution was the bourgeoisie's finest invention. It is also the running noose which will help it take its leap into oblivion. It is easy to see why bourgeois thought, strung up as it is on a rope of radicalism of its own manufacture, clings with the energy of desperation to every reformist solution, to anything that can prolong its life, even though its own weight must inevitably drag it down to its doom. Fascism is in a way a consistent response to this hopeless predicament. It is like an aesthete dreaming of dragging the whole world down with him into the abyss, lucid as to the death of his class but a sophist when he announces the inevitability of universal annihilation. Today this *mise en scène* of death chosen and refused lies at the core of the spectacle of incoherence.

The organisation of appearances aspires to the immobility of the shadow of a bird in flight. But this aspiration amounts to no more than a vain hope, bound up with the ruling class's efforts to solidify its power, of escaping from the course of history. There is, however, an important difference between myth and its fragmented, desanctified avatar, the spectacle, with respect to the way each resists the criticism of facts. The varying importance

assumed in unitary systems by artisans, merchants and bankers explains the continual oscillation in these societies between the coherence of myth and the myth of coherence. With the triumph of the bourgeoisie something very different happens: by introducing history into the armoury of appearances, the bourgeois revolution historicises appearance and thus makes the progression from the incoherence of the spectacle to the spectacle of incoherence inevitable.

In unitary societies, whenever the merchant class, with its disrespect for tradition, threatened to deconsecrate values, the coherence of myth would give way to the myth of coherence. What does this mean? What had formerly been taken for granted had suddenly to be vigorously reasserted. Loud professions of faith were heard where previously faith was so automatic as to need no stating, and respect for the great had to be preserved through recourse to the principle of absolute monarchy. I hope closer study will be given to these paradoxical interregnums of myth during which we see the bourgeoisie trying to sanctify its rise by means of a new religion and by self-ennoblement, while the nobility engages in the corollary but very different activity of gambling on an impossible transcendence. (The Fronde springs to mind — but so do the Heraclitean dialectic and Gilles de Rais.) The aristocracy had the elegance to turn its last words into a witticism; the bourgeoisie's disappearance from the scene will have but the gravity of bourgeois thought. As for the forces of revolutionary transcendence, they surely have more to win from light-hearted death than from the dead weight of survival.

There comes a time when the myth of coherence is so undermined by the criticism of facts that it cannot mutate back into a coherent myth. Appearance, that mirror in which men hide their own choices from themselves, shatters into a thousand pieces and falls into the public realm of individual supply and demand. The demise of appearances means the end of hierarchical power, that façade 'with nothing behind it'. The trend is clear, and leaves no room for doubt as to this final outcome. The Great Revolution was scarcely over before God's motley successors turned up at bargain prices as 'unclaimed' items on a pawnbroker's shelves. First came the Supreme Being and the Bonapartist *concordat*, and then, hard on their heels, nationalism, individualism, socialism, national socialism and all the

other neo-isms — not to mention the individualised dregs of every imaginable hand-me-down *Weltanschauung* and the thousands of portable ideologies offered as free gifts every time someone buys a TV, an item of culture or a box of detergent. Eventually the decomposition of the spectacle entails the resort to the spectacle of decomposition. It is in the logic of things that the last actor should film his own death. As it happens, the logic of things is the logic of what can be consumed, and sold as it is consumed. Pataphysics, sub-Dada, and the *mise en scène* of impoverished everyday life line the road that leads us with many a twist and turn to the last graveyards.

2

THE DEVELOPMENT of the drama as a literary genre cannot but throw light on the question of the organisation of appearances. After all, a play is the simplest form of the organisation of appearances, and a prototype for all more sophisticated forms. As religious plays designed to reveal the mystery of transcendence to men, the earliest theatrical forms were indeed the organisation of appearances of their time. And the process of secularisation of the theatre supplied the models for later, spectacular stage management. Aside from the machinery of war, all machines of ancient times originated in the needs of the theatre. The crane, the pulley and other hydraulic devices started out as theatrical paraphernalia; it was only much later that they revolutionised production relations. It is a striking fact that no matter how far we go back in time the domination of the earth and of men seems to depend on techniques which serve the purposes not only of work but also of illusion.

The birth of tragedy was already a narrowing of the arena in which primitive men and gods had held their cosmic dialogue. It meant a distancing, a putting in parentheses, of magical participation. This was now organised in accordance with a refraction of the principles of initiation, and no longer involved the rites themselves. What emerged was a *spectaculum*, a thing seen, while the gradual relegation of the gods to the role of mere props presaged their eventual eviction from the social scene as a whole. Once mythic relationships have been dissolved by secularising tendencies, tragedy is superseded by drama. Comedy is a good indicator of this transition: with all the vigour of a completely new force, its corrosive humour devastates

tragedy in its dotage. Molière's *Don Juan* and the parody of Handel in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* bear sufficiently eloquent testimony on this score.

With the rise of the drama, human society replaced the gods on the stage. And while it is true that nineteenth century theatre was merely one form of entertainment among others, we must not let this obscure the much more important fact that during this period theatre left the theatre, so to speak, and colonised the entire social arena. The cliché which likens life to a drama seems to evoke a fact so obvious as to need no discussion. So widespread is the confusion between play-acting and life that it does not even occur to us to wonder why it exists. Yet what is 'natural' about the fact that I stop being myself a hundred times a day and slip into the skin of people whose concerns and importance I have really not the slightest desire to know about? Not that I might not choose to be an actor on occasion — to play a role for diversion or pleasure. But this is not the type of role-playing I have in mind. The actor supposed to play a condemned man in a realist play is at perfect liberty to remain himself: herein lies, in fact, the paradox of fine acting. But this freedom that he enjoys is contingent upon the fact that this 'condemned man' is in no danger of feeling a real hangman's noose about his neck. The roles we play in everyday life, on the other hand, soak into the individual, preventing him from being what he really is and what he really wants to be. They are nuclei of alienation embedded in the flesh of direct experience. The function of such stereotypes is to dictate to each person on an individual — even an 'intimate' — level the same things which ideology imposes collectively.

✧

The immanent conditioning of religion has been replaced by partial conditioning in many areas, for now Power has to call upon a great many minor forms of brainwashing in its vain attempt to find methods of control as effective as the law and order of old. This means that prohibitions and lies have been personalised, and bear down hard on each individual so as to confine him within some abstract mould. It also means that from one point of view — from the point of view of government — progress in human knowledge improves the mechanisms of alienation: the more man views himself through the eyes of officialdom, the greater his alienation. Science provides a rationale for the police. It teaches how much people can be

tortured without dying, and above all to what degree a person may be turned into a *héautontimorouménos*, a dutiful self-torturer. It teaches how to become a thing while still retaining a human appearance — and this in the name of a certain appearance of humanity.

It is not through the dissemination of *ideas* that cinema, and its personalised form, television, win the battle for our minds. Their influence works in quite a different way. An actor on the stage impresses the audience by the general orientation of his movements and by the conviction with which he delivers his lines; on the big or little screen, the same character is broken down into a sequence of exact details each of which affects the spectator in a separate and subtle way. What we have here is a school of gesture, a lesson in dramatic art in which a particular facial expression or motion of the hand supplies thousands of viewers with a supposedly adequate way of expressing particular feelings, wishes, and so on. Thus the still rudimentary technology of the image teaches the individual to model his existential attitudes on the complete portraits of him assembled by the psychosociologists. His most personal tics and idiosyncrasies become the means by which Power integrates him into its schemata. The poverty of everyday life reaches it nadir by being choreographed in this way. Just as the passivity of the consumer is an active passivity, so the passivity of the spectator lies in his ability to assimilate roles and play them according to official norms. The repetition of images and stereotypes offers a set of models from which everyone is supposed to choose a role. The spectacle is a museum of images, a showroom of stick figures.

It is also an experimental theatre. The human-consumer lets himself be conditioned by the stereotypes (passive aspect) on which he then models his behaviour (active aspect). The dissimulation of passivity by inventing new variants of spectacular participation and enlarging the range of available stereotypes is the job of our happeners, soap-operators and sociodramatists. The machinery of production-based society is everywhere pressed into the service of the spectacle: the computer as art object. We thus see the return of the original conception of theatre, of general participation in the mystery of divinity. But, thanks to technology, this now occurs on a higher level, and by the same token embodies possibilities of transcendence unavailable in ancient times.

Stereotypes are debased forms of the old ethical categories: knight, saint, sinner, hero, traitor, vassal, plain man, etc. The images which drew their effectiveness within the mythic system of appearances from their qualitative force work in the context of spectacular appearances solely by virtue of the frequency of their reproduction as factors of conditioning: slogans, photos, stars, catchwords, etc. As we have seen, the technical reproduction of magical relationships such as religious faith or identification resulted eventually in the dissolution of magic. Coupled with the demise of the great ideologies, this development precipitated the chaos of stereotypes and roles. Hence the new demands placed upon the spectacle.

Real events come to us as one-dimensional scripts. We get their form, never their substance. And even their form is more or less clear according to how often it is repeated and according to its position in the structure of appearances. For as an organised system appearances are a vast filing cabinet in which events are broken up, isolated from one another, labelled and arbitrarily classified: Crimes of Passion, Political Affairs, Business Section, From the Police Blotter, Eating Out, etc, etc. An old lady is killed by a kid on the Boulevard St Germain. What are we told by the press? We are given a pre-established scenario designed to arouse pity, indignation, disgust, whatever. The event is broken down into abstract components which are really just clichés: youth, delinquency, crime in the streets, law and order, etc. Image, photo, style — all are fabricated and co-ordinated according to the permutations dispensed by an automatic vending machine of ready-made explanations and predetermined emotions. Real people reduced to roles serve as bait: the Boston Strangler, the Prince of Wales, Brigitte Bardot, Norman Mailer — they all make love, get divorced, think thoughts and pick their noses for thousands of people. The dissemination of prosaic details invested with significance by the spectacle results in the proliferation of inconsistent roles. The husband who kills his wife's lover competes for attention with the Pope on his deathbed, and Mick Jagger's underpants are on a par with Mao's cap. It's all one, everything is equivalent to everything else, in the perpetual spectacle of incoherence. The fact is that the structures of the spectacle are in crisis, because so many balls have to be kept in the air at the same time. The spectacle has to be everywhere, so it becomes diluted and self-contradictory. The old, ever-serviceable Manichaean rela-

tionship is tending to disappear: the spectacle is not beyond good and evil, it falls short of them. The surrealists were quite mistaken when, in 1930, they hailed the act of the exhibitionist as subversive. They failed to see that in the sphere of morality the spectacle needs spicy items of this kind to keep on going. The surrealists' enthusiasm here was really no different from that of the gutter press. The media need scandal just as they need black humour and cynicism. Real scandal consists in the rejection and sabotage of the spectacle — something which Power can postpone only by giving the structures of appearance a drastic facelift. Perhaps this will turn out to have been the function of structuralism. But poverty, fortunately, cannot be mitigated by its extension to new fields. The spectacle's degeneration is in the nature of things, and the dead weight which enforces passivity is bound to lighten. Roles are eroded by the resistance put up by lived experience, and spontaneity will eventually lance the abscess of inauthenticity and pseudo-activity.

Chapter fifteen

Roles

Stereotypes are the dominant images of a period, the images of the dominant spectacle. The stereotype is the model of the role; the role is a model form of behaviour. The repetition of an attitude creates a role; the repetition of a role creates a stereotype. The stereotype is an objective form into which people are integrated by means of the role. Skill in playing and handling roles determines rank in the spectacular hierarchy. The degeneration of the spectacle brings about the proliferation of stereotypes and roles, which by the same token become risible, and converge dangerously upon their negation, ie, spontaneous actions (1, 2). Access to the role occurs by means of identification. The need to identify is more important to Power's stability than the models identified with. Identification is a pathological state, but only accidental identifications are officially classed as 'mental illness'. Roles are bloodsuckers of the will to live (3). They express lived experience, yet at the same time they reify it. They also offer consolation for this impoverishment of life by supplying a surrogate, neurotic gratification. We have to break free of roles by restoring them to the realm of play (4). A role successfully adopted ensures promotion in the spectacular hierarchy, the rise from a given rank to a higher one. This is the process of initiation, as manifested notably in the cult of names and the use of photography. Specialists are those initiates who supervise initiation. The always partial expertise of specialists is a component part of the systematic strategy of Power — Power which destroys us even as it destroys itself (5). The degeneration of the spectacle makes roles interchangeable. The proliferation of unreal changes creates the preconditions for a sole real change, a truly radical change. The weight of inauthenticity eventually elicits a violent and quasi-biological reaction from the will to live (6).

1

OUR EFFORTS, our boredom, our defeats, the absurdity of our actions — all stem most of the time from the imperious necessity in our present situation of playing hybrid parts, parts which appear to answer our desires but which are really antagonistic to them. "We would live," says Pascal,

"according to the ideas of others; we would live an imaginary life, and to this end we cultivate appearances. Yet in striving to beautify and preserve this imaginary being we neglect everything authentic." This was an original thought in the seventeenth century; at a time when the system of appearances was still hale, its coming crisis was apprehended only in the intuitive flashes of the most lucid. Today, amidst the decomposition of all values, Pascal's observation states only what is obvious to everyone. By what magic do we attribute the liveliness of human passions to lifeless forms? Why do we succumb to the seduction of borrowed attitudes? What are roles?

Is what drives people to seek power the very weakness to which Power reduces them? The tyrant is irked by the duties the subjection of his people imposes on him. The price he pays for the divine consecration of his authority over men is perpetual mythic sacrifice, a permanent humility before God. The moment he quits God's service, he no longer 'serves' his people — and his people are immediately released from their obligation to serve him. What *vox populi, vox dei* really means is: "What God wants, the people want." Slaves are not willing slaves for long if they are not compensated for their submission by a shred of power: all subjection entails the right to a measure of power, and there is no such thing as power that does not embody a degree of submission. This is why some agree so readily to be governed. Wherever it is exercised, on every rung of the ladder, power is partial, not absolute. It is thus ubiquitous, but ever open to challenge.

The role is a consumption of power. It locates one in the *representational* hierarchy, and hence in the spectacle: at the top, at the bottom, in the middle — but never *outside* the hierarchy, whether this side of it or beyond it. The role is thus the means of access to the mechanism of culture: a form of *initiation.* It is also the medium of exchange of individual sacrifice, and in this sense performs a *compensatory* function. And lastly, as a residue of separation, it strives to construct a behavioural unity; in this aspect it depends on *identification.*

2

IN A RESTRICTIVE sense, the expression 'to play a role in society' clearly implies that roles are a distinction reserved for a chosen few. Roman slaves, medieval serfs, agricultural day-labourers, proletarians, brutalised by

a thirteen-hour day — the likes of these do not have roles, or they have such rudimentary ones that 'refined' people consider them more animals than men. There is, after all, such a thing as poverty founded on exclusion from the poverty of the spectacle. By the nineteenth century, however, the distinction between good worker and bad worker had begun to gain ground as a popular notion, just as that between master and slave had been vulgarised, along with Christ, under the earlier, mythic system. It is true that the spread of this new idea was achieved with less effort, and that it never acquired the importance of the master-slave idea (although it was significant enough for Marx to deem it worthy of his derision). So, just like mythic sacrifice, roles have been democratised. Inauthenticity is a right of man; such, in a word, is the triumph of socialism. Take a thirty-five year-old man. Each morning he starts his car, drives to the office, pushes papers, has lunch in town, plays pool, pushes more papers, leaves work, has a couple of drinks, goes home, greets his wife, kisses his children, eats his steak in front of the TV, goes to bed, makes love and falls asleep. Who reduces a man's life to this pathetic sequence of clichés? A journalist? A cop? A market researcher? A socialist-realist author? Not at all. He does it himself, breaking his day down into a series of poses chosen more or less unconsciously from the range of dominant stereotypes. Taken over body and consciousness by the blandishments of a succession of images, he rejects authentic satisfaction and espouses a passionless asceticism: his pleasures are so mitigated, yet so demonstrative, that they can only be a façade. The assumption of one role after another, provided he mimics stereotypes successfully, is titillating to him. Thus the satisfaction derived from a well-played role is in direct proportion to his distance from himself, to his self-negation and self-sacrifice.

What power masochism has! Just as others were Count of Sandomir, Palatine of Smirnoff, Margrave of Thorn, Duke of Courlande, so he invests his poses — as driver, employee, superior, subordinate, colleague, customer, seducer, friend, philatelist, husband, *paterfamilias*, viewer, citizen — with a quite personal majesty. And yet such a man cannot be entirely reduced to the idiotic machine, the lethargic puppet, that all this implies. For brief moments his daily life must generate an energy which, if only it were not rechannelled, dispersed and squandered in roles, would suffice to overthrow

the world of survival. Who can gauge the striking-power of an impassioned daydream, of pleasure taken in love, of a nascent desire, of a rush of sympathy? Everyone seeks spontaneously to extend such brief moments of real life; everyone wants basically to make something whole out of their everyday life. But conditioning succeeds in making most of us pursue these moments in exactly the wrong way — by way of the inhuman — with the result that we lose what we most want at the very moment we attain it.

✧

Stereotypes have a life and death of their own. Thus an image whose magnetism makes it a model for thousands of individual roles will eventually crumble and disappear in accordance with the laws of consumption, the laws of constant novelty and universal obsolescence. So how does spectacular society find new stereotypes? It finds them thanks to that injection of real creativity which prevents some roles from conforming to ageing stereotypes (rather as language gets a new lease on life through the assimilation of popular forms). Thanks, in other words, to that element of play which transforms roles.

To the extent that it conforms to a stereotype, a role tends to congeal, to take on the static nature of its model. Such a role has neither present, nor past, nor future, because its time resembles exposure time, and is, so to speak, a pause in time: time compressed into the dissociated space-time which is that of Power. (Here again we see the truth of the argument that Power's strength lies in its facility in enforcing both actual separation and false union.) The timeless moment of the role may be compared to the cinematic image, or rather to one of its elements, to one frame, to one image in a series of images of minimally varying predetermined attitudes whose reproduction constitutes a shot. In the case of roles reproduction is ensured by the rhythms of the advertising media, whose power of dissemination is the precondition for a role's achievement of the status of a stereotype (Monroe, Sagan, Dean). No matter how much or how little limelight a given role attains in the public eye, however, its prime function is always that of social adaptation, of integrating people into the well-policed universe of things. Which is why there are hidden cameras always ready to catapult the most pedestrian of lives into the spotlight of instant fame. Bleeding

hearts fill columns, and superfluous body hair becomes a matter of Beauty. When the spectacle battening on to everyday life takes a pair of unhappy lovers and mass-markets them as Tristan and Isolde, sells a tattered derelict as a piece of nostalgia, or makes a drudging housewife into a good fairy of the kitchen, it is already way ahead of anything modern art can dream up. It was inevitable, perhaps, that people would end up modelling themselves on collages of smiling spouses, crippled children and do-it-yourself geniuses. At any rate we have reached that point — and such ploys always pay off. On the other hand the spectacle is fast approaching a saturation point, the point immediately prior to the true eruption of everyday reality. For roles now operate on a level perilously close to their own negation: already the average failure is hard put to it to play his role properly, and some maladjusted people refuse their roles altogether. As it falls apart, the spectacular system starts scraping the barrel, drawing nourishment from the lowest social strata. It is forced, in fact, to eat its own shit. Thus tone-deaf singers, talent-free artists, reluctant laureates and pallid stars of all kinds emerge periodically to cross the firmament of the media, their rank in the hierarchy being determined by the regularity with which they achieve this feat.

Which leaves the hopeless cases — those who reject all roles and those who develop a theory and practice of this refusal. From such a maladjustment to spectacular society a new poetry of real experience and a reinvention of life are bound to spring. The deflation of roles precipitates the decompression of spectacular time in favour of lived space-time. What is living intensely if not the mobilisation and redirection of the current of time, so long arrested and lost in appearances? Are not the happiest moments of our lives glimpses of an expanded present rejecting Power's accelerated time, which dribbles away year after year, for as long as it takes to grow old?

3

IDENTIFICATION. The principle of Szondi's test is well known. The patient is asked to choose, from forty-eight photographs of people in various types of paroxystic crisis, those which evoke sympathy in him and those which evoke aversion. The subject invariably prefers those faces expressing instinctual feelings which he accepts in himself, and rejects those expressing

ones which he represses. The results enable the psychiatrist to draw up an instinctual profile of his patient which helps him decide whether to discharge him or send him to the air-conditioned crematorium known as a mental hospital.

Consider now the needs of consumer society, a society in which man's essence is to consume — to consume Coca-Cola, literature, ideas, emotions, architecture, TV, power, etc. Consumer goods, ideologies, stereotypes — all play the part of photos in a gigantic version of Szondi's test in which each of us is supposed to take part, not merely by making a choice, but by a commitment, by practical activity. This society's need to market objects, ideas and model forms of behaviour calls for a decoding centre where an instinctual profile of the consumer can be constructed to help in product design and improvement, and in the creation of new needs liable to increase consumption. Market research, motivation techniques, opinion polls, sociological surveys and structuralism may all be considered a part of this project, no matter how anarchic and feeble their contributions may be as yet. The cyberneticians can certainly supply the missing co-ordination and rationalisation — if they are given the chance.

At first glance the main thing would seem to be the choice of the 'consumable image'. The housewife-who-uses-Fairy-Snow is different — and the difference is measured in profits — from the housewife-who-uses-Tide. The Labour voter differs from the Conservative voter, and the Communist from the Christian, in much the same way. But such differences are increasingly hard to discern. The spectacle of incoherence ends up putting a value on the vanishing point of values. Eventually, identification with anything at all, like the need to consume anything at all, becomes more important than brand loyalty to a particular type of car, idol, or politician. The essential thing, after all, is to alienate people from their desires and pen them in the spectacle, in the occupied zone. It matters little whether people are good or bad, honest or criminal, left-wing or right-wing: the *form* is irrelevant, just so long as they lose themselves in it. Let those who cannot identify with Khruschev identify with Yevtushenko; this should cover everyone but hooligans — and we can deal with them. And indeed it is the third force alone that has nothing to identify with — no enemy, no pseudo-revolutionary leader. The third force is the force of *identity* — that identity

in which everyone recognises and discovers himself. There, at least, no one makes decisions for me, or in my name; there my freedom is the freedom of all.

✧

There is no such thing as mental illness. It is merely a convenient label for grouping and isolating cases where identification has not occurred properly. Those whom Power can neither govern nor kill, it taxes with madness. The category includes extremists and megalomaniacs of the role, as well as those who deride roles or refuse them. It is only the isolation of such individuals that marks them, however. Let a General identify with France, with the support of millions of voters, and an opposition immediately springs up which seriously seeks to rival him in his lunacy. Hörbiger's attempt to invent a Nazi physics met with a similar kind of success. General Walker was taken seriously when he drew a distinction between superior, white, divine and capitalist man on the one hand, and black, demoniacal, communist man on the other. Franco would meditate devoutly and beg God for guidance in oppressing Spain. Everywhere in the world are leaders whose cold frenzy lends substance to the thesis that man is a machine for ruling. True madness is a function not of isolation but of identification.

The role is the self-caricature which we carry about with us everywhere, and which brings us everywhere face to face with an absence. An absence, though, which is structured, dressed up, prettified. The roles of paranoiac, schizophrenic or psychopath do not carry the seal of social usefulness; in other words, they are not distributed under the label of power, as are the roles of cop, boss, or military officer. But they do have a utility in specified places — in asylums and prisons. Such places are museums of a sort, serving the double purpose, from Power's point of view, of confining dangerous rivals while at the same time supplying the spectacle with needed negative stereotypes. For bad examples and their exemplary punishment add spice to the spectacle and protect it. If identification were maximised through increased isolation, the ultimate falseness of the distinction between mental and social alienation would soon become clear.

At the opposite extreme from absolute identification is a particular way of putting a distance between the role and one's self, a way of establishing

a zone of free play. This zone is a breeding place of attitudes disruptive of the spectacular order. Nobody is ever completely swallowed up by a role. Even turned on its head, the will to live retains a potential for violence always capable of carrying the individual away from the path laid down for him. One fine morning, the faithful lackey, who has hitherto identified completely with his master, leaps on his oppressor and slits his throat. For he has reached that point where his right to bite like a dog has finally aroused his desire to strike back like a human being. Diderot has described this moment well in *Rameau's Nephew* — and the case of the Papin sisters illustrates it even better. The fact is that identification, like all manifestations of inhumanity, has its roots in the human. Inauthentic life feeds on authentically felt desires. And identification through roles is doubly successful in this respect. In the first place, it co-opts the pleasure to be derived from metamorphoses, from putting on masks and going about in different disguises. Secondly, it appropriates mankind's ancient love of mazes, the love of getting lost solely in order to find one's way again: the pleasure of the *dérive*. Roles also lay under contribution the reflex of identity, the desire to find the richest and truest part of ourselves in other people. The game thus ceases to involve play: it petrifies because the players can no longer make up the rules. The quest for identity degenerates into identification.

Let us reverse the perspective for a moment. A psychiatrist tells us that "Recognition by society leads the individual to expend his sexual drives on cultural goals, and this is the best way for him to defend himself against these drives". Read: the aim of roles is to absorb vital energies, to reduce erotic energy by ensuring it permanent sublimation. The less erotic reality there is, the more sexualised forms appear in the spectacle. Roles — Reich would say 'armouring' — guarantee orgastic impotence. Conversely, true pleasure, *joie de vivre* and orgastic potency shatter body armour and roles. If individuals could stop seeing the world through the eyes of the powers-that-be, and look at it from their own point of view, they would have no trouble discerning which actions are really liberating, which moments are lightning flashes in the dark night of roles. Real experience can illuminate roles — can x-ray them, so to speak — in such a way as to retrieve the energy invested in them, to extricate the truth from the lies. This task is at once individual and collective. Though all roles alienate equally, some are more

vulnerable than others. It is easier to escape the role of a libertine than the role of a cop, executive or rabbi. A fact to which everyone should give a little thought.

4

COMPENSATION. The ultimate reason why people come to value roles more highly than their own lives is that their lives are priceless. What this means, in its ambiguity, is that life cannot be priced, cannot be marketed; and also that such riches can only be described according to the spectacle's categories as intolerable poverty. In the eyes of consumer society poverty is whatever cannot be brought down to terms of consumption. From the spectacular point of view the reduction of man to consumer is an enrichment: the more things he has, the more roles he plays, the more he *is*. So it is decreed by the organisation of appearances. But, from the point of view of lived reality, all power so attained is paid for by the sacrifice of true self-realisation. What is gained on the level of appearances is lost on the level of being and becoming.

Thus lived experience always furnishes the raw material of the social contract, the coin in which the entry fee is paid. Life is sacrificed, and the loss compensated, by means of accomplished prestidigitation in the realm of appearances. The more daily life is thus impoverished, the greater the attraction of inauthenticity, and vice versa. Dislodged from its essential place by the bombardment of prohibitions, limitations and lies, lived reality comes to seem so trivial that appearances become the centre of our attention, until roles completely obscure the importance of our own lives. In an order of *things*, compensation is the only thing that gives a person any weight. The role compensates for a lack: ultimately, for the lack of life; more immediately, for the lack of another role. A worker conceals his prostration beneath the role of foreman, and the poverty of this role itself beneath the incomparably superior image of a late-model car. But every role is paid for by self-injury (overwork, the renunciation of 'luxuries', survival, etc). At best it is an ineffective plug for the gaping wound left by the vampirisation of the self and of real life. The role is at once a threat and a protective shield. Its threatening aspect is felt only subjectively, however, and does not exist officially. Officially, the only danger lies in the loss or devaluation of the

role: in loss of honour, loss of dignity, or (happy phrase!) loss of *face*. This ambiguity accounts to my mind for people's addiction to roles. It explains why roles stick to our skin, why we give up our lives for them. They impoverish real experience but they also protect this experience from becoming conscious of its impoverishment. Indeed, so brutal a revelation would probably be too much for an isolated individual to bear. Thus roles partake of organised isolation, of separation, of false union, while compensation is the depressant that ensures the realisation of all the potentialities of inauthenticity, that gets us high on identification.

Survival and its protective illusions form an inseparable whole. The end of survival naturally entails the disappearance of roles (although there are some dead people whose *names* are linked to stereotypes). Survival without roles is to be officially dead. Just as we are condemned to survival, so we are condemned to 'keep up appearances' in the realm of inauthenticity. Armouring inhibits freedom of gesture but also deadens blows. Beneath this carapace we are completely vulnerable. But at least we can still play 'let's pretend' — we still have a chance to play roles off against one another.

Rosanov's approach is not a bad one: "Externally, I decline. Subjectively, I am quite indeclinable. I don't agree. I'm a kind of adverb." In the end, of course, the world must be modelled on subjectivity: then I will 'agree' with myself in order to 'agree' with others. But, right now, to throw out all roles like a bag of old clothes would amount to denying the fact of separation and plunging into mysticism or solipsism. I am in enemy territory, and the enemy is within me. I do not want him to kill me, and the armour of roles gives me a measure of protection. I work, I consume, I know how to be polite, how to avoid aggravation, how to keep a low profile. All the same, this world of pretence has to be destroyed, which is why it is a shrewd course to let roles play each other off. Seeming to have no responsibility is the best way of behaving responsibly toward oneself. All jobs are dirty — so do them dirtily! All roles are lies, but leave them alone and they'll give each other the lie! I love the arrogance of Jacques Vaché when he writes: "I wander from ruins to village with my monocle of Crystal and a disturbing theory of painting. I have been in turn a lionised author, a celebrated pornographic draftsman and a scandalous cubist painter. Now I am going to stay at home and let others explain and debate my personality in the light of the

above-mentioned indications." My only responsibility is to be absolutely honest with those who are on my side, those who are true partisans of authentic life.

The more detached one is from a role, the easier it becomes to turn it against the enemy. The more effectively one avoids the weight of things, the easier it is to achieve lightness of movement. Comrades care little for forms. They argue openly, confident in the knowledge that they cannot inflict wounds on each other. Where communication is genuinely sought, misunderstandings are no crime. But if you accost me armed to the teeth, understanding agreement only in terms of a victory for you, then you will get nothing out of me but an evasive *pose*, and a formal silence intended to indicate that the discussion is closed. For interchange on the basis of contending roles is useless *a priori*. Only the enemy wants to fight on the terrain of roles, according to the rules of the spectacle. It is hard enough keeping one's phantoms at arm's length: who needs 'friendships' which put us back on the same footing? Would that biting and barking could wake people up to the dog's life roles force them to live — wake them up to the importance of their selves!

Fortunately, the spectacle of incoherence is obliged to introduce an element of *play* into roles. Its levelling of all ethical distinctions makes it impossible to take seriously. The playful approach to roles leaves them floating in the sea of its indifference. This accounts for the rather unhappy efforts of our reorganisers of appearances to increase the playful element (TV game shows, etc), to press flippancy into the service of consumption. The disintegration of appearances tends to foster distancing from roles. Some roles, being dubious or ambiguous, embody their own self-criticism. The spectacle is destined eventually for reconversion into a collective game. Daily life, seizing whatever means it has to hand, will establish the preconditions for this game's never-ending expansion.

5

INITIATION. As it seeks to safeguard the poverty of survival by loudly protesting against it, the compensatory tendency bestows upon each individual a certain number of formal possibilities of participating in the spectacle — a sort of permit for the scenic representation of one or more

slices of (private or public) life. Just as God used to bestow grace on all men, leaving each free to choose salvation or damnation, so modern social organisation accords everyone the right to be a success or a failure in the social world. But whereas God appropriated human subjectivity in one fell swoop, the bourgeoisie commandeers it by means of a series of partial alienations. In one sense, therefore, there is progress here: subjectivity, which was nothing, becomes something; it attains its own truth, its mystery, its passions, its rationality, its rights. But this official recognition is bought at the price of its subdivision into components which are graded and pigeonholed according to Power's norms. Subjectivity attains objective form as stereotypes, by means of identification. In the process it has to be broken up into would-be-absolute fragments and pathetically reduced (witness the Romantics' grotesque treatment of the self, and the antidote for it, humour).

I possess badges of power, therefore I am. In order to be someone the individual must pay *things* their due. He must keep his roles in order, polish them up, enter into them repeatedly, and initiate himself little by little until he qualifies for promotion in the spectacle. The conveyor belts called schools, the advertising industry, the conditioning mechanisms inseparable from any Order — all conspire to lead the child, the adolescent and the adult as painlessly as possible into the big family of consumers.

There are different stages of initiation. Recognised social groups do not all enjoy the same measure of power, nor is that measure equally distributed within each group. It is a long way, in hierarchical terms, from the boss to his workers, from the star to his fans, or from the politician to his supporters. Some groups have a much more rigid structure than others. But all are founded on the illusion of participation shared by every group member whatever his rank. The illusion is fostered through meetings, insignia, the distribution of minor 'responsibilities', etc. The solidarity manufactured by such means is spurious — and often friable. Yet this boy-scout mentality is frighteningly pervasive, and it throws up its own stereotypes, its own martyrs, heroes, models, geniuses, thinkers, good niggers, great successes — eg, Tania, Cienfuegos, Brando, Dylan, Sartre, a national darts champion, Lin Piao. (The reader may add his own categories.)

Can the collectivisation of roles successfully replace the quondam power

of the old ideologies? It has to be remembered that Power stands or falls with the organisation of appearances. The fission of myth into particles of ideology has produced roles as fallout. The poverty of power now has no means of self-concealment aside from its lie-in-pieces. The prestige of a film star, a head of a family, or a chief executive is not worth a wet fart. Nothing can escape the effects of this nihilistic process of decomposition except its transcendence. Should technocracy triumph over this transcendence, people will still be condemned to meaningless activity, to rites of initiation leading nowhere, to unrewarded sacrifice, to enrolment without roles, to specialisation.

The specialist is, indeed, an adumbration of just such a chimerical being, cog, mechanical *thing*, housed in the rationality of a perfect social order of zombies. He turns up everywhere — among politicians, among hijackers. Specialisation is in a sense the science of roles, the science of endowing appearances with the *éclat* formerly bestowed by nobility, wit, extravagance or wealth. The specialist does more than this, however, for he enrols himself in order to enrol others. He is the vital link between the techniques of production and consumption and the technique of spectacular representation. Yet he is, so to speak, an isolated link — a monad. Knowing everything about a small area, he enlists others to produce and consume within the confines of this area so that he himself may receive a surplus-value of power and increase the significance of his own hierarchical image. He knows, if need be, how to give up a multitude of roles for one only, how to concentrate his power instead of spreading it around, how to make his life unilinear. When he does this he becomes a manager. His misfortune is that the sphere within which he exercises power is always too restricted, too partial. He is like the gastro-enterologist who cures a stomach but poisons the rest of the body in the process. Naturally, the importance of the group which he holds in thrall can allow him the illusion of power, but the anarchy is such, the clash of contradictory competing interests so violent, that he must eventually realise how powerless he really is. Just as heads of state with the power to unleash thermonuclear war contrive to paralyse each other, so specialists, by working at cross-purposes, construct and (in the last analysis) operate a gigantic machine — Power, social organisation — which dominates them all and oppresses them in varying degrees according to their

importance as cogs. They construct and operate this machine blindly, because it is simply the aggregate of their crossed purposes. We may expect, therefore, that in the case of most specialists the sudden consciousness of such a disastrous passivity, a passivity in which they have invested so much effort, will eventually fling them all the more energetically in the direction of an authentic will to live. It is also predictable that others among them, those who have been longer or more intensely exposed to the radiation of authoritarian passivity, will follow the example of the officer in Kafka's *Penal Colony* and perish along with the machine, tormented to the end by its last spasms. Every day the crossed purposes of the powerful make and unmake the tottering majesty of Power. We have seen with what results. Let us now try to imagine the glacial nightmare into which we would be plunged were the cyberneticians able so to co-ordinate their efforts as to achieve a *rational* organisation of society, eliminating or at any rate reducing the effects of crossed purposes. They would have no rivals for the Nobel Prize, save perhaps the proponents of thermonuclear suicide.

✧

The widespread use of name and photograph, as in what are laughingly referred to as 'identification' papers, is rather obviously tied up with the police function in modern societies. But the connection is not merely with the vulgar police work of search, surveillance, harassment, torture and murder incorporated. It also involves much more occult methods of maintaining law and order. The frequency with which an individual's name or image passes through the visual and oral channels of communication is an index of that individual's rank and category. It goes without saying that the name most often uttered in a neighbourhood, town, country, or in the world has a powerful fascination. Charted statistically for any given time and place, this information would supply a perfect relief map of Power.

Historically, however, the degeneration of roles goes hand in hand with the increasing meaninglessness of names. The aristocrat's name crystallises the mystery of birth and title. In consumer society the spectacular exposure of the name of a Bernard Buffet serves to transform a very ordinary talent into a famous painter. The manipulation of names fabricates leaders in the same way as it sells shampoo. But this also means that a famous name is no

longer the attribute of the one who bears it. The name 'Buffet' does not designate anything except a *thing*— and a pig in a poke. It is a fragment of power.

I laugh when I hear the humanists whining about the reduction of people to ciphers. What makes them think the destruction of people complete with tricked-up names is any less inhuman than their destruction as a set of numbers? I have already said that the obscure antagonism between the would-be progressives and the reactionaries boils down to this: should people be smashed by punishments or by rewards? As for the reward of celebrity, thanks for nothing!

In any case, it is things that have names nowadays, not people. To reverse the perspective, however, it makes me happy to think that what I am cannot be reduced to a name. My pleasure is nameless: those all too rare moments when I act for myself afford no handhold for external manipulation of whatever kind. It is only when I accede to the dispossession of my self that I risk petrification amidst the names of the *things* which oppress me. This is the context in which to grasp the full meaning of Albert Libertad's burning of his identification papers. Such an act — echoed much later by the black workers of Johannesburg — is more than a rejection of police control: it is a way of giving up one name so as to have the pick of a thousand. Such is the superb dialectic of the change in perspective: since the powers-that-be forbid me to bear a name which is — as it was for the feudal lord — a true emanation of *my* strength, I refuse to be called by any name, and suddenly beneath the nameless I discover the wealth of life, inexpressible poetry, the antechamber of transcendence. I enter the nameless forest where Lewis Carroll's gnat explains to Alice: "If the governess wanted to call you for your lessons, she would call out 'Come here —', and there she would have to leave off, because there wouldn't be any name for her to call, and of course you wouldn't have to go, you know." The blissful forest of radical subjectivity.

Giorgio de Chirico, to my mind, also has an admirably lucid knowledge of the way to Alice's forest. What holds for names holds too for the representation of the face. The photograph is the expression *par excellence* of the role, of the pose. It imprisons the soul and offers it up for inspection — this is why a photograph is always sad. We examine it as we examine an

object. And, true enough, to identify oneself with a range of facial expressions, no matter how broad a range, is a form of self-objectification. The God of the mystics at least had the good sense to avoid this trap. But let us get back to Chirico — a near contemporary of Libertad's. (Power, if only it were human, would be proud of the number of potential encounters it has successfully prevented.) The blank faces of Chirico's figures are the perfect indictment of inhumanity. His deserted squares and petrified backgrounds display man dehumanised by the things he has made — things which, frozen in an urban space crystallising the oppressive power of ideologies, rob him of his substance and suck his blood. (I forget who speaks somewhere of vampiric landscapes; Breton, perhaps.) More than this, the absence of facial features seems to conjure up new faces, to materialise a presence capable of investing the very stones with humanity. For me this ghostly presence is that of collective creation: because they have no one's face, Chirico's figures evoke *everyone*.

In striking contrast to the fundamental tendency of modern sculpture, which goes to great lengths to express its own nothingness and concocts a semiology on the basis of its nullity, Chirico gives us paintings in which absence is evoked solely as a means of intimating what lies beyond it — namely, the poetry of reality and the realisation of art, of philosophy, of man. As the sign of a reified world, the blank space is incorporated into the canvas at the crucial spot; the implication is that the countenance is no longer part of the representational universe, but is about to become part of everyday praxis.

One of these days the incomparable wealth of the decade between 1910 and 1920 will be clearly seen. The genius of these years, however primitive and intuitive, lay in the fact that for the first time an attempt was made to bridge the gulf between art and life. I think we may safely say that, the surrealist adventure aside, nothing was achieved in the period between the demise of this vanguard of transcendence and the inception of the situationist project. The disillusionment of the older generation which has been marking time for the last forty years, as much in the realm of art as in that of social revolution, merely reinforces this view. Dada, Malevich's white square, *Ulysses*, Chirico's canvasses — all impregnated the absence of man reduced to the state of a thing with the presence of the whole man. And

today the whole man is simply the project which the majority of men harbour under the sign of a forbidden creativity.

6

IN THE UNITARY WORLD, under the serene gaze of the gods, adventure and pilgrimage were paradigms of change in an unchanging universe. Inasmuch as this world was given for all time there was really nothing to be discovered, but revelation awaited the pilgrim, knight or wanderer at the crossroads. Actually revelation lay within each individual: the seeker would travel the world seeking it in himself, seeking it in far lands, until suddenly it would surge forth, a magical spring released by the purity of a gesture at the same place where the ill-favoured seeker would have found nothing. The spring and the castle dominate the creative imagination of the Middle Ages. The symbolic theme here is plain: beneath movement lies immutability, and beneath immutability, movement.

Wherein lies the greatness of Heliogabalus, Tamerlane, Gilles de Rais, Tristan, Perceval? In the fact that, once vanquished, they withdraw into a living God; they identify with the demiurge, abandoning their unsatisfied humanity in order to reign and die under the mask of divine awe. This death of men, which is the God of the immutable, lets life bloom under the shadow of its scythe. Our dead God weighs more heavily than the living God of old; for the bourgeoisie has not completely disposed of God, it has only contrived to air-condition his corpse. (The Romantic attitude was a reaction to the odour of that corpse's putrefaction, a disgusted wrinkling of the nostrils at the conditions imposed by *survival*.)

As a class rent by contradictions, the bourgeoisie founds its domination on the transformation of the world, yet refuses to transform itself. It is thus a movement wishing to avoid movement. In unitary societies the image of immutability embraced movement; in fragmentary societies change seeks to reproduce immutability: "Wars (or the poor, or slaves) will always be with us." Thus the bourgeoisie in power can tolerate change only if it is empty, abstract, cut off from the whole: partial change, changes of parts. Now although the habit of change is intrinsically subversive, it is also the main prerequisite to the functioning of consumer society. People have to change cars, fashions, ideas, etc, all the time. For if they did not, a more

radical change would occur which would put an end to a form of authority that is already reduced to putting itself up for sale as parcels of power: it has to be consumed at all costs, and one of the costs is that everyone is consumed along with it. Sad to say, this headlong rush towards death, this desperate and would-be endless race deprives us of any real future: ahead lies the past, hastily disguised and projected forward in time. For decades now the self-same 'novelties' have been turning up in the marketplace of fad and fancy, with the barest attempt to conceal their decrepitude. The same is true in the supermarkets of the role. The system is confronted by the problem of how to supply a variety of roles wide enough to compensate for the loss of the qualitative force of the role as it existed in the feudal era. This is a hopeless task for two reasons. In the first place, the quantitative character of roles is a limitation by definition, and inevitably engenders the demand for a conversion into quality. Secondly, the lie of renewal cannot be sustained within the poverty of the spectacle. The constant need for fresh roles forces a resort to remakes. The proliferation of trivial changes titillates the desire for real change but never satisfies it. Power accelerates changes in illusions, thereby hastening the eruption of reality, of radical change.

It is not just that the increasing number of roles tends to make them indistinguishable, it also triturates them and makes them ludicrous. The quantification of subjectivity has created spectacular categories for the most prosaic acts and the most ordinary attributes: a certain smile, a chest measurement, a hairstyle. Great roles are few and far between; walk-ons are a dime a dozen. Even the Ubus — the Stalins, Hitlers or Mussolinis — have but the palest of successors. Most of us are well acquainted with the malaise that accompanies any attempt to join a group and make contact with others. This feeling amounts to stage fright, the fear of not playing one's part properly. Only with the crumbling of officially controllable attitudes and poses will the true source of this anxiety become clear to us. For it arises not from our clumsiness in handling roles but from the loss of self in the spectacle, in the order of things. In his book *Médecine et homme total*, Solié has this to say about the frightening spread of neurotic disorders: "There is no such thing as disease *per se*, no such thing, even, as a sick person *per se:* all there is is authentic or inauthentic being-in-the-world." The reconversion of the energy robbed by appearances into the will to live authentically

is a function of the dialectic of appearances itself. The refusal of inauthenticity triggers a near-biological defensive reaction which because of its violence has a very good chance of destroying those who have been orchestrating the spectacle of alienation all this time. This fact should give pause to all who pride themselves on being idols, artists, sociologists, thinkers and specialists of every kind of *mise en scène*. Explosions of popular anger are never accidental in the sense that the eruption of Krakatoa is accidental.

✧

According to a Chinese philosopher, "Confluence tends towards the void. In total confluence presence stirs". Alienation extends to all human activities and dissociates them in the extreme. But by the same token it loses its own coherence and becomes everywhere more vulnerable. In the disintegration of the spectacle we see what Marx called "the new life which becomes self-aware, destroys what is already destroyed, and rejects what is already rejected". Beneath dissociation lies unity; beneath fatigue, concentrated energy; beneath the fragmentation of the self, radical subjectivity. In other words, the qualitative. But wanting to remake the world is more complicated than wanting to make love to your lover.

With the weakening of the factors responsible for the etiolation of everyday life, the forces of life tend to get the upper hand over the power of roles. This is the beginning of the reversal of perspective. Modern revolutionary theory should concentrate its efforts on this area so as to open the breach that leads to transcendence. As the period of calculation and suspicion ushered in by capitalism and Stalinism draws to a close, it is challenged from within by the initial phase, based on clandestine tactics, of the *era of play*.

The degenerate state of the spectacle, individual experience, collective acts of refusal — these supply the context for development of practical tactics for dealing with roles. Collectively it is quite possible to abolish roles. The spontaneous creativity and festive atmosphere given free rein in revolutionary moments afford ample evidence of this. When people are overtaken by *joie de vivre* they are lost to leadership and stage-management of any kind. Only by starving the revolutionary masses of joy can one become their master: uncontained, collective pleasure can only go from victory to

victory. Meanwhile it is already possible for a group dedicated to theoretical and practical actions, like the situationists, to infiltrate the political and cultural spectacle as a subversive force.

Individually — and thus in a strictly temporary way — we must learn how to sustain roles without strengthening them to the point where they are detrimental to us. How to use them as a protective shield while at the same time protecting ourselves against them. How to retrieve the energy they absorb and actualise the illusory power they dispense. How to play the game of a Jacques Vaché.

If your role imposes a role on others, assume this power which is not you, then set this phantom loose. Nobody wins in struggles for prestige, so don't bother with them. Down with pointless quarrels, vain discussions, forums, debates and Weeks for Marxist Thought! When the time comes to strike for your real liberation, strike to kill. Words cannot kill.

Do people want to *discuss* things with you? Do they admire you? Spit in their faces. Do they make fun of you? Help them recognise themselves in their mockery. Roles are inherently ridiculous. Do you see nothing but roles around you? Treat them to your nonchalance, to your dispassionate wit. Play cat and mouse with them, and there is a good chance that one or two people about you will wake up to themselves and discover the prerequisites for real communication. Remember: all roles alienate equally, but some are less despicable than others. The range of stereotyped behaviour includes forms which barely conceal lived experience and its alienated demands. To my mind, temporary alliances are permissible with certain revolutionary images, to the extent that a glimmer of radicalism shines through the ideological screen which they presuppose. A case in point is the cult of Lumumba among young Congolese revolutionaries. In any case, it is impossible to go wrong so long as we never forget that the only proper treatment for ourselves and for others is to make ever more radical demands.

Chapter sixteen

The fascination of time

People are bewitched *into believing that time slips away, and this belief is the basis of time actually slipping away. Time is the work of attrition of that adaptation to which people must resign themselves so long as they fail to change the world. Age is a role, an acceleration of 'lived' time on the plane of appearances, an attachment to* things.

THE GROWTH OF civilisation's discontents is now forcing every branch of therapeutics towards a new demonology. Just as, formerly, invocation, sorcery, possession, exorcism, black sabbaths, metamorphoses, talismans and all the rest were bound up with the suspect capacity for healing and hurting, so today (and more effectively) the apparatus for offering consolation to the oppressed — medicine, ideology, compensatory roles, consumer gadgetry, movements for social change — serves the oppressor and the oppressor alone. The *order of things* is sick: this is what our leaders would conceal at all costs. In a fine passage in *The Function of the Orgasm*, Wilhelm Reich relates how after long months of psychoanalytic treatment he managed to cure a young Viennese working woman. She was suffering from depression brought on by the conditions of her life and work. Once she had recovered Reich sent her back home. A fortnight later she killed herself. Reich's intransigent honesty condemned him, as everyone knows, to exclusion from the psychoanalytic establishment, to isolation, delusion, and death in prison: the duplicity of our neo-demonologists cannot be exposed with impunity.

Those who organise the world organise both suffering and the anaesthetics for dealing with it; this much is common knowledge. Most people live like sleepwalkers, torn between the gratifications of neurosis and the traumatic prospect of a return to real life. Things are now reaching the point, however, where the maintenance of survival calls for so many analgesics that

the organism approaches saturation point. But the magical analogy is more apt here than the medical: practitioners of magic fully expect a backlash effect in such circumstances, and we should expect the same. It is because of the imminence of this upheaval that I compare the present conditioning of human beings to a massive bewitchment.

Bewitching of this kind presupposes a spatial network which links up the most distant objects sympathetically, according to specific laws: formal analogy, organic coexistence, functional symmetry, symbolic affiliation, etc. Such correspondences are established through the infinitely frequent association of given forms of behaviour with appropriate signals. In other words, through a generalised system of conditioning. The present vogue for loudly condemning the role of conditioning, propaganda, advertising and the mass media in modern society may be assumed to be a form of partial exorcism designed to reinforce a vaster and more essential mystification by distracting attention from it. Outrage at the gutter press goes hand in hand with subservience to the more elegant lies of posh journalism. Media, language, time — these are the giant claws with which Power manipulates humanity and moulds it brutally to its own perspective. These claws are not very adept, admittedly, but their effectiveness is enormously increased by the fact that people are not aware that they can resist them, and often do not even know the extent to which they are already spontaneously doing so.

Stalin's show trials proved that it only takes a little patience and perserverance to get a man to accuse himself of every imaginable crime and appear in public begging to be executed. Now that we are aware of such techniques, and on our guard against them, how can we fail to see that the set of mechanisms controlling us uses the very same insidious persuasiveness — though with more powerful means at its disposal, and with greater persistence — when it lays down the law: "You are weak, you must grow old, you must die." Consciousness acquiesces, and the body follows suit. I am fond of a remark of Artaud's, though it must be set in a materialist light: "We do not die because we have to die: we die because one day, and not so long ago, our consciousness was forced to deem it necessary."

Plants transplanted to an unfavourable soil die. Animals adapt to their environment. Human beings transform theirs. Thus death is not the same thing for plants, animals and humans. In favourable soil, the plant lives like

an animal: it can adapt. Where man fails to change his surroundings, he too is in the situation of an animal. Adaptation is the law of the animal world.

According to Hans Selye, the theoretician of 'stress', the general syndrome of adaptation has three phases: the alarm reaction, the phase of resistance and the phase of exhaustion. In terms of appearances, man has struggled for eternal life, but in terms of real life he is still at the level of animal adaptation: spontaneous reactions in childhood, consolidation in maturity, exhaustion in old age. And today, the harder people try to find salvation in appearances, the more vigorously is it borne in upon them by the ephemeral and inconsistent nature of the spectacle that they live like dogs and die like bundles of hay. The day cannot be far off when men will have to face the fact that the social organisation they constructed to change the world according to their wishes no longer serves this purpose. For all this organisation amounts to is a system of prohibitions preventing the creation of a higher form of organisation and the use therein of the techniques of liberation and individual self-realisation which have evolved throughout the history of privative appropriation, of exploitation of man by man, of hierarchical authority.

We live in a closed, suffocating system. Whatever we gain in one sphere we lose in another. Death, for instance, though quantitatively defeated by modern medicine, has re-emerged qualitatively on the plane of survival. Adaptation has been democratised, made easier for everyone, at the price of abandoning the essential project, which is the adaptation of the world to human needs.

A struggle against death exists, of course, but it takes place within the limits set by the adaptation syndrome: death is part of the cure for death. Significantly, therapeutic efforts concentrate mainly on the exhaustion phase, as though the main aim were to extend the stage of resistance as far as possible into old age. Thus the big guns are brought out only once the body is old and weak, because, as Reich understood well, any all-out attack on the attrition wreaked by the demands of adaptation would inevitably mean a direct onslaught on social organisation — ie, on that which stands opposed to any transcendence of the principle of adaptation. Partial cures are preferred because they leave the overall social pathology untouched. But what will happen when the proliferation of such partial cures ends up

spreading the malaise of inauthenticity to every corner of daily life? And when the essential role of exorcism and bewitchment in the maintenance of a sick society becomes plain for all to see?

✧

The question "How old are you?" inevitably contains a reference to power. Dates themselves serve to pigeonhole and circumscribe us. Is not the passage of time always measured by reference to the establishment of some authority or other — in terms of the years accumulated since the installation of a god, messiah, leader or conquering city? To the aristocratic mind, moreover, such accumulated time was a measure of authority: the prepotency of the lord was increased both by his own age and by the antiquity of his lineage. At his death the noble bequeathed a vitality to his heirs which drew vigour from the past. By contrast, the bourgeoisie has no past; or at any rate it recognises none inasmuch as its fragmented power no longer depends on any hereditary principle. The bourgeoisie is thus reduced to apeing the nobility: identification with forebears is sought in nostalgic fashion via the photos in the family album; identification with cyclical time, with the time of the eternal return, is feebly emulated by blind identification with a staccato succession of short spans of linear time.

This link between age and the starting-post of measurable time is not the only thing which betrays age's kinship with power. I am convinced that people's measured age is nothing but a role. It involves a speeding up of lived time in the mode of non-life — on the plane, therefore, of appearances, and in accordance with the dictates of adaptation. To acquire power is to acquire 'age'. In earlier times only the 'aged' or 'elders', those old either in nobility or in experience, exercised power. Today even the young enjoy the dubious privilege of age. In fact consumer society, which invented the teenager as a new class of consumer, fosters premature senility: to consume is to be consumed by inauthenticity, nurturing appearance to the advantage of the spectacle and to the detriment of real life. The consumer is killed by the things he becomes attached to, because these things (commodities, roles) are dead.

Whatever you possess possesses you in return. Everything that makes you into an owner adapts you to the order of things — and makes you old. *Time-which-slips-away is what fills the void created by the absence of the self.*

The harder you run after time, the faster time goes: this is the law of consumption. Try to stop it, and it will wear you out and age you all the more easily. Time has to be caught on the wing, in the present — but the present has yet to be constructed.

We were born never to grow old, never to die. All we can hope for, however, is an awareness of having come too soon. And a healthy contempt for the future can at least ensure us a rich portion of life.

Survival and false opposition to it

Survival is life reduced to economic imperatives. In the present period, therefore, survival is life reduced to what can be consumed (seventeen). Reality is giving answers to the problem of transcendence before our so-called revolutionaries have even thought of formulating this problem. Whatever is not transcended rots, and whatever is rotten cries out for transcendence. Spurious opposition, being unaware of both these tendencies, speeds up the process of decomposition while becoming an integral part of it: it thus makes the task of transcendence easier — but only in the sense in which we sometimes say of a murdered man that he made his murderer's task easier. Survival is non-transcendence become unlivable. The mere rejection of survival dooms us to impotence. We have to retrieve the core of radical demands which has repeatedly been renounced by movements which started out as revolutionary (eighteen).

Chapter seventeen

Survival sickness

Capitalism has demystified survival. It has made the poverty of daily life intolerable in view of the increasing wealth of technical possibilities. Survival has become an economising on life. The civilisation of collective survival increases the dead time in individual lives to the point where the death forces are liable to carry the day over collective survival itself. The only hope is that the passion for destruction may be reconverted into a passion for life.

UP UNTIL NOW men have merely complied with a *system* of world-transformation. Today the task is to make the system comply with the transformation of the world.

The organisation of human societies has changed the world, and the world in changing has brought upheaval to the organisation of human societies. But if hierarchical organisation seizes control of nature, while itself undergoing transformation in the course of this struggle, the portion of liberty and creativity falling to the lot of the individual is drained away by the requirements of adaptation to social norms of various kinds. This is true, at any rate, so long as no generalised revolutionary moment occurs.

The time belonging to the individual in history is for the most part dead time. Only a rather recent awakening of consciousness has made this fact intolerable to us. For with its revolution the bourgeoisie does two things. On the one hand, it proves that men *can* accelerate world transformation, and that they *can* improve their individual lives (where improvement is understood in terms of accession to the ruling class, to riches, to capitalist success). But at the same time the bourgeois order nullifies the individual's freedom by interference; it increases the dead time in daily life (imposing the need to produce, consume, calculate); and it capitulates before the haphazard laws of the market, before the inevitable cyclical crises with their

burden of wars and misery, and before the limitations invented by 'common sense' ("You can't change human nature", "The poor will always be with us", etc). The politics of the bourgeoisie, as of the bourgeoisie's socialist heirs, is the politics of a driver pumping the brake with the accelerator jammed fast to the floor: the more his speed increases, the more frenetic, perilous and useless become his attempts to slow down. The helter-skelter pace of consumption is set at once by the rate of the disintegration of Power and by the imminence of the construction of a new order, a new dimension, a parallel universe born of the collapse of the Old World.

The changeover from the aristocratic system of adaptation to the 'democratic' one brutally widened the gap between the passivity of individual submission and the social dynamism that transforms nature — the gap between men's powerlessness and the power of new techniques. The contemplative attitude was perfectly suited to the feudal system, to a virtually motionless world underpinned by eternal gods. But the spirit of submission was hardly compatible with the dynamic vision of merchants, manufacturers, bankers and discoverers of riches — the vision of men acquainted not with the revelation of the immutable, but rather with the shifting economic world, the insatiable hunger for profit and the necessity of constant innovation. Yet wherever the bourgeoisie's action resulted in the popularisation and valuing of the sense of transience, the sense of hope, the bourgeoisie *qua* power sought to *imprison* human beings within this transitoriness. To replace the old theology of stasis the bourgeoisie set up a metaphysics of motion. Although both these ideological systems hinder the movement of reality, the earlier one does so more successfully and more harmoniously than the second: the aristocratic scheme is more consistent, more unified. For to place an ideology of change in the service of what does not change creates a paradox which nothing henceforward can either conceal from consciousness or justify to consciousness. Thus in our universe of expanding technology and comfort we see people turning in upon themselves, shrivelling up, living trivial lives and dying for details. It is a nightmare where we are promised absolute freedom but granted a miserable square inch of individual autonomy — a square inch, moreover, that is strictly policed by our neighbours. A space-time of pettiness and mean thoughts.

Before the bourgeois revolution, the possibility of death in a living God lent everyday life an illusory dimension which aspired to the fullness of a multifaceted reality. You might say that man has never come closer to self-realisation while yet confined to the realm of the inauthentic. But what is one to say of a life lived out in the shadow of a God that is dead — the decomposing God of fragmented power? The bourgeoisie has dispensed with a God by economising on men's lives. It has also made the economic sphere into a sacred imperative and life into an economic system. This is the model that our future programmers are preparing to rationalise, to submit to proper planning — in a word, to 'humanise'. And, never fear, they will be no less irresponsible than the corpse of God.

Kierkegaard describes survival sickness well: "Let others bemoan the maliciousness of their age. What irks me is its pettiness, for ours is an age without passion . . . . My life comes out all one colour." Survival is life reduced to bare essentials, to life's abstract form, to the minimum of activity required to ensure men's participation in production and consumption. The entitlement of a Roman slave was rest and sustenance. As beneficiaries of the Rights of Man we receive the wherewithal to nourish and cultivate ourselves, enough consciousness to play a role, enough initiative to acquire power and enough passivity to flaunt Power's insignia. Our freedom is the freedom to adapt after the fashion of *higher animals.*

Survival is life in slow motion. How much energy it takes to remain on the level of appearances! The media gives wide currency to a whole personal hygiene of survival: avoid strong emotions, watch your blood pressure, eat less, drink in moderation only, survive in good health so that you can continue playing your role. "OVERWORK: THE EXECUTIVE'S DISEASE", ran a recent headline in *Le Monde.* We must be economical with survival for it wears us down; we have to live it as little as possible, for it belongs to death. In former times one died a live death, a death quickened by the presence of God. Today our respect for life prohibits us from touching it, reviving it or snapping it out of its lethargy. We die of inertia, whenever the charge of death that we carry with us reaches saturation point. Where is the scientific institute that could measure the intensity of the deadly radiation that kills our daily actions? In the end, by dint of identifying ourselves with what we are not, of switching from one role to another, from one authority to

another, and from one age to another, how can we avoid ourselves becoming part of that never-ending state of transition which is the process of decomposition?

The presence within life itself of a mysterious yet tangible death so misled Freud that he postulated an ontological curse in the shape of a 'death instinct'. This mistake of Freud's, which Reich had already pointed out, has now been clarified by the phenomenon of consumption. The three aspects of the death instinct — Nirvana, the repetition compulsion and masochism — have turned out to be simply three styles of domination: constraint passively accepted, seduction through conformity to custom, and mediation perceived as an ineluctable law.

As we know, the consumption of goods — which comes down always, in the present state of things, to the consumption of power — carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction and the conditions of its own transcendence. The consumer cannot and must not ever attain satisfaction: the logic of the consumable object demands the creation of fresh needs, yet the accumulation of such false needs exacerbates the malaise of men confined with increasing difficulty solely to the status of consumers. Furthermore, the wealth of consumer goods impoverishes authentic life. It does so in two ways. First, it replaces authentic life with *things*. Secondly, it makes it impossible, with the best will in the world, to become attached to these things, precisely because they have to be *consumed*, ie, destroyed. Whence an absence of life which is ever more frustrating, a self-devouring dissatisfaction. This need to live is ambivalent: it constitutes one of those points where perspective is reversed.

In the consumer's manipulated view of things — the view of conditioning — the lack of life appears as insufficient consumption of power and insufficient self-consumption in the service of power. As a palliative to the absence of real life we are offered death on an instalment plan. A world that condemns us to a bloodless death is naturally obliged to propagate the taste for blood. Where survival sickness reigns, the desire to live lays hold spontaneously of the weapons of death: senseless murder and sadism flourish. For passion destroyed is reborn in the passion for destruction. If these conditions persist, no one will survive the era of survival. Already the despair is so great that many people would go along with Antonin Artaud

saying: "I bear the stigma of an insistent death that strips real death of all terror for me."

The man of survival is inhabited by pleasure-anxiety, by unfulfilment: he is a mutilated man. Where is he to find himself in the endless self-loss into which everything draws him? He is a wanderer in a labyrinth with no centre, a maze full of mazes. His is a world of equivalents. Should he kill himself? Killing oneself, though, implies some sense of resistance: one must possess a value that one can destroy. Where there is nothing, the destructive actions themselves crumble to nothing. You cannot hurl a void into a void. "If only a rock would fall and kill me," wrote Kierkegaard, "at least that would be an expedient." I doubt if there is anyone today who has not been touched by the horror of a thought such as that. Inertia is the surest killer, the inertia of people who settle for senility at eighteen, plunging eight hours a day into degrading work and feeding on ideologies. Beneath the miserable tinsel of the spectacle there are only gaunt figures yearning for, yet dreading, Kierkegaard's 'expedient', so that they might never again have to desire what they dread and dread what they desire.

At the same time the passion for life emerges as a biological need, the reverse side of the passion for destroying and letting oneself be destroyed. "So long as we have not managed to abolish any of the causes of human despair we have no right to try and abolish the means whereby men attempt to get rid of despair." The fact is that men possess both the means to eliminate the causes of despair and the power to mobilise those means. No one has the right to ignore the fact that the sway of conditioning accustoms him to survive on one hundredth of his potential for life. So general is survival sickness that the slightest concentration of lived experience could not fail to unite the largest number of men in a common will to live. The negation of despair would of necessity become the construction of a new life. The rejection of economic logic (which economises only on life) would of necessity entail the death of economics and carry us beyond the realm of survival.

Chapter eighteen

Spurious opposition

There comes a moment of transcendence that is historically defined by the strength and weakness of Power; by the fragmentation of the individual to the point where he is a mere monad of subjectivity; and by the intimacy between everyday life and that which destroys it. This transcendence will be general, undivided, and built by subjectivity (1). Once they abandon their initial extremism, revolutionary elements become irremediably reformist. The well-nigh general abandonment of the revolutionary spirit in our time is a soil in which reformisms of survival thrive. Any modern revolutionary organisation must identify the seeds of transcendence in the great movements of the past. In particular, it must rediscover and carry through the project of individual freedom, perverted by liberalism; the project of collective freedom, perverted by socialism; the project of the recapture of nature, perverted by fascism; and the project of the whole man, perverted by Marxist ideologies. *This last project, though expressed in the theological terms of the time, also informed the great medieval heresies and their anti-clerical rage, the recent exhumation of which is so apt in our own century with its new clergy of 'experts' (2). The man of* ressentiment *is the perfect* survivor *— the man bereft of the consciousness of possible transcendence, the man of the age of decomposition (3). By becoming aware of spectacular decomposition, the man of* ressentiment *becomes a nihilist. Active nihilism is pre-revolutionary. There is no consciousness of transcendence without consciousness of decomposition. Juvenile delinquents are the legitimate heirs of Dada (4).*

1

THE QUESTION OF TRANSCENDENCE. Refusal is multiform; transcendence is one. Faced by modern discontent and incited by it to bear witness, human history is quite simply the history of a radical refusal which invariably carries transcendence within itself, which invariably tends towards self-negation. Although only one or two aspects of this refusal are ever seen at a time, this can never successfully conceal the fact that dictatorship by God, monarch, chief, class or organisation is always fundamentally the same

thing. What idiocy it is to evoke an ontology of revolt. By transforming natural alienation into social alienation, the movement of history teaches men freedom in servitude: it teaches them both revolt and submission. Revolt has less need of metaphysicians than metaphysicians have of revolt. Hierarchical power, which has been with us for millennia, furnishes a perfectly adequate explanation for the permanence of rebellion, as it does for the repression of that rebellion.

The overthrow of feudalism and the creation of masters without slaves are one and the same project. The memory of the partial future of this project in the French Revolution has continued to render it more familiar and more attractive, even as later revolutions, each in its own way abortive (the Paris Commune, the Bolshevik Revolution), have at once clarified the project's contours and deferred its enactment.

All *philosophies* of history without exception collude with this failure, which is why *consciousness* of history cannot be divorced from consciousness of the necessity of transcendence.

How is it that the moment of transcendence is increasingly easy to discern on the social horizon? The question of transcendence is a tactical question. A number of considerations arise in this connection.

(a) Anything that does not kill power reinforces it, but anything which power does not itself kill weakens power.

The more the requirements of consumption come to supersede the requirements of production, the more government by constraint gives way to government by seduction.

With the democratic extension of the right to consume comes a corresponding extension to the largest group of people of the right to exercise authority (in varying degrees, of course).

As soon as men fall under the spell of Authority they are weakened and their capacity for refusal withers. Power is thus reinforced, it is true, yet it is also reduced to the level of the consumable and is indeed consumed, dissipated and, of necessity, becomes vulnerable.

The point of transcendence is one moment in this dialectic of strength and weakness. While it is undoubtedly the task of radical criticism to identify this moment and to work tactically to precipitate it, we must not forget that it is the *facts* all around us that call such radical criticism forth.

Transcendence sits astride a contradiction that haunts the modern world, permeating the daily news and leaving its stamp on most of our behaviour. This is the contradiction between impotent refusal — ie, reformism — and wild refusal, or nihilism (two types of which, the active and the passive, are to be distinguished).

(b) The diffusion of hierarchical power may broaden that power's realm but it also tarnishes its glamour. Fewer people live on the fringes of society as bums and parasites, yet at the same time fewer people actually respect an employer, a monarch, a leader or a role; although more people survive within the social organisation, many more of the people within it hold it in contempt. Everyone finds himself at the centre of the struggle *in his daily life*. This has two consequences:

In the first place, the individual is not only the victim of social atomisation, he is also the victim of fragmented power. Now that subjectivity has emerged onto the historical stage, only to come immediately under attack, it has become the most crucial revolutionary demand. Henceforward the construction of a harmonious society will require a revolutionary theory founded not on communitarianism but rather upon subjectivity — a theory founded, in other words, on individual cases, on the lived experience of *individuals*.

Secondly, the extreme fragmentariness of resistance and refusal turns, ironically, into its opposite, for it recreates the preconditions for a global refusal. The new revolutionary collective will come into being through a chain reaction leaping from one subjectivity to the next. The construction of a community of people who are whole individuals will inaugurate the reversal of perspective without which no transcendence is possible.

(c) A final point is that the idea of a reversal of perspective is invading popular consciousness. For everyone is too close for comfort to that which negates them. This proximity to death makes the life forces rebel. Just as the allure of faraway places fades when one gets closer, so perspective vanishes as the eye gets too near. By locking men up in its decor of things, and by its clumsy attempts to insinuate itself into men themselves, all Power manages to do is to spread the discontent and disaffection. Vision and thought get muddled, values blur, forms become vague, and anamorphic distortions trouble us rather as though we were looking at a painting with

our nose pressed hard against the canvas. Incidentally, the change in pictorial perspective (Uccello, Kandinsky) coincided with a change of perspective at the level of social life. The rhythm of consumption thrusts the mind into that interregnum where far and near are indistinguishable. The facts themselves will soon come to the aid of the mass of men in their struggle to enter at long last that state of freedom aspired to — though they lacked the means of attaining it — by those Swabian heretics of 1270 mentioned by Norman Cohn in his *Pursuit of the Millennium*, who "said that they had mounted up above God and, reaching the very pinnacle of Divinity, abandoned God. Often the adept would affirm that he or she had no longer any need of God".

2

THE RENUNCIATION OF POVERTY and the poverty of renunciation. Almost every revolutionary movement embodies the desire for complete change, yet up to now almost every revolutionary movement has succeeded only in changing some detail. As soon as the people in arms renounces its own will and kowtows to the will of its counsellors it abdicates its freedom and enthrones its so-called revolutionary leaders as its oppressors-to-be. This is the 'cunning', so to speak, of fragmentary power: it gives rise to fragmentary revolutions, revolutions dissociated from any reversal of perspective, cut off from the totality, paradoxically detached from the proletariat which makes them. There is no mystery in the fact that a totalitarian regime is the price paid when the demand for total freedom is renounced once a handful of partial freedoms has been won. How could it be otherwise? People talk in this connection of a fatality, a curse: the revolution devouring its children, and so on. As though Makhno's defeat, the crushing of the Kronstadt revolt, or Durruti's assassination were not already writ large in the structure of the original Bolshevik cells, perhaps even in Marx's authoritarian positions in the First International. 'Historical necessity' and 'reasons of state' are simply the necessity and the reasons of leaders who have to legitimate their renunciation of the revolutionary project, their renunciation of extremism.

Renunciation equals non-transcendence. And issue-politics, partial refusal and piecemeal demands are the very thing that blocks transcendence.

The worst inhumanity is never anything but a wish for emancipation that has settled for compromise and fossilised beneath the strata of successive sacrifices. Liberalism, socialism and Bolshevism have each built new prisons under the sign of liberty. The left fights for an increase in comfort within alienation, skilfully furthering this impoverished aim by evoking the barricades, the red flag and the finest revolutionary moments of the past. In this way, once-radical impulses are doubly betrayed, twice renounced: first they are ossified, then dug up and used as a carrot. 'Revolution' is doing pretty well everywhere: worker-priests, biker-priests, communist generals, red potentates, trade unionists on the board of directors . . . . Radical chic harmonises perfectly with a society that can sell Watney's Red Barrel beer under the slogan "The Red Revolution is Coming". Not that all this is without risk for the system. The endless caricaturing of the most deeply-felt revolutionary desires can produce a backlash in the shape of a resurgence of such feelings, purified in reaction to their universal prostitution. There is no such thing as lost allusions.

The new wave of insurrection tends to rally young people who have remained outside specialised politics, whether right or left, or who have passed briefly through these spheres because of excusable errors of judgement, or ignorance. All currents merge in the tide-race of nihilism. The only important thing is what lies beyond this confusion. The revolution of daily life will be the work of those who, with varying degrees of facility, are able to recognise the seeds of total self-realisation preserved, contradicted and dissimulated within ideologies of every kind — and who cease consequently to be either mystified or mystifiers.

✧

If a spirit of revolt once existed within Christianity, I defy anybody who still calls himself Christian to understand that spirit. Such people have neither the right nor the capacity to inherit the heretical tradition. Today heresy is an impossibility. The theological language used to express the impulses of so many fine revolts was the mark of a particular period; it was the only language then available, and nothing more than that. Translation is now necessary — not that it presents any difficulties. Setting aside the period in which I live, and the objective assistance it gives me, how can I hope to improve in the twentieth century on what the Brethren of the Free

Spirit said in the thirteenth: "A man may be so much one with God that whatever he does he cannot sin. I am part of the freedom of Nature and I satisfy all my natural desires. The free man is perfectly right to do whatever gives him pleasure. Better that the whole world be destroyed and perish utterly than that a free man should abstain from a single act to which his nature moves him." One cannot but admire Johann Hartmann's words: "The truly free man is lord and master of all creatures. All things belong to him, and he is entitled to make use of whichever pleases him. If someone tries to stop him doing so, the free man has the right to kill him and take his possessions." The same goes for John of Brünn, who justifies his practice of fraud, plunder and armed robbery by announcing that "All things created by God are common property. Whatever the eye sees and covets, let the hand grasp it". Or again, consider the Pifles d'Arnold and their conviction that they were so pure as to be incapable of sinning no matter what they did (1157). Such jewels of the Christian spirit always sparkled a little too brightly for the bleary eyes of the Christians. The great heretical tradition may still be discerned — dimly perhaps, but with its dignity still intact — in the acts of a Pauwels leaving a bomb in the church of La Madeleine (15 March 1894), or of the young Robert Burger slitting a priest's throat (11 August 1963). The last — and the last possible — instances of priests retrieving something genuine from a real attachment to the revolutionary origins of Christianity are furnished in my opinion by Meslier and Jacques Roux fomenting *jacquerie* and riot. Not that we can expect this to be understood by the sectarians of today's ecumenising forces. These emanate from Moscow as readily as from Rome, and their evangelists range from cybernetician scum to the creatures of Opus Dei. Such being the new clergy, the way to transcend heresy should not be hard to divine.

✧

No one is about to deny liberalism full credit for having spread the thirst for freedom to every corner of the world. Freedom of the press, freedom of thought, freedom of creation — if all these 'freedoms' have no other merit, at least they stand as a monument to liberalism's falseness. The most eloquent of epitaphs, in fact: after all, it is no mean feat to imprison liberty in the name of liberty. In the liberal system, the freedom of individuals is destroyed by mutual interference: one person's liberty begins

where the other's ends. Those who reject this basic principle are destroyed by the sword; those who accept it are destroyed by justice. Nobody gets their hands dirty: a button is pressed and the guillotine of police and State intervention falls. A very unfortunate business, to be sure. The State is the bad conscience of the liberal, the instrument of a necessary repression for which deep in his heart he denies responsibility. As for day-to-day business, it is left to the freedom of the capitalists to keep the freedom of the worker within proper bounds. Here, however, the upstanding socialist comes on the scene to denounce this hypocrisy.

What is socialism? It is a way of getting liberalism out of its contradiction, namely the fact that it simultaneously safeguards and destroys individual freedom. Socialism proposes (and there could be no more worthy goal) to prevent individuals from negating each other through interference. The solution it actually produces, however, is very different. For it ends up eliminating interferences without liberating the individual; what is much worse, it melts the individual will into a collective mediocrity. Admittedly, only the economic sphere is affected by the institution of socialism, and opportunism — that is, liberalism in the sphere of daily life — is scarcely incompatible with bureaucratic planning of all activities from above, with manoeuvring for promotion, with power struggles between leaders, etc. Thus socialism, by abolishing economic competition and free enterprise, puts an end to interference on one level, but it retains the race for the consumption of power as the only authorised form of freedom. The partisans of self-limiting freedom are split into two camps, therefore: those who are for liberalism in production and those who are for liberalism in consumption. And a fat lot of difference there is between them!

The contradiction in socialism between radicalism and its renunciation is well exemplified by two statements recorded in the minutes of the debates of the First International. In 1867 we find Chémalé reminding his listeners that "The product must be *exchanged* for another product of equal value; anything less amounts to trickery, to fraud, to robbery". According to Chémalé, therefore, the problem is how to rationalise exchange, how to make it fair. The task of socialism, in this view, is to correct capitalism, to give it a human face, to plan it, and to empty it of its substance (profit). And who profits from the end of capitalism? This we have found out since

1867. But there was already another view of socialism, co-existent with this one, and we find it expressed by Varlin, Communard-to-be, at the Geneva Congress of this same International Association of Workingmen in 1866: "So long as *anything* stands in the way of the *employment of oneself* freedom will not exist." There is thus a freedom locked up in socialism, but nothing could be more foolhardy than to try and release this freedom today without declaring total war on socialism itself.

Is there any need to expatiate on the abandonment of the Marxist project by every variety of present-day Marxism? The Soviet Union, China, Cuba: what is there here of the construction of the whole man? The material poverty which fed the revolutionary desire for transcendence and radical change has been attenuated, but a new poverty has emerged, a poverty born of renunciation and compromise. The renunciation of poverty has led only to the poverty of renunciation. Was it not the feeling that he had allowed his initial project to be fragmented and effected in piecemeal fashion that occasioned Marx's disgusted remark, "I am not a Marxist"? Even the obscenity of fascism springs from a will to live — but a will to live denied, turned against itself like an in-growing toenail. A will to live become a will to power, a will to power become a will to passive obedience, a will to passive obedience become a death wish. For when it comes to the qualitative sphere, to concede a fraction is to give up everything.

By all means, let us destroy fascism, but let the same destructive flame consume all ideologies, and all their lackeys to boot.

✧

Through force of circumstance, poetic energy is everywhere renounced or allowed to go to seed. Isolated people abandon their individual will, their subjectivity, in an attempt to break out. Their reward is the illusion of community and a sharpened sense of death. Renunciation is the first step towards a man's co-optation by the mechanisms of Power.

There is no such thing as a technique or thought which does not arise in the first instance from a will to live; but neither is there any such thing as an officially approved technique or thought which does not lead us towards death. The traces of past renunciations are the signs of a history still largely unknown to men. The study of these traces helps in itself to forge the arms

of total transcendence. Where is the radical core, the qualitative dimension? This question has the power to shatter habits of mind and habits of life; and it has a part to play in the strategy of transcendence, in the building of new networks of radical resistance. It may be applied to philosophy, where ontology bears witness to the renunciation of being-as-becoming. It may be applied to psychoanalysis, a technique of liberation which confines itself for the most part to 'liberating' us from the need to challenge the organisation of society. It may be applied to all the dreams and desires stolen, violated and twisted beyond recognition by conditioning. To the basically radical nature of a man's spontaneous acts, so often denied by his stated view of himself and of the world. To the playful impulse, whose present imprisonment in the categories of permitted games — from roulette to war, by way of lynching parties — leaves no place for the authentic game of playing with each moment of daily life. And to love, so inseparable from revolution, and so largely cut off, as things stand, from the pleasure of giving.

Remove the qualitative and all that remains is despair. Despair comes in every variety available to a system designed for killing human beings, the system of hierarchical power: reformism, fascism, philistine apoliticism, mediocracy, activism and passivity, boy-scoutism and ideological masturbation. A friend of Joyce's recalls: "I don't remember Joyce ever saying a word during all those years about Poincaré, Roosevelt, de Valera, Stalin; never so much as a mention of Geneva or Locarno, Abyssinia, Spain, China, Japan, the Prince affair, Violette Nozière . . ." What, indeed, could he have added to *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake?* Once the *Capital* of individual creativity had been written, it only remained for the Leopold Blooms of the world to unite, to throw off their miserable survival and to actualise the richness and diversity of their 'interior monologues' in the lived reality of their existence. Joyce was never a comrade-in-arms to Durruti; he fought shoulder to shoulder with neither the Asturians nor the Viennese workers. But he had the decency to pass no comment on news items, to the anonymity of which he abandoned *Ulysses* — that 'monument of culture', as one critic put it; to have done so would have meant renouncing himself, Joyce, the man of total subjectivity. To the spinelessness of the man of letters, *Ulysses* is witness. As to the spinelessness of renunciation, its witness is invariably the 'forgotten' radical moment. Thus revolutions and counter-

revolutions follow hard upon one another's heels, sometimes within a twenty-four-hour period — in the space, even, of the least eventful of days. But consciousness of the radical act and of its renunciation becomes more widespread and more discriminating all the time. Inevitably. For today survival is non-transcendence become unlivable.

3

THE MAN OF RESSENTIMENT. The more power is dispensed in consumer-sized packs, the more circumscribed becomes the sphere of survival — until we enter that reptilian world in which pleasure, the effort of liberation and agony all find expression in a single shudder. Low thought and short sight have long signalled the fact that the bourgeoisie belongs to a civilisation of troglodytes in the making, a civilisation of survival perfectly epitomised by the invention of the fallout shelter complete with all modern conveniences. The greatness of the bourgeoisie is a borrowed cloak: unable to build truly on the back of its defeated opponent, it donned feudal robes only to find itself draped in a pale shadow of feudal virtue, of God, of nature, and so on. No sooner had it discovered its incapacity to control these entities directly than it fell to internal squabbling over details, involuntarily dealing itself blow after blow — though never, it is true, a mortal one. The same Flaubertwho flays the bourgeois with ridicule calls him to arms to put down the Paris Commune . . .

The nobility turned the bourgeois into an aggressor: the proletariat puts it on the defensive. What does the proletariat represent for the bourgeoisie? Not a true adversary: at the most a guilty conscience that it desperately tries to conceal. Withdrawn, seeking a position of minimum exposure to attack, proclaiming that reform is the only legitimate form of change, the bourgeoisie clothes its fragmented revolutions in a cloth of wary envy and resentment.

I have already said that in my view no insurrection is ever fragmented in its initial impulses, that it only becomes so when the poetry of agitators and ringleaders gives way to authoritarian leadership. The man of *ressentiment* is the official world's travesty of a revolutionary: a man bereft of awareness of the possibility of transcendence; a man who cannot grasp the necessity for a reversal of perspective and who, gnawed by envy, spite and despair,

tries to use these feelings as weapons against a world so well-designed for his oppression. An isolated man. A reformist pinioned between total refusal and absolute acceptance of Power. He rejects hierarchy out of umbrage at not having a place therein, and this makes him, as a rebel, an ideal slave to the designs of revolutionary 'leaders'. Power has no better buttress than thwarted ambition, which is why it makes every effort to console losers in the rat race by flinging them the privileged as a target for their rancour.

Short of a reversal in perspective, therefore, hatred of power is merely another form of obeisance to Power's ascendancy. The man who walks under a ladder to prove his freedom from superstition proves just the opposite. Obsessive hatred and the insatiable thirst for positions of authority wear down and impoverish people to the same degree — though perhaps not in the same way, for there is, after all, more humanity in fighting against Power than in prostituting oneself to it. There is in fact a world of difference between struggling to live and struggling not to die. Revolts within the realm of survival are measured by the yardstick of death, which explains why they always require self-abnegation on the part of their militants, and the *a priori* renunciation of that will to live for which *everyone* is in reality struggling.

The rebel with no other horizon than a wall of restraints either rams his head against this wall or ends up defending it with dogged stupidity. No matter whether one accepts or rejects Power, to see oneself in the light of constraints is to see things from Power's point of view. Here we have man at the vanishing point — swarming with vermin, in Rosanov's words. Hemmed in on all sides, he resists any kind of intrusion and mounts a jealous guard over himself, never realising that he has become sterile, that he is keeping vigil over a graveyard. He has internalised his own lack of existence. Worse, he borrows Power's impotence in order to fight Power; such is the zeal with which he applies the principle of fair play. Alongside such sacrifice, the price he pays for purity — for playing at being pure — is small indeed. How the most compromised people love to give themselves credit for integrity out of all proportion to the odd minor points over which they have preserved any! They get on their high horses because they refused a promotion in the army, gave out a few leaflets at a factory gate or got hit on the head by a cop. And all their bragging goes hand in hand with the most obtuse militantism in some communist party or other.

Once in a while, too, a man at the vanishing point takes it into his head that he has a world to conquer, that he needs more *Lebensraum*, a vaster ruin in which to engulf himself. The rejection of Power easily comes to embrace the rejection of those things which Power has appropriated — eg, the rebel's own self. Defining oneself negatively by reference to Power's constraints and lies can result in constraints and lies entering the mind as an element of travestied revolt — generally without so much as a dash of irony to give a breath of air. No chain is harder to break than the one which the individual attaches to himself when his rebelliousness is lost to him in this way. When he places his freedom in the service of unfreedom, the resulting increase in unfreedom's strength enslaves him. Now, it may well be that nothing resembles unfreedom so much as the effort to attain freedom, but unfreedom has this distinguishing mark: once bought, it loses all its value, even though its price is every bit as high as unfreedom's.

The walls close in and we can't breathe. The more people struggle for breath, the worse it gets. The ambiguity of the signs of life and freedom, which oscillate between their positive and negative forms according to the necessary conditions imposed by global oppression, tends to generalise a confusion in which one hand is constantly undoing the work of the other. Inability to apprehend oneself encourages people to apprehend others on the basis of their negative representations, on the basis of their roles — and thus to treat them as objects. Old maids, bureaucrats — all, in fact, who thrive on survival — have no effective knowledge of any other reason for existing. Needless to say, Power's best hopes of co-optation lie precisely in this shared *malaise*. And the greater the mental confusion, the greater its chances.

Myopia and voyeurism are the twin prerequisites of man's adaptation to the social mediocrity of the age. Look at the world through a keyhole! This is what all the experts urge us to do, and what the man of *ressentiment* delights in doing. Unable to play a leading part, he rushes to get the best seat in the auditorium. He is desperately in need of minute platitudes to chew on: all politicians are crooks, de Gaulle is a great man, China is a workers' paradise, etc. He loves to hate an individualised oppressor, to love a flesh-and-blood Uncle Joe: *systems* are too complicated for him. How easy it is to understand the success of such crass images as the foul Jew, the

shiftless native or the Two Hundred Families! Give the enemy a face and immediately the countenance of the masses apes another — most admirable — face, the face of the Defender of the Fatherland, Ruler, Führer.

The man of *ressentiment* is a potential revolutionary, but the development of this potentiality entails his passing through a phase of larval consciousness: he first becomes a nihilist. If he does not kill the organisers of his *ennui*, or at least those people who appear as such in the forefront of his vision (managers, experts, ideologues, etc), then he will end up killing in the name of an authority, in the name of some reason of state, or in the name of ideological consumption. And if the state of things does not eventually provoke a violent explosion, he will continue to flounder in a sea of roles, locked in the tedious rigidity of his spite, spreading his saw-toothed conformism everywhere and applauding revolt and repression alike; for, in this eventuality, incurable confusion is his only possible fate.

4

THE NIHILIST. Rozanov's definition of nihilism is the best: "The show is over. The audience get up to leave their seats. Time to collect their coats and go home. They turn round . . . . No more coats and no more home."

Nihilism is born of the collapse of myth. When a mythical system enters into contradiction with economic and social reality a gulf opens between the way people live and the prevailing explanation of the world, which is now suddenly completely inadequate. All traditional values are sucked into the abyss and destroyed. Deprived of any justification, stripped of the illusions that concealed it, the weakness of men emerges in all its nakedness. On the other hand, once myth no longer justifies the ways of Power to men, the real possibilities of social action and experiment appear. Myth was not just a cloak for this weakness: it was also the cause of it. Thus the explosion of myth frees an energy and creativity too long siphoned away from authentic experience into religious transcendence and abstraction. The interregnum between the collapse of classical philosophy and the erection of the Christian myth saw an unprecendented effervescence of thought and action. Then came the dead hand of Rome, co-opting whatever it could not destroy utterly. Later, in the sixteenth century, the Christian myth itself disintegrated, and another period of frenetic experimentation burst upon

the world. But this time there was an important difference, for after 1789 the reconstruction of a new myth became an absolute impossibility.

Christianity neutered the explosive nihilism of certain gnostic sects, and improvised a protective garment for itself from their remains. But the establishment of the bourgeois world made any new displacement of nihilistic energy on to the plane of myth impossible: the nihilism generated by the bourgeois revolution was a *concrete* nihilism. The reality of exchange, as we have seen, precludes all dissimulation. Until its abolition, the spectacle can never be anything except the spectacle of nihilism. That vanity of the world which the Pascal of the *Pensées* evoked, as he thought, to the greater glory of God, turned out to be a product of historical reality — and this in the *absence* of God, himself a casualty of the explosion of myth. Nihilism swept everything before it, God included.

For the last century and a half, the most lucid contributions to art and life have been the fruit of free experiment in the field of abolished values. De Sade's passional rationalism, Kierkegaard's sarcasm, Nietszche's vacillating irony, the violence of Maldoror, Mallarmé's icy dispassion, Jarry's *Umour*, Dadaist negativism — these are some of the impulses that have spread far and wide, investing human consciousness with a little of the dankness of decaying values; yet also, along with the dankness, the incipient hope of a total transcendence — a true reversal of perspective.

There is a paradox here. On the one hand, the great propagators of nihilism lacked an essential weapon: the sense of historic reality, the sense of the reality of decay, erosion and fragmentation. On the other hand, those who have *made* history in the period of bourgeois decline have been tragically lacking in any acute awareness of the immense dissolvent power of history in this era: Marx failed to analyse Romanticism and the artistic phenomenon in general; Lenin was wilfully blind to the importance of everyday life, of the Futurists, of Mayakovsky, or of the Dadaists.

Nihilism and historical consciousness have yet to join forces. The gap between the two is an open door to the hordes of passive liquidators, nihilists of the official world doggedly destroying the very values they pretend to believe in. How long must we bear the hegemony of these communist bureaucrats, fascist brutes, opinion-makers, pockmarked politicians, sub-Joycean writers, neo-Dadaist thinkers — all preaching the fragmentary, all

working assiduously for the Big Sleep and justifying themselves in the name of one Order or another: the family, morality, culture, the flag, the space race, margarine, etc. Perhaps nihilism could not have attained the status of platitude if history had not advanced so far. But advanced it has. Nihilism is a self-destruct mechanism: today a flame, tomorrow ashes. The old values in ruins today feed the intensive production of consumable and 'futurised' values sold under the old label of 'the modern'; but they also thrust us inevitably towards a future yet to be constructed, towards the transcendence of nihilism. In the consciousness of the new generation a slow reconciliation is occurring between history's destructive and constructive tendencies. The alliance of nihilism and transcendence means that transcendence will be total. Here lies the only wealth to be found in the affluent society.

When the man of *ressentiment* becomes aware of the dead loss which is survival, he turns into a nihilist. So tightly does he embrace the impossibility of living that survival itself becomes impossible. Nihilist angst is unlivable: in face of an absolute void, everything breaks up. Past and future implode: the present is ground zero. And from ground zero there are only two ways out, two kinds of nihilism: *active* and *passive*.

✧

The *passive* nihilist compromises with his own lucidity about the collapse of all values. He makes one final nihilistic gesture: he throws a dice to decide his 'cause', and becomes its devoted slave, for Art's sake, and for the sake of a little bread . . . . Nothing is true, so a few gestures become hip. Joe Soap intellectuals, pataphysicians, crypto-fascists, aesthetes of the *acte gratuit*, mercenaries, Kim Philbys, pop-artists, psychedelic impresarios — bandwagon after bandwagon works out its own version of the *credo quia absurdum est:* you don't believe in it, but you do it anyway; you get used to it and you even get to like it in the end. Passive nihilism is an overture to conformism.

After all, nihilism can never be more than a transition, a shifting, ill-defined sphere, a period of wavering between two extremes, one leading to submission and subservience, the other to permanent revolt. Between the two poles stretches a no-man's-land, the wasteland of the suicide and the solitary killer, of the criminal described so aptly by Bettina as the crime of

the State. Jack the Ripper is forever inaccessible. The mechanisms of hierarchical power cannot touch him; he cannot be touched by revolutionary will. A kind of *en-soi!* He gravitates round that zero-point where destruction, instead of reinforcing the destruction wrought by power, beats power at its own game, excites it to such violence that the machine of the *Penal Colony,* stabbing wildly, shatters into pieces and flies apart. Maldoror takes the disintegration of contemporary social organisation to its logical conclusion: to the stage of its self-destruction. The individual's absolute rejection of society as reponse to society's absolute rejection of the individual. Isn't this the still point of the reversal of perspective, the exact point where movement, dialectics and time no longer exist? Noon and eternity of the great refusal. Before it, the pogroms; beyond it, the new innocence. The blood of Jews or the blood of cops.

✧

The *active* nihilist does not simply watch things fall apart. He criticises the causes of disintegration by speeding up the process. Sabotage is a natural response to the chaos ruling the world. *Active nihilism is pre-revolutionary; passive nihilism is counter-revolutionary.* And most people waltz tragi-comically between the two. Like the Red Army soldier described by some Soviet author — Victor Chlovsky perhaps — who never charged without shouting, "Long Live the Tsar!" But circumstances inevitably end by drawing a line, and people suddenly find themselves, once and for all, on one side or the other of the barricades.

You always learn to dance for yourself on the off-beat of the official world. And you must follow your demands to their logical conclusion, not accept a compromise at the first setback. Consumer society's frantic need to manufacture new needs adroitly cashes in on the way-out, the bizarre and the shocking. Black humour and real agony turn up on Madison Avenue. Flirtation with non-conformism is an integral part of prevailing values. Awareness of the decay of values has its role to play in sales strategy. More and more pure *rubbish* is marketed. The figurine salt-shaker of Kennedy, complete with 'bullet-holes' through which to pour salt, for sale in the supermarket, should be enough to convince anybody, if there is anybody who still needs convincing, how easily a joke which once would have

delighted Ravachol or Peter the Painter now merely helps to keep the market going.

Consciousness of decay reached its most explosive expression in Dada. Dada really did contain the seeds by which nihilism could have been surpassed; but it just left them to rot, along with all the rest. The whole ambiguity of surrealism, on the other hand, lies in the fact that it was an accurate critique made at the wrong moment. While its critique of the transcendence aborted by Dada was perfectly justified, when it in its turn tried to surpass Dada it did so without going back to Dada's initial nihilism, without basing itself on Dada-anti-Dada, without seeing Dada historically. History was the nightmare from which the surrealists never awoke: they were defenceless before the Communist Party, they were out of their depth with the Spanish Civil War. For all their yapping they slunk after the official left like faithful dogs.

Certain features of Romanticism had already proved, without awakening the slightest interest on the part of either Marx or Engels, that art — the pulse of culture and society — is the first index of the decay and disintegration of values. A century later, while Lenin thought that the whole issue was beside the point, the Dadaist could see the artistic abscess as a symptom of a cancer whose poison was spread throughout society. *Unpleasant* art only reflects the repression of pleasure instituted by Power. It is this the Dadaists of 1916 proved so cogently. To go beyond this analysis could mean only one thing: to take up arms. The neo-Dadaist larvae pullulating in the shit-heap of present-day consumption have found more profitable employment.

The Dadaists, working to cure themselves and their civilisation of their discontents — working, in the last analysis, more coherently than Freud himself — built the first laboratory for the revitalisation of everyday life. Their activity was far more radical than their theory. Grosz: "The point was to work completely in the dark. We didn't know where we were going." The Dada group was a funnel sucking in all the trivia and garbage cluttering up the world. Reappearing at the other end, everything was transformed, original, brand new. Though people and things stayed the same they took on totally new meanings. The reversal of perspective was begun in the magic of rediscovering lost experience. Subversion, the tactics of the reversal of perspective, overthrew the rigid frame of the old world. This upheaval

showed exactly what is meant by 'poetry made by everyone' — a far cry indeed from the literary mentality to which the surrealists eventually succumbed.

The initial weakness of Dada lay in its extraordinary humility. Think of Tzara, who, it is said, used every morning to repeat Descartes' statement, "I do not even want to know whether there were men before me". In this Tzara, a buffoon taking himself as seriously as a pope, it is not hard to recognise the same individual who would later spit on the memory of such men as Ravachol, Bonnot and Makhno's peasant army by joining up with the Stalinist herds.

Dada broke up because transcendence was impossible, and it was impossible because the Dadaists had failed to search the past for those real occasions when such transcendence became a possibility — those moments when the masses arise and take their destiny into their own hands.

The first compromise is always terrible in its effects. Dada's original error tainted its heirs irrevocably: it infected surrealism throughout its history, and finally turned malignant — witness neo-Dadaism. Admittedly, the surrealists looked to the past. But with what results? While they were right in recognising the subversive genius of a Sade, a Fourier or a Lautréamont, all they could do then was to write so much — and so well — about them as to win for their heroes the honour of a few timid footnotes in progressive school textbooks. A literary celebrity much like the celebrity the neo-Dadaists win for their forebears in the present spectacle of decomposition.

✧

The only modern phenomena comparable to Dada are the most savage outbreaks of juvenile delinquency. The same contempt for art and bourgeois values. The same refusal of ideology. The same will to live. The same ignorance of history. The same barbaric revolt. The same lack of tactics.

The nihilist makes one mistake: he does not realise that other people are also nihilists, and that the nihilism of other people is now an active historical factor. He has no consciousness of the possibility of transcendence. The fact is, however, that the present reign of survival, in which all the talk about progress expresses nothing so much as the fear that progress may be impossible, is itself a product of history, is itself the outcome of all the

renunciations of humanity that have been made over the centuries. Indeed, the history of survival is the historical movement which will eventually undo history itself. For clear awareness of just how nightmarish life has become is on the point of fusing with a consciousness of the successive renunciations of the past, and thus too with the real desire to pick up the movement of transcendence everywhere in space and time where it has been prematurely interrupted. Transcendence — that is to say, the revolution of everyday life — will consist in retrieving all such abandoned radical nuclei and infusing them with the unmatched violence of *ressentiment.* The resulting chain reaction of subterranean creativity cannot fail to overthrow the world of hierarchical power. *In the last reckoning, the nihilists are our only allies.* If they now live in the despair of non-transcendence, a coherent theory will suffice to set them straight, placing the potential energy of their accumulated rancour in the service of their will to live. Anyone who combines consciousness of past renunciations with a historical consciousness of decomposition is ready to take up arms in the cause of the transformation of daily life and of the world. *Nihilists,* as de Sade would have said, *one more effort if you want to be revolutionaries!*

Part two

Reversal of perspective

Chapter nineteen

Reversal of perspective

The light of Power is on the wane. The eyes of the illusion of community are holes in a mask, holes through which the eyes of individual subjectivity can see nothing. The individual point of view is bound to prevail over the point of view of false collective participation. With the totality as our starting point the social realm must be attacked with the arms of subjectivity and everything rebuilt on the basis of the self. The reversal of perspective is the positivity of negation — the swelling fruit about to shatter the husk of the Old World.

1

ONE DAY Herr Keuner was asked just what he meant by 'reversal of perspective', and he told the following story. Two brothers, who were deeply attached to one another, once adopted a curious practice. They started using pebbles to record the nature of each day's events, a white stone for each moment of happiness, a black one for any misfortune or chagrin. They soon discovered, on comparing the contents of their jars of pebbles at the end of each day, that one brother collected only white pebbles, the other only black. Intrigued by the remarkable consistency with which they each experienced a similar fate in a quite different way, they resolved to seek the opinion of an old man famed for his wisdom. "You don't talk about it enough", said the wise man. "Each of you should seek the causes of your choices and explain them to the other." Thenceforward the two brothers followed this advice, and soon found that while the first remained faithful to his white pebbles, and the second to his black ones, in neither of the jars were there now as many pebbles as formerly. Where there had usually been thirty or so, each brother would now collect scarcely more than seven or eight. Before long the wise man had another visit from the two brothers, both looking very downcast. "Not long ago," began the first brother, "my jar would fill up with pebbles as black as night. I lived in unrelieved despair. I confess that I only went on living out of force of habit. Now, I rarely collect more

than eight pebbles in a day. But what these eight symbols of misery represent has become so intolerable that I simply cannot go on living like this." The other brother told the wise man: "Every day I used to pile up my white pebbles. These days I only get seven or eight, but these exercise such a fascination over me that I cannot recall these moments of happiness without immediately wanting to live them over again, even more intensely than before. As a matter of fact, I long to keep on experiencing them forever, and this desire is a torment to me." The wise man smiled as he listened. "Excellent, excellent", he said. "Things are shaping up well. You must persevere. One other thing. From time to time, ask yourselves why this game with the jar and the pebbles arouses so much enthusiasm in you." The next time the two brothers visited the wise man, they had this to say: "Well, we asked ourselves the question, as you suggested, but we have no answer. So we asked everyone in the village. You can see how much it has upset them. Whole families sit outside their houses in the evenings arguing about white pebbles and black pebbles. Only the elders and notables refuse to take part in these discussions. They laugh at us, and say that a pebble is a pebble, black or white." The old man could not conceal his delight at this. "Everything is going as I had foreseen. Don't worry. Soon the question will no longer arise; it has already lost its importance, and I daresay that one day soon you will have forgotten that you ever concerned yourselves with it." Not long thereafter the old man's predictions were confirmed in the following manner. A great joy seized the people of the village. And as dawn broke after a night full of comings and goings, the first rays of sunlight fell upon the heads of the elders and notables, struck from their bodies and impaled upon the sharp-pointed stakes of a palisade.

2

THE WORLD HAS always been geometrical. The angle and perspective from which people were supposed to see each other, speak to each other, and represent each other, were once sovereignly decided by the gods of the unitary systems. Then men — the men of the bourgeoisie — played a dirty trick on these gods: they put them in perspective, situating them within an historical process in which they were born, matured, grew old and died. History has been the twilight of the gods.

Once historicised, God became indistinguishable from his material nature, from the dialectic of master and slave, from the history of the class struggle and of hierarchical social power. Thus in a sense the bourgeoisie instigated a reversal of perspective, only to restrict it immediately to the plane of appearances: God has been abolished but the pillars which supported him still rise towards an empty sky. The explosion which demolished the cathedral of sacred values must have produced very slow shock waves, for even today, two centuries later, great chunks of the mythic façade are still in the process of being ground to powder in the spectacle. The bourgeoisie presides over one phase only of the dynamiting of a God whose absolute disappearance is now in the offing; so completely will he disappear, indeed, that every trace of his material origins — ie, man's domination by man — will disappear along with him.

The mechanisms of the economy, the control and power of which the bourgeoisie in part mastered, revealed Power's material basis while enabling Power to dispense with the divine phantom. But at what price? God, that grand negation of humanity, offered the faithful a sort of refuge where, paradoxically, they found a justification for rising up, as the mystics so often did, against temporal authorities, invoking the absolute power of God against the 'usurped' power of priests and leaders. Today, Power comes down to men, tries to seduce them, proffers itself as something to be consumed. It weighs more and more heavily upon them, reduces the span of life to mere survival, and compresses time till it has no more substance than that of the role. Rather schematically speaking, Power might be compared to an angle — an acute angle, to begin with, its point lost in the heavens; then gradually widening as its tip descends and emerges from the clouds; and eventually becoming so wide that it disappears altogether and we are left with a straight line amounting to no more than a series of equivalent and feeble points. Beyond this line, which represents the moment of nihilism, a new perspective emerges which is neither a reflection nor an inversion of the earlier one. Rather, it is an ensemble of harmonised individual perspectives which are not in conflict with one another, but which successfully construct a coherent and collective world. All these angles, though different, open in the same direction: individual will and collective will have become one.

The function of conditioning is to assign and adjust people's positions on the hierarchical ladder. The reversal of perspective entails a kind of anti-conditioning. Not a new form of conditioning, but a new game and its tactics; the game of subversion (*détournement*).

The reversal of perspective turns knowledge into praxis, hope into freedom, and mediation into a passion for immediacy. It enshrines the victory of a system of human relationships grounded in three indivisible principles: participation, communication and self-realisation.

To reverse perspective is to stop seeing things through the eyes of the community, of ideology, of the family, of other people. To grasp hold of oneself as of something solid, to take oneself as starting point and centre. To base everything on subjectivity and to follow one's subjective will to be everything. In the sights of my insatiable desire to live, the whole of Power is merely one target in a wider horizon. Power cannot spoil my aim by deploying its forces: on the contrary, I'm able to track its movements, gauge the danger and calmly observe its parading. My creativity, no matter how poor, is for me a far better guide than all the knowledge with which my head has been crammed. In the night of Power, its glimmer keeps the enemy forces at bay. These forces are cultural conditioning, specialisation of every kind, and imposed world-views — all irretrievably totalitarian in nature. In creativity, then, everyone possesses the ultimate weapon. But, like a talisman, this weapon has to be used wittingly. Where creativity is mobilised against the grain, in the service of lies and oppression, it turns into a sick farce: the consecration of art. Furthermore, there is a distinction between acts designed to destroy Power and acts designed to build individual free will: their form is the same but their range is different; as any good strategist knows, you prepare in different ways for defence and attack. We have not chosen the reversal of perspective out of some kind of voluntarism. It has chosen us. Caught up as we are in the historical state of *nothing* the next step can only be a change in *everything*. Consciousness of total revolution — or rather, of the necessity for it — is the only way we have left of being *historical*, our last chance to undo history under willed conditions. The game we are about to join is the game of our creativity. Its rules are radically opposed to those which govern our society. It is a game of loser wins: what is left unsaid is more important than what is shown on the level of

appearances. And it has to be played out to the end. How can anyone who has suffered oppression till his very bones rebel turn down the life-raft offered him by his will to *live without reservations*? Woe betide those who abandon their violence and their radical demands along the way. As Nietzsche noted, murdered truths become poisonous. If we do not reverse perspective, Power's perspective will succeed in turning us against ourselves once and for all. German fascism was spawned in the blood of Spartakus. Our everyday renunciations — no matter how trivial — lend fuel to our enemy, who wants nothing short of our total death.

Chapter twenty

Creativity, spontaneity and poetry

Man is in a state of creativity twenty-four hours a day. Once revealed, the scheming use of freedom by the mechanisms of domination produces a backlash in the form of an idea of authentic freedom inseparably bound up with individual creativity. The passion to create which issues from the consciousness of constraint can no longer be pressed into the service of production, consumption or organisation (1). Spontaneity is the mode of existence of creativity: not an isolated state, but the unmediated experience of subjectivity. Spontaneity concretises the passion for creation and is the first moment of its practical realisation: the precondition of poetry, of the impulse to change the world in accordance with the demands of radical subjectivity (2). The qualitative exists wherever creative spontaneity manifests itself. It entails the direct communication of the essential. It is poetry's chance. A crystallisation of possibilities, a multiplier of knowledge and practical potential, and the proper modus operandi *of intelligence. Its criteria are* sui generis. *The qualitative leap precipitates a chain reaction which is to be seen in all revolutionary moments; such a reaction must be awoken by the scandal of free and total creativity (3). Poetry is the organiser of creative spontaneity to the extent that it reinforces spontaneity's hold on reality. Poetry is an act which engenders new realities: it is the fulfilment of radical theory, the revolutionary act* par excellence *(4).*

1

IN THIS FRACTURED WORLD, whose common denominator throughout history has been hierarchical social power, only one freedom has ever been tolerated: the freedom to change the numerator, the freedom to prefer one master to another. Freedom of choice so understood has increasingly lost its attraction — especially since it became the official doctrine of the worst totalitarianisms of the modern world, East and West. The generalisation of the refusal to make such a Hobson's choice — to do no more than change employers — has in turn occasioned a restructuring of State power. All the governments of the industrialised or semi-industrialised world now

tend to model themselves — to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their nation's level of development — after a single prototype: the common aim is to rationalise, to 'automate', the old forms of domination. And herein lies freedom's first chance. The bourgeois democracies have clearly shown that individual freedoms can be tolerated only insofar as they entrench upon and destroy one another; and now that this is clear, it has become impossible for any government, no matter how sophisticated, to wave the *muleta* of freedom without everyone discerning the sword concealed behind it. In fact the constant evocation of freedom merely incites freedom to rediscover its roots in individual creativity, to break out of its official definition as the permitted, the licit, the tolerable — to shatter the benevolence of despotism.

Freedom's second chance comes once it has retrieved its creative authenticity, and is tied up with the very mechanisms of Power. It is obvious that abstract systems of exploitation and domination are human creations, brought into being and refined through the diversion or co-optation of creativity. The only forms of creativity that authority can deal with, or wishes to deal with, are those which the spectacle can co-opt. But what people do officially is nothing compared with what they do in secret. People usually associate creativity with works of art, but what are works of art alongside the creative energy displayed by everyone a thousand times a day? Alongside seething unsatisfied desires, daydreams in search of a foothold in reality, feelings at once confused and luminously clear, ideas and gestures presaging nameless upheavals? All this energy, of course, is relegated to anonymity and deprived of adequate means of expression, imprisoned by survival and obliged to find outlets by sacrificing its qualitative richness and conforming to the spectacle's categories. Think of Cheval's palace, the Watts Towers, Fourier's inspired system, or the pictorial universe of Douanier Rousseau. Even more to the point, consider the incredible diversity of *anyone's* dreams — landscapes the brilliance of whose colours qualitatively surpass the finest canvases of a Van Gogh. Every individual is constantly building an ideal world within himself, even as his external motions bend to the requirements of soulless routine.

Nobody, no matter how alienated, is without (or unaware of) an irreducible core of creativity, a *camera obscura* safe from intrusion from lies and constraints. If ever social organisation extends its control to this stronghold

of humanity, its domination will no longer be exercised over anything save robots, or corpses. And, in a sense, this is why consciousness of creative energy increases, paradoxically enough, as a function of consumer society's efforts to co-opt it.

Argus is blind to the danger right in front of him. Where quantity reigns, quality has no legal existence; but this is the very thing that safeguards and nourishes it. I have already mentioned the fact that the dissatisfaction bred by the manic pursuit of quantity calls forth a radical desire for the qualitative. The more oppression is justified in terms of the freedom to consume, the more the malaise arising from this contradiction exacerbates the thirst for total freedom. The crisis of production-based capitalism pointed up the element of repressed creativity in the energy expended by the worker, and Marx gave us the definitive exposé of this alienation of creativity through forced labour, through the exploitation of the producer. Whatever the capitalist system and its avatars (their antagonisms notwithstanding) lose on the production front they try to make up for in the sphere of consumption. The idea is that, as they gradually free themselves from the imperatives of production, men should be trapped by the newer obligations of the consumer. By opening up the wasteland of 'leisure' to a creativity liberated at long last thanks to reduced working hours, our kindly apostles of humanism are really only raising an army suitable for training on the parade ground of a consumption-based economy. Now that the alienation of the consumer is being exposed by the dialectic internal to consumption itself, what kind of prison can be devised for the highly subversive forces of individual creativity? As I have already pointed out, the rulers' last chance here is to turn us all into organisers of our own passivity.

With touching candour, Dewitt Peters remarks that, "If paints, brushes and canvas were handed out to everyone who wanted them, the results might be quite interesting". It is true that if this policy were applied in a variety of well-defined and well-policed spheres, such as the theatre, the plastic arts, music, writing, etc, and in a general way to any such sphere susceptible of total isolation from all others, then the system might have a hope of endowing people with the consciousness of the artist, ie, the consciousness of someone who makes a profession of displaying his creativity in the museums and shop windows of culture. The popularity of such a

culture would be a perfect index of Power's success. Fortunately, the chances of people being successfully 'culturised' in this way are now slight. Do the cyberneticians really imagine that people can be persuaded to engage in free experiment within bounds laid down by authoritarian decree? Or that prisoners who have become aware of their creative capacity will be content to decorate their cells with original graffiti? They are more likely to apply their new-found *penchant* for experiment in other spheres: firearms, desires, dreams, self-realisation techniques. Especially since the crowd is already full of agitators. No: the last possible way of co-opting creativity, which is the organisation of artistic passivity, is happily doomed to failure.

"What I am trying to reach," wrote Paul Klee, "is a far-off point, at the sources of creation, where I suspect a single explanatory principle applies for man, animals, plants, fire, water, air and all the forces that surround us." As a matter of fact, this point is only far off in Power's lying perspective: the source of all creation lies in individual creativity; it is from this starting point that everything, being or thing, is ordered in accordance with poetry's grand freedom. This is the take-off point of the new perspective: that perspective for which everyone is struggling willy-nilly with all his strength and at every moment of his existence. "Subjectivity is the only truth", says Kierkegaard.

Power cannot enlist true creativity. In 1869 the Brussels police thought they had found the famous gold of the International, about which the capitalists were losing so much sleep. They seized a huge strongbox hidden in some dark corner. When they opened it, however, they found only coal. Little did the police know that the pure gold of the International would always turn into coal if touched by enemy hands.

The laboratory of individual creativity transmutes the basest metals of daily life into gold through a revolutionary alchemy. The prime objective is to disclose slave consciousness, consciousness of impotence, by releasing creativity's magnetic power; impotence is magically dispelled as creative energy surges forth, genius serene in its self-assurance. So sterile on the plane of the race for prestige in the spectacle, megalomania is an important phase in the struggle of the self against the combined forces of conditioning. The creative spark, which is the spark of true life, shines all the more brightly in the night of nihilism which at present envelops us. As the project of a better

organisation of survival aborts, the sparks will become more and more numerous and gradually coalesce into a single light, the promise of a new organisation based this time on the harmonising of individual wills. History is leading us to the crossroads where radical subjectivity is destined to encounter the possibility of changing the world. The crossroads of the reversal of perspective.

2

SPONTANEITY. Spontaneity is the true mode of being of individual creativity, creativity's initial, immaculate form, unpolluted at the source and as yet unthreatened by the mechanisms of co-optation. Whereas creativity in the broad sense is the most equitably distributed thing imaginable, spontaneity seems to be confined to a chosen few. Its possession is a privilege of those whom long resistance to Power has endowed with a consciousness of their own value as individuals. In revolutionary moments this means the majority; in other periods, when the old mole works unseen, day by day, it is still more people than one might think. For so long as the light of creativity continues to shine spontaneity has a chance.

"The new artist protests", wrote Tzara in 1919. "He no longer paints: he creates directly." The new artists of the future, constructors of situations to be lived, will undoubtedly have immediacy as their most succinct — though also their most radical — demand. I say 'succinct' because it is important after all not to be confused by the connotations of the word 'spontaneity'. Spontaneity can never spring from internalised restraints, even subconscious ones, nor can it survive the effects of alienating abstraction and spectacular co-optation: it is a conquest, not a given. The reconstruction of the individual presupposes the reconstruction of the unconscious (compare the construction of dreams).

What spontaneous creativity has lacked up to now is a clear consciousness of its poetry. The common-sense view has always treated spontaneity as a primary state, an initial stage in need of theoretical adaptation, of transposition into formal terms. This view isolates spontaneity, treats it as a thing-in-itself — and thus recognises it only in the travestied forms which it acquires within the spectacle (eg, action painting). In point of fact

spontaneous creativity carries the seeds of a self-sufficient development within itself. It is possessed of its own poetry.

For me spontaneity is immediate experience, consciousness of a lived immediacy threatened on all sides yet not yet alienated, not yet relegated to inauthenticity. The centre of lived experience is that place where everyone comes closest to himself. Within this unique space-time we have the clear conviction that reality exempts us from necessity. Consciousness of necessity is always what alienates us. We have been taught to apprehend ourselves by default — *in absentia*, so to speak. But it takes a single moment of awareness of real life to eliminate all alibis, and consign the absence of future to the same void as the absence of past. Consciousness of the present harmonises with lived experience in a sort of extemporisation. The pleasure this brings us — impoverished by its isolation, yet potentially rich because it reaches out towards an identical pleasure in other people — bears a striking resemblance to the enjoyment of jazz. At its best, improvisation in everyday life has much in common with jazz as evoked by Dauer: "The African conception of rhythm differs from the Western in that it is perceived through bodily movement rather than aurally. The technique consists essentially in the introduction of discontinuity into the static balance imposed upon time by rhythm and metre. This discontinuity, which results from the existence of ecstatic centres of gravity out of time with the musical rhythm and metre proper, creates a constant tension between the static beat and the ecstatic beat which is superimposed on it."

The instant of creative spontaneity is the minutest possible manifestation of the reversal of perspective. It is a unitary moment, ie, one and many. The eruption of lived pleasure is such that in losing myself I find myself; forgetting that I exist, I realise myself. Consciousness of immediate experience lies in this oscillation, in this improvisational jazz. By contrast, thought directed towards lived experience with analytic intent is bound to remain detached from that experience. This applies to all reflection on everyday life, including, to be sure, the present one. To combat this, all I can do is try to incorporate an element of constant self-criticism, so as to make the work of co-optation a little harder than usual. The traveller who is always thinking about the length of the road before him tires more easily than his companion who lets his imagination wander as he goes along. Similarly,

anxious attention paid to lived experience can only impede it, abstract it, and make it into nothing more than a series of memories-to-be.

If thought is really to find a basis in lived experience, it has to be free. The way to achieve this is to think *other* in terms of *the same*. As you make yourself, imagine another self who will make you one day in his turn. Such is my conception of spontaneity: the highest possible self-consciousness which is still inseparable from the self and from the world.

All the same, the paths of spontaneity are hard to find. Industrial civilisation has let them become overgrown. And even when we find real life, knowing the best way to grasp it is not easy. Individual experience is also prey to insanity — a foothold for madness. Kierkegaard described this state of affairs as follows: "It is true that I have a lifebelt, but I cannot see the pole which is supposed to pull me out of the water. This is a ghastly way to experience things." The pole is there, of course, and no doubt everyone could grab on to it, though many would be so slow about it that they would die of anxiety before realising its existence. But exist it does, and its name is radical subjectivity: the consciousness that all people have the same will to authentic self-realisation, and that their subjectivity is strengthened by the perception of this subjective will in others. This way of getting out of oneself and radiating out, not so much towards others as towards that part of oneself that is to be found in others, is what gives creative spontaneity the strategic importance of a launching pad. The concepts and abstractions which rule us have to be returned to their source, to lived experience, not in order to validate them, but on the contrary to correct them, to turn them on their heads, to restore them to that sphere whence they derive and which they should never have left. This is a necessary precondition of people's imminent realisation that their individual creativity is indistinguishable from universal creativity. The sole authority is one's own lived experience: and this everyone must prove to everyone else.

3

THE QUALITATIVE. I have already said that creativity, though equally distributed to all, only finds direct, spontaneous expression on specific occasions. These occasions are pre-revolutionary moments, the source of

the poetry that changes life and transforms the world. They must surely be placed under the sign of that modern equivalent of grace, the qualitative. The presence of the divine abomination is revealed by a cloying spirituality suddenly conferred upon all, from the rustic to the most refined: on a cretin like Claudel as readily as on a St John of the Cross. Similarly, a gesture, an attitude, perhaps merely a word, may suffice to show that poetry's chance is at hand, that the total construction of everyday life, a global reversal of perspective — in short, the revolution — are immanent possibilities. The qualitative encapsulates and crystallises these possibilities; it is a direct communication of the essential.

One day Kagame heard an old woman of Rwanda, who could neither read nor write, complaining: "Really, these whites are incurably simple-minded. They have no brains at all." "How can you be so stupid?" he answered her. "I would like to see you invent so many unimaginably marvellous things as the whites have done." With a condescending smile, the old woman replied, "Listen, my child. They may have learned a lot of things, but they have no brains. They don't understand anything". And she was right, for the curse of technological civilisation, of quantified exchange and scientific knowledge, is that they have created no means of freeing people's spontaneous creativity *directly;* indeed, they do not even allow people to *understand* the world in any unmediated fashion. The sentiments expressed by the Rwandan woman — whom the Belgian administrator doubtless looked upon, from the heights of his superior intelligence, as a wild animal — are also to be found, though laden with guilt and thus tainted by crass stupidity, in the old platitude: "I have studied a great deal and now know that I know nothing." For it is false, in a sense, to say that study can teach us nothing, so long as study does not abandon the point of view of the totality. What this attitude refuses to see, or to learn, are the various stages of the qualitative — whatever, at whatever level, lends support to the qualitative. Imagine a number of apartments located immediately above one another, communicating directly by means of a central elevator and also indirectly linked by an outside spiral staircase. People in the different apartments have direct access to each other, whereas someone slowly climbing the spiral stairs is cut off from them. The former have access to the qualitative at all levels; the latter's knowledge is limited to one step at a

time, and so no dialogue is possible between the two. Thus the revolutionary workers of 1848 were no doubt incapable of reading the *Communist Manifesto*, yet they possessed within themselves the essential lessons of Marx's and Engels's text. In fact this is what made the Marxist theory truly radical. The objective conditions of the worker's life, expressed by the *Manifesto* on the level of theory, made it possible for the most illiterate proletarian to understand Marx *immediately* when the moment came. The cultivated man who uses his culture like a flame thrower is bound to get on with the uncultivated man who experiences what the first man puts in scholarly terms in the lived reality of his everyday life. The arms of criticism do indeed have to join forces with criticism by force of arms.

Only the qualitative permits a higher stage to be reached in one bound. This is the lesson that any endangered group must learn, the pedagogy of the barricades. The graded world of hierarchical power, however, can only envisage knowledge as being similarly graded: the people on the spiral staircase, experts on the type and number of steps, meet, pass, bump into one another and trade insults. What difference does it make? At the bottom we have the auto-didact gorged on platitudes, at the top the intellectual collecting ideas like butterflies: mirror images of foolishness. The opposition between Miguel de Unamuno and the repulsive Millan Astray, between the paid thinker and his reviler, is an empty one: where the qualitative is not in evidence, intelligence is a fool's cap and bells.

The alchemists called those elements needed for the Great Work the *materia prima*. Paracelsus's description of this applies perfectly to the qualitative: "It is obvious that the poor possess it in greater abundance than the rich. People squander the good portion of it and keep only the bad. It is visible and invisible, and children play with it in the street. But the ignorant crush it underfoot everyday." The consciousness of this qualitative *materia prima* may be expected to become more and more acute in most minds as the bastions of specialised thought and gradated knowledge collapse. Those who make a profession of creating, and those whose profession prevents them from creating, both artists and workers, are being pushed into the same nihilism by the process of proletarianisation. This process, which is accompanied by resistance to it, ie, resistance to co-opted forms of creativity, occurs amid such a plethora of cultural goods — records,

films, paperback books — that once these commodities have been freed from the laws of consumption they will pass immediately into the service of true creativity. The sabotage of the mechanisms of economic and cultural consumption is epitomised by young people who steal the books in which they expect to find confirmation of their radicalism.

Once the light of the qualitative is shed upon them, the most varied kinds of knowledge combine and form a magnetic bridge powerful enough to overthrow the weightiest traditions. The force of plain spontaneous creativity increases knowledge at an exponential rate. Using makeshift equipment and negligible funds, a German engineer recently built an apparatus able to replace the cyclotron. If individual creativity can achieve such results with such meagre stimulation, what marvels of energy must be expected from the qualitative shock waves and chain reactions that will occur when the spirit of freedom still alive in the individual re-emerges in collective form to celebrate the great social *fête*, with its joyful breaking of all taboos.

The task of a coherent revolutionary group, far from being the creation of a new type of conditioning, is to establish protected areas where the intensity of conditioning tends towards zero. Making each person aware of his creative potential will be a hapless task unless recourse is had to qualitative shock tactics. Which is why we expect nothing from the mass parties and other groupings based on the principle of quantitative recruitment. Something *can* be expected, on the other hand, from a micro-society formed on the basis of the radical acts or thought of its members, and maintained in a permanent state of practical readiness by means of strict theoretical discrimination. Cells successfully established along such lines would have every chance of wielding sufficient influence one day to free the creativity of the majority of the people. The despair of the anarchist terrorist must be changed into hope; his tactics, worthy of some medieval warrior, must be changed into a modern strategy.

4

POETRY. What is poetry? It is the organisation of creative spontaneity, the exploitation of the qualitative in accordance with its internal laws of coherence. Poetry is what the Greeks call *poiein*, 'making', but 'making'

restored to the purity of its moment of genesis — seen, in other words, from the point of view of the totality.

Poetry cannot exist in the absence of the qualitative. In this absence we find the opposite of the qualitative: information, the transitional programme, specialisation, reformism — the various guises of the fragmentary. The presence of the qualitative does not of itself guarantee poetry, however. A rich complex of signs and possibilities may get lost in confusion, disintegrate from lack of coherence, or be destroyed by crossed purposes. The criterion of effectiveness must remain supreme. Thus poetry is also radical theory completely embodied in action; the mortar binding tactics and revolutionary strategy; the high point of the great gamble on everyday life.

What is poetry? In 1895, during an ill-advised and seemingly foredoomed French railway workers' strike, one trade unionist stood up and mentioned an ingenious and cheap way of advancing the strikers' cause: "It takes two sous' worth of a certain substance used in the right way to immobilise a locomotive." Thanks to this bit of quick thinking, the tables were turned on the government and capitalists. Here it is clear that poetry is the act which brings new realities into being, the act which reverses the perspective. The *materia prima* is within everyone's reach. Poets are those who know how to use it to best effect. Moreover, two sous' worth of some chemical is nothing compared with the profusion of unrivalled energy generated and made available by everyday life itself: the energy of the will to live, of desire unleashed, of the passion of love, the power of fear and anxiety, the hurricane of hatred and the wild impetus of the urge for destruction. What poetic upheavals may confidently be expected to stem from such universally experienced feelings as those associated with death, old age and sickness. The long revolution of everyday life, the only true poetry-made-by-all, will take this still marginal consciousness as its point of departure.

"What is poetry?" ask the aesthetes. And we may as well give them the obvious answer right away: poetry rarely involves poems these days. Most works of art are betrayals of poetry. How could it be otherwise, when poetry and power are irreconcilable? At best, the artist's creativity is imprisoned, cloistered within an unfinished *oeuvre*, awaiting the day when it will have the last word. Unfortunately, no matter how much importance the artist

gives it, this last word, which is supposed to usher in perfect communication, will never be pronounced so long as the revolt of creativity has not realised art.

The African work of art — poem, music, sculpture or mask — is not considered complete until it has become a form of *speech*, a word-in-action, a creative element which *functions*. Actually this is true for more than African art. There is no art in the world which does not seek to function; and to function — even on the level of later co-optation — consistently with the very same will which generated it, the will to live constantly in the euphoria of the moment of creation. Why is it that the work of the greatest artists never seems to have an end? The answer is that great art cries out in every possible way for realisation, for the right to enter lived experience. The present decomposition of art is a bow perfectly readied for such an arrow.

Nothing can save past culture from the cult of the past except those pictures, writings, musical or lithic architectures, etc, whose qualitative dimension gets through to us free of its form — of all art forms. This happens with Sade and Lautréamont, of course, but also with Villon, Lucretius, Rabelais, Pascal, Fourier, Bosch, Dante, Bach, Swift, Shakespeare, Uccello, etc. All are liable to shed their cultural chrysalis, emerge from the museums to which history has relegated them and become so much dynamite for the bombs of the future realisers of art. Thus the value of an old work of art should be assessed on the basis of the amount of radical theory that can be drawn from it, on the basis of the nucleus of creative spontaneity which the new creators will be able to release from it for the purposes of — and by means of — an unprecedented kind of poetry.

Radical theory's forte is its ability to postpone an action begun by creative spontaneity without mitigating it or redirecting its thrust. Conversely, the artistic approach seeks in its finest moments to stamp the world with the impress of a tentacular subjective activity constantly seeking to create, and to create itself. Whereas radical theory sticks close to poetic reality, to reality in process and to the world as it is being changed, art takes an identical tack but at much greater risk of being lost and corrupted. Only an art armed against itself, against its own weaker side — its most aesthetic side — has any hope of evading co-optation.

Consumer society, as we well know, reduces art to a range of consumable

products. The more vulgarised this reduction, the faster the rate of decomposition and the greater the chances for transcendence. That communication so urgently sought by the artist is cut off and prohibited even in the simplest relationships of everyday life. So true is this that the search for new forms of communication, far from being the preserve of painters and poets, is now part of a collective effort. In this way the old specialisation of art has finally come to an end. There are no more artists because everyone is an artist. The work of art of the future will be the construction of a passionate life.

The object created is less important than the process which gives rise to it, the act of creating. What makes an artist is his state of creativity, not art galleries. Unfortunately, artists rarely recognise themselves as creators: most of the time they play to the gallery, exhibitionistically. A contemplative attitude before a work of art was the first stone thrown at the creator. He encouraged this attitude in the first place, but today it is his undoing: now it amounts to no more than a need to consume, an expression of the crassest economic imperatives. This is why there is no longer any such thing as a work of art in the classical sense of the word. Nor can there be such a thing. So much the better. Poetry is to be found elsewhere: in the facts, in the events we bring about. The poetry of the facts, formerly always treated as marginal, now stands at the centre of everyone's concerns, at the centre of daily life, a sphere which as a matter of fact it has never left.

True poetry cares nothing for poems. In his quest for the Book, Mallarmé wanted nothing so much as to abolish the poem. What better way could there be of abolishing the poem than realising it? And indeed a few of Mallarmé's contemporaries proved themselves rather brilliant exponents of just such a 'new poetry'. Did the author of *Hérodiade* have an inkling, perhaps, when he described them as 'angels of purity', that the anarchists with their bombs offered the poet a key which, walled up in his words, he could never use?

Poetry is always somewhere. Its recent abandonment of the arts makes it easier to see that it resides primarily in individual acts, in a lifestyle and in the search for such a style. Everywhere repressed, this poetry springs up everywhere. Brutally put down, it is reborn in violence. It plays muse to rioters, informs revolt and animates all great revolutionary carnivals for a

while, until the bureaucrats consign it to the prison of hagiography.

Lived poetry has effectively shown throughout history, even in partial revolts, even in crime — which Coeurderoy so aptly dubbed the 'revolt of one' — that it is the protector *par excellence* of everything irreducible in mankind, that is to say, of creative spontaneity. The will to unite the individual and the social, not on the basis of an illusory community but on that of subjectivity — this is what makes the new poetry into a weapon which everyone must learn to handle *by himself*. Poetic experience is henceforth at a premium. The organisation of spontaneity will be the work of spontaneity itself.

Chapter twenty-one

Masters without slaves

Power is that social organisation whereby masters maintain the conditions of slavery. God, State, Organisation: these three words are a good index of the relative significance for Power of autonomy and historical determinism. Three principles have successively held sway: the principle of domination (feudal power), the principle of exploitation (bourgeois power), and the principle of organisation (cybernetic power) (2). Hierarchical social organisation has been refined by deconsecration and mechanisation, but at the same time its contradictions have become more acute. It has given itself a human face precisely to the extent that it has stripped men of their human substance. It has gained in autonomy at the expense of the masters (the rulers are in charge, but they are governed by the levers of Power). Those who enforce Power's directives are the modern scions of the race of submissive slaves — that race which, Theognis tells us, is born with head bowed. They cannot even enjoy the unhealthy pleasure of dominating. Confronting these master-slaves are the men of refusal, the new proletariat, rich in their revolutionary traditions. Out of this confrontation will come the future masters without slaves, and a higher form of society destined to realise both the lived project of childhood and the historical project of the great aristocrats (1, 3).

1

IN THE *Theages*, Plato writes: "Everyone would like if possible to be master of all men, or better still God himself." A feeble enough ambition in view of the weakness of masters and gods. Slaves are weak because they swear allegiance to those who govern them; masters, and God himself, are weak because of the shortcomings of those whom they govern. The master knows the positive pole of alienation, the slave its negative one, but both are denied full mastery.

How does the feudal lord behave in this dialectic of master and slave? As slave of God and master of men — and master of men *because* he is a slave of God, according to the rules of the myth — he finds himself condemned,

in his dealings with God, to conceal his execration behind respectful obeisance, for it is to God that he owes allegiance and from him that he derives his power over men. In short, he reproduces between God and himself the same relationship that obtains between nobility and monarch. What is a king? An elect of the elect. Significantly, the struggle for succession to the throne generally resembles a contest between equals. Feudal lords serve the monarch, but they serve him as his equals *in potentia*. By the same token, if they submit to God they do so *qua* rivals.

The dissatisfaction of the masters of old is not hard to understand. Through God, they partake of the negative pole of alienation; through those whom they oppress, they partake of its positive pole. How could they truly wish to be God, familiar as they are with the *ennui* of positive alienation? And how could they fail to want to destroy God, who tyrannises them? The 'to be or not to be' of the high and mighty always came down in the feudal period to the question, insoluble at that time, of how to negate yet preserve God — the question, in other words, of God's transcendence, God's realisation.

History records two practical attempts to achieve such a transcendence: that of the mystics and that of the great negators. Meister Eckhart: "I pray to God to deliver me from God." Similarly, the Swabian heretics claimed in 1270 that they had risen above God, and that since they had themselves attained the highest possible degree of divinity, they had abandoned God. Following another path, the negative path, such towering figures as Heliogabalus, Gilles de Rais or Erszebet Bathory were clearly trying to attain complete mastery by eliminating the intermediaries, those who alienated them positively, namely their slaves. They sought to reach the total man via total inhumanity, by following the road of perversity. But from this it may be seen that the ruler who would reign without restrictions and the slave who rebels absolutely were on the same path: they are both on that uphill and down-dale road along which Caligula and Spartacus, Gilles de Rais and Dosza Gyorgy, travel arm in arm, together yet apart. But it is not enough simply to note that the thoroughgoing revolt of slaves (and I say thoroughgoing because I am not talking about half-cocked revolts like the Christian, bourgeois or socialist ones) is akin to extreme revolts by feudal lords. The fact is that the will to abolish slaves and their descendants (proletarians,

administrators, abject and passive individuals) opens up a unique opportunity for the will to reign over the world with no restrictions save those imposed by a finally reinvented nature and by the resistance of things to their own transformation.

This opportunity is part of a historical process. History exists because the oppressed exist. The struggle against nature, and against the various forms of social organisation devised in the struggle against nature, has always ultimately been the struggle for human emancipation, for the whole man. The refusal to be a slave is the only thing that really changes the world.

What then is the goal of history? Made "under specific conditions" (Marx), by slaves and against slavery, history can have but one end: the destruction of the masters. For his part, the master can expect no surcease unless he can escape from history, rejecting it by massacring those who make it — and who make it perforce against *him*.

Let us consider the paradoxes of the situation.

(a) The most human aspect of the masters of old lay in their aspiration to absolute dominion. Such a project implied the complete blocking of history, and hence of its emancipatory tendency. In other words, it implied total inhumanity.

(b) The desire to escape history only makes one more vulnerable to it: to flee it is to break cover and expose oneself to its blows. Diehard conservatism is every bit as susceptible to the repeated assaults of real life as it is to the dialectic of the forces of production. The masters are martyrs to history. History crushes them in accordance with what, from atop the pyramid of the present, with three thousand years' worth of hindsight, gives every appearance of a *plan*, a systematic programme, a line of force which tempts one to speak of history as having a sense (the end of the world of slavery, the end of the feudal world, the end of the bourgeois world).

It is because they seek to escape history, then, that the masters are in due course filed in history's pigeonholes; they enter linear temporal development willy-nilly, precisely because of their contempt for it. By contrast, those who make history — revolutionaries, slaves drunk with the prospect of their freedom — seem to act *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the aegis of the timeless; they are drawn by an insatiable thirst for life intensely lived, and they remain faithful to this goal regardless of changing historical conditions.

Perhaps the philosophical concept of eternity is tied up with the historical quest for emancipation, destined to be realised one day — along with philosophy — by the bearers of total freedom and by the end of traditional history.

(c) The superiority of alienation's negative pole over its positive one resides in the fact that it is only from the negative starting point that thoroughgoing revolt can make the project of absolute mastery feasible. It is slaves, struggling to throw off their chains, who unleash the movement whereby history abolishes masters, and who can already glimpse, beyond history, the possibility of a new kind of power over things — a power which no longer has to appropriate beings in order to appropriate objects. Given the slow workings of history, however, it was inevitable that the masters would not disappear in an instant; instead, they slowly degenerated, until today we have no more masters, just slaves-who-consume-power, distinguishable from one another only by reference to the relative quantity of power they consume.

That the forces of production could but slowly bring about the material preconditions of total emancipation, that they had first to pass through the bourgeois stage, was unavoidable. Now that automation and cybernetics, if only they were applied in a truly human way, would allow the actualisation of the dreams of the masters of old, and the dreams of every slave, all we have left of the old system is a socially shapeless magma in which each individual is in some confused and partial way both master and slave. This reign of *equivalent values* is nevertheless destined to spawn the masters of the future: masters without slaves.

I would like at this juncture to pay homage to de Sade. His appearance at a great turning point in history and his astonishing lucidity together qualify him as the last great aristocratic rebel. Thus, in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, he gives us the masters of the Château of Selling making their bid for absolute mastery and earthly paradise by massacring all their servants. Marquis and sansculotte, de Sade couples in his person the icily logical hedonism of the evil *grand seigneur* and the revolutionary will to push the employment of subjectivity, freed at last from the shackles of hierarchy, as far as it will go. His desperate efforts to abolish alienation both positive and

negative place him in the highest rank among theoreticians of the whole man. It is high time he was read as carefully by revolutionaries as Marx. (Admittedly, our revolutionary experts' knowledge of Marx tends to be limited to what he wrote under the pseudonym of 'Stalin' — or at best as 'Lenin' and 'Trotsky'.) At all events, no one who genuinely wants to change everyday life in radical fashion can afford to ignore such great negators of Power, nor indeed any of the masters of old who felt nothing but hampered by the authority with which God had invested them.

2

BOURGEOIS POWER draws sustenance from the crumbs of feudal power. It is nothing more than bits and pieces of feudal power. The bourgeoisie's revolutionary criticism first eroded aristocratic authority, then trampled it down and smashed it to pieces, but this demolition job was never carried to its logical conclusion, namely, the abolition of hierarchical power. Instead, this authority survived the demise of the aristocracy in parodic form, like the fixed grin of a dead man. The leaders of the bourgeoisie, stiffly confined within their fragmented power, strove to make a whole out of the pieces (this is, indeed, the essence of totalitarianism), but they were fated to see their improvised prestige become ever more moth-eaten and end up in the rags and tatters of the spectacle. Once the weightiness of myth and the belief in authority were gone, the only forms of government left were burlesque terror and idiot democracy. What pretty little children Bonaparte had! Louis-Philippe, Napoleon III, Thiers, Alphonso III, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Franco, Salazar, Nasser, Mao, de Gaulle . . . so many prolific Ubus spawning ever-more talented offspring in every corner of the world. Only yesterday these gorillas could at least brandish their twigs of authority and threaten Olympian wrath; today their weedy successors are lucky if they can achieve a miserable *succès d'estime* in the public eye. There are no leading roles any more. Please do not mistake me. I am not saying that a Franco, for all his absurdity, is not lethal. I am saying, though, that the stupidity of Power is about to become a far deadlier killer than stupidity *in* power.

The brain-scrambling machine of our penal colony is the spectacle. Our master-slaves are the spectacle's faithful servants, its actors and stage-man-

agers. Who will care to judge them? We may be sure that they will plead not guilty. And indeed they are not guilty. They depend less on a cynicism of their own than on others' spontaneous admissions of guilt, less on terror than on willing victims, less on brute force than on widespread masochism. The rulers' excuse is the spinelessness of the ruled. But everyone is ruled now — manipulated like a thing by an abstract Power, by a self-sufficient organisation whose rules apply as much to the would-be rulers as to anyone else. And you cannot judge *things:* you can only prevent them from doing harm.

In October 1963, the sociologist Fourastié came to the following conclusions with regard to the leader of the future: "The leader has lost his former *magical* power; he is now, and will continue to be, someone capable of *provoking action.* Ultimately decision-making will become the responsibility of work groups. The leader will be a committee chairman, albeit one able to *come to conclusions and make decisions.*" (Emphasis mine.) Here we can see the three stages in the historical evolution of the master:

— the principle of domination, characteristic of feudal society;

— the principle of exploitation, characteristic of bourgeois society;

— the principle of organisation, characteristic of cybernetic society.

In actuality, all three principles are always in play. There is no domination without exploitation and organisation. But their relative importance varies with the period under consideration. As one stage gives way to the next, the independence of the masters and the scope of their responsibility decline. As their humanity tends towards zero, the inhumanity of disembodied power tends towards infinity.

Under the principle of domination, the master denies his slaves an existence which would limit his own. Under the principle of exploitation, the boss grants his workers that degree of existence which fattens and develops his own. The principle of organisation breaks individual existences down into fractions, classifying them according to degrees in each's capacity for leadership or administration: eg, a foreman might be described, after careful examination of his productivity, representativity, etc, as 56% leader, 40% administrator and — as Fourier might have put it — 4% ambiguous.

Domination is a right, exploitation a contract, and organisation an ordering of *things.* The tyrant dominates according to his will to power; the

capitalist exploits according to the laws of profit; the organiser programmes and is programmed. The first appeals to arbitrariness, the second to justice, the third to rationality and objectivity. The inhumanity of the lord is a humanity in search of itself. The inhumanity of the exploiter seeks to buy its way out by bribing humanity with technological progress, amenities and triumph over hunger and disease. The inhumanity of the cybernaut is an inhumanity perfectly at peace with itself. Thus the master's inhumanity has become progressively less human. Extermination camps are of a different order of atrocity from the murderous fury of feudal barons engaged in pointless wars. But the clinical hecatomb of Auschwitz still has a lyrical quality when compared with the icy grasp of that generalised conditioning which the programmers of technocratic organisation are preparing for us in a frighteningly near future. I am not saying that there is any more 'humanity' in execution by order of the King than in brainwashing techniques. As soon choose between the hangman's rope and the guillotine! No, it is simply that the dubious pleasure derived from dominating and crushing people is tending to disappear. It was capitalism that instigated a need to exploit people without getting any erotic gratification out of it. No sadism, none of the negative joy to be had from the infliction of pain, not even a *perverted* humanity: the reign of things brought to perfection. When they gave up the principle of hedonism the masters gave up mastery itself. It will be up to the masters without slaves to rectify this error.

Mechanisms set in train by production-based capitalism are now being refined by the dictatorship of consumption. The function of the principle of organisation is total mastery of dead things over people. Whatever power remained to those who possessed the instruments of production is lost as soon as control of the machines passes from the hands of their owners to the hands of technicians who organise their use. Even these organisers are destined to be ingurgitated by their own plans and systems. The simple machine will then be seen to have been the last justification for the existence of bosses, the last prop for the boss's vestigial humanity. The cybernetic organisation of production and consumption calls inevitably for the control, planning and rationalisation of everyday life.

Specialists are those truncated masters, those masters-cum-slaves, who proliferate in the sphere of everyday life. Their chances, fortunately, are nil.

As early as 1867, at the Basle Congress of the First International, Francau declared: "We have been in tow for far too long to the dukes of the diploma and the potentates of science. Let us take care of our own affairs; no matter how inept we are, we will never make such a poor job of it as these people do, in our name." Fine words of wisdom, these — and all the more apt today, as swarms of experts parasitise every aspect of individual life. A clear polarisation is occurring between those who succumb to the magnetism of the great Kafkaesque machine of cybernetics and those who follow their deepest impulses and seek to escape this machine at all costs. The second group are the sole trustees of all that is human, because there is no one left in the camp of the old masters who can make any claim to humanity. On the one hand, there is nothing left but things, all falling at the same speed into the void; on the other, nothing but the age-old project of slaves intoxicated by the prospect of total freedom.

3

THE MASTER WITHOUT SLAVES, or the aristocratic transcendence of aristocracy. The master disappears down the same hole as God. He topples like a Golem as soon as he ceases to love men, that is to say, as soon as he ceases to love the pleasure he takes in oppressing them, as soon as he abandons the principle of hedonism. There is scant pleasure to be drawn from the ordering of things, from the manipulation of beings as passive and inert as bricks and mortar. With his refined tastes, God needs living creatures; appetising, throbbing flesh; souls trembling in terror and humility. To get a sense of his own grandeur he must have subjects who are fervent in prayer, in rebellion, in subterfuge — even in blasphemy. The Catholic God is quite willing to dispense true freedom, but he dispenses it, like a pawnbroker, on loan only. He plays cat and mouse with men until the last judgement, then he gobbles them up. With the arrival of the bourgeoisie on the scene towards the end of the middle ages, this God is slowly humanised. He is humanised in a paradoxical way, however, for at the same time he becomes an object, and so do men. Calvin's God, by dooming people to predestination, abdicates his pleasure in arbitrary judgement: he is no longer free to crush whomever he wants according as the mood takes him. This God is the God of the business transaction, devoid of divine

whim, quantifiable, cold as a discount rate. So he hides his head in shame: *Deus absconditus*. Hence Pascal's despair, and Descartes's embarrassment at being left holding a soul which he does not know what to do with. Later — *too late* — Kierkegaard tries to resuscitate a subjective God by resuscitating human subjectivity. But there is nothing for it: by this time God has become the 'Great External Object' in people's minds. He is as dead as a dodo, lithified, of coral made. Meanwhile, caught in the *rigor mortis* of his dying embrace (in power's hierarchical Form), people seem doomed to reification, and everything human to annihilation. In Power's perspective there is nothing to be seen but things — chips of the divine fossil. And this is indeed the light in which the so-called human sciences of sociology, psychology and economics pursue their 'objective' researches.

What obliges the master to relinquish his hedonism? What prevents him achieving complete gratification, if not his very state of being a master, his commitment to the principle of hierarchical superiority? The scope of this renunciation of his can only widen as hierarchy is comminuted, as masters — but reduced masters — become legion, as history parcels out power in democratic doses. Thus the imperfect gratification of the masters becomes the gratification of imperfect masters. We have seen the bourgeois masters — Ubuesque plebians — consummating their beer-hall revolt in the dead march of fascism. But soon our masters-cum-slaves — the last avatar of hierarchical man — will not even have the dubious pleasure of such a *fête funèbre*. The only thing left to them will be the melancholy of things, gloomy quietude, the malaise of roles, and the awareness of *being nothing*.

What will become of these *things* that govern us? Will they have to be destroyed? Certainly — and the best-equipped to liquidate these slaves-in-power are those who have been fighting against slavery all along. Popular creativity, which neither lords nor capitalists have succeeded in smashing, will never kowtow to programmed necessities and technocratic planning. It will be objected that less passion and enthusiasm can be mobilised for the liquidation of an abstract form, a system, than for the execution of hated masters. But this is to see the problem from the wrong point of view — from the point of view of Power. For, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, the proletariat is the bearer of the end of class distinctions and of hierarchy. The bourgeoisie's role was solely negative, as Saint-Just reminds us, with fine

arrogance, when he says: "What constitutes a republic is the complete destruction of everything opposing it."

Whereas the bourgeoisie merely forges arms against the feudal system — arms which will eventually be turned against it — the proletariat carries within itself the possibility of its own transcendence. The proletariat is poetry momentarily usurped by the ruling class or by technocratic organisation, but ever on the point of bursting out of this bondage. It is the sole depository of the will to live, for it alone has experienced the intolerable pressure of mere survival in its full force. The breath of its pleasure and the spontaneous violence of its creative energy will one day break down the walls of constraint. All the joy and laughter that this art will release, the proletariat already possesses, for its strength and passion are drawn from within. It is in the process of *building* that the proletariat will, in addition, *destroy* whatever stands in its way, just as a new recording erases the previous one. The power of things will be abolished by a proletariat in the act of abolishing itself. It will be abolished by virtue of a luxurious, nonchalant afterthought, by virtue of the grace displayed by someone calmly deploying their superiority. The new proletariat will throw up masters without slaves — and not the automatons of humanism dreamt up by the masturbators of the would-be revolutionary left. The insurrectional violence of the masses is but one aspect of the proletariat's creativity: this class is just as impatient to abolish itself as it is to carry out survival's self-imposed death sentence.

I find it helpful, albeit artificial, to distinguish three predominating passions involved in the overthrow of the reified order:

— *The passion for absolute power*, a passion for placing objects directly in the service of men, without the mediation of men themselves. The destruction, in other words, of those who cleave to the order of things, of the slaves who possess crumbs of power. "Because we cannot stand the sight of them, we shall abolish slaves." (Nietzsche)

— *The passion for smashing constraints*, for breaking chains. As de Sade says: "How can lawful pleasures be compared to those which embody not only much more piquant delights but also the priceless joy of breaking all social taboos and overturning all laws?"

— *The passion for rectifying an unhappy past*, for retrieving and realising disappointed hopes, in the individual's life as much as in the history of failed

revolutions. Just as it was right to punish Louis XVI for the crimes of his predecessors, passion gives us every reason — there being no way of wreaking vengeance on things — to avenge the memory, so offensive to any free man, of executed Communards, the tortured peasants of 1525, revolutionaries hunted down and murdered, workers massacred, civilisations annihilated by colonialism, and all past oppression which the present has yet to eradicate. Evening the score has become a passionate pursuit because it has become historically possible: at last we have a chance to wash away the blood of Babeuf, Lacenaire, Ravachol or Bonnot with the blood of the obscure descendants of all those who, though themselves enslaved to an order founded on profit and economic mechanisms, managed to put cruel checks on human emancipation.

The predominant element in the pleasure to be obtained from overthrowing Power, from becoming a master without slaves, and from rectifying the past, is the subjectivity of each individual. The revolutionary movement gives everyone a chance to make his own history. The cause of free self-realisation must always embrace subjectivity — and thus cease to be a cause. Only from this starting point can we accede to those vertiginous heights where every gratification falls within the grasp of each.

✧

The destroyers of the old order of things must beware lest they bring it down upon their own heads. Unless collective protection of some kind can be devised against conditioning, the spectacle and hierarchical organisation, there is a real danger that consumer society will drag us all down with it in its collapse. Shelters must be built from which future offensives can be launched. The realisation of the project of the masters of old, divested of its hierarchical canker, will be the task of micro-societies already in gestation. The transcendence of the 'evil *grand seigneur*' will amount to a strict application of Keats's admirable principle: everything that can be abolished must be abolished, so as to save our children from slavery.

This transcendence must occur in three spheres simultaneously: (a) the transcendence of patriarchal social organisation; (b) the transcendence of hierarchical power; (c) the transcendence of subjective arbitrariness, of authoritarian whim.

(a) The magical power of the aristocracy resides in lineage, in the

authority passed on in this way from generation to generation. The bourgeoisie undermines feudal authority, but by the same token it involuntarily undermines the institution of the family, along with the organisation of society in general. This negativity of the bourgeoisie is undoubtedly its greatest virtue, its most 'positive' side. But what the bourgeoisie lacks is the possibility of transcendence. What would constitute a real transcendence of the family in the form it had under feudalism? The only possible answer is: the establishment of coherent groups in which individual creativity is totally invested in collective creativity and strengthened by it; in which an unmediated, lived *present* becomes the source of the energy potential which derived under feudalism from the *past*. The relative powerlessness of the lord imprisoned by his hierarchical system is perfectly analogous to the weakness of the child confined by the bourgeois family.

The child accedes to a subjective experience of freedom unknown to any other animal, but at the same time he remains objectively dependent on his parents; he needs their care and love. What distinguishes the young human from the young of any other species is the fact that he has an unlimited sense of transformation of the world, that is to say, a sense of *poetry*. But he is denied access to techniques which adults use for the most part to combat such poetry, eg, techniques for the conditioning of children themselves. And by the time children *are* old enough to gain access to techniques, they have been so broken in that their 'maturity' consists in the loss of everything which constituted the superiority of their childhood. The universe of the master of old bears the same stigma as the universe of the child: the techniques of liberation are out of his reach. He is condemned to dream of a *transformation* of the world while confined by the laws of *adaptation* to it. Once the bourgeoisie brings world-transforming technology to a high degree of sophistication, hierarchical organisation — arguably the best way of focusing social energy in a world where such energy is without the invaluable underpinning provided by the machine — becomes an anachronism, a brake on the development of human power over the world. Hierarchy, the power of man over man, obscures the true enemy; it prohibits the transformation of the environment and imposes the need for adaptation to that environment as it is, the need for integration into the order of things.

(b) Consequently, the destruction of the social screen which alienates

our view of the world is predicated upon the strict rejection of all hierarchy within the group. In this connection it is worth taking a look at the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Historically, the dictatorship of the proletariat has turned into dictatorship over the proletariat; in other words, it has been institutionalised. Now, as Lenin wrote, "The dictatorship of the proletariat is a relentless struggle, sometimes bloody, sometimes bloodless, sometimes violent, sometimes peaceful; a struggle military and economic, education and administrative, against the forces and traditions of the old world". It is not in the proletariat's nature to institute an enduring despotism, nor to run a willingly accepted dictatorship. The imperative need to crush the enemy nevertheless obliges it to concentrate a highly consistent repressive power in its own hands. The dictatorship of the proletariat has therefore to be a dictatorship which contains its own negation: for the party of the proletariat, as for the proletariat itself, "Victory must also mean annihilation". The proletariat must exercise its dictatorship to place its own negation immediately on the order of the day. It has no choice but to liquidate in short order — as bloodily or as bloodlessly as the circumstances decree — all those who stand in the way of its project of total liberation, all those who oppose the end of the proletariat *qua* proletariat. These enemies must be completely destroyed, treated as proliferating vermin. Furthermore, within each individual, the proletariat must erase even the most vestigial concern with status and prestige, stirring up against these tendencies — ie, against roles — a self-confident energy in search of authentic life.

(c) The end of roles means the triumph of subjectivity. Once acknowledged and given a central part, this subjectivity will give rise, paradoxically, to a new objectivity. A new world of objects — a new 'nature', if you will — will be constituted on the basis of the demands of individual subjectivity. Here again we find an analogy between the point of view of childhood and the point of view of the feudal lord. For in both instances — though in different modes — what is possible is masked by the screen of social alienation.

How can anyone forget those spaces of primitive immensity which open before the solitary child? When we were children every stick was a magic wand. Then we had to adapt, to become social and sociable. The life went out of our solitude, the child chose to grow old despite himself, and the

immensity was suddenly closed up like a storybook. In this world nobody manages to leave the murky waters of adolescence completely behind. Meanwhile, childhood itself is being slowly colonised by consumer society. The 'under-tens' are already a category on a par with teenagers in the big happy family of consumers; 'consuming' childhood instead of living it, the child grows up in record time. Between the historical decadence of the old masters and the increasing decadence of the realm of childhood the resemblance is striking. The corruption of the human element has reached its nadir. We have never been so near to, yet so far from, the whole man.

The arbitrary power of the lord and master of old is inferior to the child's capriciousness in that it odiously calls for the oppression of others. The subjectivity embodied in feudal arbitrariness — "I give you riches or I give you death, as I see fit" — is inhibited and tainted by the sterility of its expression. The master's subjectivity is in fact only actualised through the denial of the subjectivity of others, and thus it loads itself down with chains: by shackling others it shackles itself.

The child does not have the advantage of this imperfection: he loses his right to pure subjectivity in one fell swoop. He is forever being taxed with childishness and urged to behave like a grown-up. And grow up he must, repressing his childhood all his life through, just so that he can claim in his dotage, on his deathbed, that he has lived like an adult.

Child's play — like the play of nobles — needs liberating, reinstating, to be given its due once more. Today is a historically favourable moment for this. Childhood can be saved through the actualisation of the project of the old masters — childhood with its sovereign subjectivity; with its laughter, that first ripple of spontaneity; and with its way of putting the world in a light all its own, a light coming direct from the self which gives objects a strangely familiar look.

The beauty of things is lost to us; we have lost touch with their mode of existence by leaving them to die in the clutches of Power and the gods. The splendid daydream that was surrealism sought in vain to resuscitate them by means of poetic radiation: the power of imagination alone is not enough to shatter the husk of social alienation in which things are imprisoned, and, try as it may, it is unable to restore them to the free play of subjectivity. From Power's point of view, a stone, a tree, a mixer, a cyclotron are all dead

objects — so many tombstones to the will to see them otherwise, and to change them. Yet I know that, aside from what they are made to mean, these things could be full of excitement for me. I know that machines can arouse passionate enthusiasm the moment they are placed in the service of play, fantasy, freedom. In a world in which everything was alive — including stones and trees — the passively contemplated sign would not exist. Everything would speak of joy. The triumph of subjectivity is destined to restore life to things; and does not the present intolerable domination of subjectivity by dead things itself constitute at bottom our best historical chance of one day achieving a higher state of life?

How? By realising in today's language — in the language of praxis — what a heretic once said to Ruysbroeck: "God cannot know anything, will anything or do anything without me. With God I created myself, I created all things, and my hand holds up heaven, earth and all the creatures of the earth. Without me there is nothing."

✧

We must discover new frontiers. The limitations imposed by social alienation still imprison us, but at least we are no longer taken in by them. People have been standing for centuries before a worm-eaten door, making pinholes in it with increasing ease. The time has come to kick it down, for it is only on the other side that everything begins. The problem facing the proletariat is no longer the problem of how to seize power, but the problem of how to abolish Power forever. Beyond the world of hierarchy, possibilities will surge forth unbidden. The primacy of life over survival is the historical movement destined to undo history. Our true opponents have yet to be invented, and it is up to us to seek them out, to join battle with them on the far side — the infantile side — of things.

Can humanity resume a dialogue with the cosmos, a dialogue comparable to the one that the earliest inhabitants of the earth must have engaged in, yet different, this time, in that it will occur on a higher plane, on a plane whence it will be possible to look back at prehistory, a plane devoid of the trembling awe of primitive man in the face of the cosmological mystery? In other words, can the cosmos be invested with a human meaning — a highly desirable replacement for the divine meaning with which it has been

impregnated since the dawn of time?

And what of that other infinity, the actual human being, complete with body, neuronal impulses, muscular activity and errant dreams? Might not men one day become master of these too? Might not individual will, once liberated by collective will, put in the shade the astounding if sinister wonders of control already achieved over human beings by police-state conditioning techniques? If people can be made into dogs, bricks or Green Berets, who is to say that they cannot be made into people?

We have never had enough faith in our own infallibility. Perhaps out of pride, we have given a monopoly of this virtue to a collection of hypostasised, gnarled forms: Power, God, the Pope, the Führer, Other People. The fact remains that every time we refer to Society, God, or all-powerful Justice, we are referring — albeit feebly and indirectly — to our power. At least we are one stage beyond prehistory — and on the threshold of a new form of human organisation, a social organisation in which all the energy of individual creativity will have free rein, so that the world will be shaped by the dreams of each, as harmonised by all.

Utopia? Not in the least. Enough whining condescension! There is *no one* who does not cling with all his might to the hope of such a world. Many, of course, lose their grip on this hope — but they put as much desperate energy into falling as into hanging on. Everyone wants his own subjectivity to win out; the unification of men ought therefore to be founded on this shared desire. Nobody can strengthen his subjectivity without the help of others, without the help of a group which has itself become a focus of subjectivity, a faithful expression of the subjectivity of its members. So far, the Situationist International has been the only group ready to defend radical subjectivity at all costs.

Chapter twenty-two

The space-time of lived experience and the rectification of the past

The dialectic of decomposition and transcendence is also that of dissociated and unitary space-time (1). The new proletariat carries within itself the capacity for realising childhood and the space-time of childhood (2). The history of separations tends slowly towards a resolution in the 'historicising' goal of history (3). Cyclical versus linear time. Lived space-time is the space-time of transformation, whereas the space-time of roles is that of adaptation. The function of the past and its projection into the future is the outlawing of the present. Historical ideology is the screen which comes between the will to individual self-realisation and the will to make history, preventing any fraternisation or confusion between them (4). The present is a space-time yet to be created (5).

1

AS THE SPECIALISTS organise the survival of the species, and assign the programming of history to their sophisticated blueprints, the will to change life by changing the world grows ever stronger among the mass of people. The point has been reached where each specific individual finds himself face to face, just like humanity as a whole, with a general despair with no way out except annihilation or transcendence. Ours is a time in which historical and individual development tend to merge because both are headed in the same direction — towards the state of a *thing*, and the refusal of this state. The history of the species and the millions of individual histories would seem to be entering into concert, either to die or to begin *everything* afresh. In this way the past returns to us, bearing the seeds of death along with the spark of life. And our childhood too is at the rendezvous — under the threat of Lot's curse.

This threat, we must hope, will provoke an upsurge of revolt against the

ghastly aging process to which the forced feeding of ideology and useless commodities obliges the child. There is a tempting analogy to be drawn, in terms of dreams and desires, between the will of the feudal lord and the subjective wishes of the child. The realisation of the potential of childhood must surely imply the realisation of the old masters' project — a project which is thus destined to be carried through by us, adults of the technocratic era, rich in what children lack, strong precisely where the greatest conquerors were weakest. We are the ones to whom it will fall to combine collective history and individual destiny in ways surpassing the wildest dreams of a Tamerlane or a Heliogabalus.

The primacy of life over survival is the historical movement which will undo history. The construction of everyday life and the realisation of history are henceforward one and the same project. In what will the joint construction of a new life and a new society consist? What will be the nature of the revolution of everyday life? Simply this: transcendence will replace decay, as the consciousness of the reality of decay feeds the consciousness of the necessity for transcendence.

No matter how far back in history, all previous attempts at transcendence are part and parcel of the present reversal of perspective. They play a part in it directly, without mediation, leaping over the barriers of space and time — and, indeed, breaking these barriers down. Without a doubt, the end of separations begins with the end of one particular separation — that between space and time. And, as we have seen, the restitution of this primordial unity presupposes the critical analysis of childhood's space-time, of the space-time of unitary societies and of the fragmentary societies which embody the dialectic of decomposition and the long-awaited possibility of transcendence.

2

IF CARE IS NOT TAKEN, survival sickness can soon turn a young person into a haggard old Faust, burdened down with regrets and yearning for a youth through which he passes without so much as realising it. The teenager bears the first wrinkles of the consumer. Little distinguishes him from a sixty-year-old. He consumes faster and faster, and the more he gives in to inauthenticity, the sooner he is rewarded with a precocious entry into old

age. If he is slow to get a grip on himself, the past will close up behind him: he will have no further chance to return to what he has done, even for the purpose of redoing it. So much separates him from the children he played with only yesterday. He has entered the trivial domain of the market, willingly giving up the poetry, freedom and subjective riches of childhood in exchange for an image in spectacular society. And yet, if only he and his like would pull themselves up short and fight their way out of this nightmare, the forces of order would be faced with a truly redoubtable opponent. An opponent capable, in defence of his childhood, of turning the most fearsome weapons of technocracy against their doting inventors. We have not forgotten the extraordinary prowess displayed by the young Simbas of Lumumba's revolution, the primitiveness of their arms notwithstanding; how much more may we expect from a generation every bit as enraged, but armed much more efficiently and loosed upon a battleground extending to every corner of daily life!

For, in a sense, every sphere of everyday life is experienced embryonically in childhood. The child packs such a horde of events into a few days or even a few hours that his time does not trickle away like an adult's. Two months vacation is an eternity for him. For an old man two months is a fleeting moment. The child's days escape adult time — they are time swollen by subjectivity, by passion, by dreams inhabited by reality. Outside this universe the educators wait patiently, watch in hand, for the child to join in the round dance of adult time. It is they who *have time.* At first the child experiences adults' imposition of their kind of time on him as an intrusion; but eventually he capitulates, and consents to grow old. Innocent of the ways of conditioning, he falls like some young animal into the snare. Later on, when he is possessed of the arms of criticism and eager to turn them against the time in which he is imprisoned, the years will have carried him too far from his target. But his childhood will remain within him like an open wound.

So here we all are, haunted by a childhood which social organisation seeks by scientific means to destroy. The psycho-sociologists are on the lookout, while the market researchers are already exclaiming, "Look at all those little dollars!" (Vance Packard). A new decimal system.

Children are playing in the street. One of them suddenly leaves the

group, comes up to me and tells me some of the most beautiful dreams I have ever heard. He teaches me something which had I but known it would have saved me, namely, the thing that destroys the notion of age, the capacity for living a multitude of events — not just watching them flow by, but truly living and constantly recreating them. And now that I find myself at a point where all this is beyond my grasp, yet where all has become clear to me, is it any wonder that an untamed instinct for wholeness erupts in me from beneath so many strata of false desires — a type of childishness whose subversive force is demonstrated by all the lessons of history and of the class struggle? Who, if not the new proletariat, is to be entrusted with the task of realising childhood in the adult world?

We are the discoverers of a world both new and well known, a world lacking only unity of time and space. A world still shot through with separations, still fragmented. The semi-barbarity of our bodies, our needs, and our spontaneity — that is, our childhood, as refined by consciousness — give us secret access to places never discovered by centuries of aristocratic rule, and never so much as dreamt of by the bourgeoisie. In this way we are able to enter the maze of unfinished civilisations and approach all the embryonic attempts at transcendence surreptitiously conceived by history. Our desire to retrieve childhood rejoins the childhood of our desires. From the wild depths of the past which is still close to us, and in a sense still unfulfilled, emerges a new topography of the passions.

3

BEING MOTION within immobility, the time of unitary societies is cyclical. As they follow their course, beings and things move around the circumference of the circle whose centre is God. This God-pivot, unchanging yet at once nowhere and everywhere, is the measure of the duration of an eternal power. He is his own standard, and the standard of all things, which gravitate equidistantly around him, evolving, progressing or regressing, but never completely expending themselves and never in fact escaping from their orbit. "*La treizième revient, c'est encore la première*" (Nerval).

As for the *space* of unitary systems, its organisation is determined by time. Since there is no time but God's, no space seems to exist aside from that which God controls. This space extends from the centre to the circumfer-

ence, from heaven to earth, from the one to the many. At first sight, time seems irrelevant here: it takes one neither closer to God nor further from him. On the contrary, the way to God appears to be spatial in character: the upward paths of spiritual elevation and hierarchical promotion. Time belongs to God and God alone, whereas the space granted men acquires a specifically human and irreducible quality. Men can ascend or descend, rise or fall in the social world, guarantee their salvation or risk damnation. Space means the presence of man: it is the dimension of relative freedom; time imprisons him within its circle. And what is the meaning of the Last Judgement, if not the idea that God will one day gather time in to himself once more, the centre sucking in the circumference and concentrating the entirety of the space imparted to his creatures into this impalpable point? This desire to obliterate the materiality of the human (ie, human occupation of space) is clearly the project of a master incapable of completely possessing his slave, and hence incapable of not being partly possessed by him.

Duration has space on a leash; it drags us towards death, eroding the space which is our life. In the course of history, however, this distinction is not always so clearly apparent. Feudal societies are societies of separations, just as bourgeois societies are, for separation is the corollary of privative appropriation. But feudalism's advantage here lies in its immense ability to mystify.

Myth has the power to bridge separations and make a unitary life possible. Such a life is inauthentic, it is true, but at least this inauthenticity is One, and unanimously accepted by a coherent community (tribe, clan, kingdom). God is the image or symbol of the transcendence of dissociated space and time. Everyone who 'lives' in God partakes of this transcendence. The majority take part in a mediated way. They conform, in other words, within the confines of their everyday life, to the exigencies of a duly hierarchical space extending upwards from mere mortals to priests, to chiefs, to God. As a reward for such submission they receive the gift of eternal life, duration without space, pure temporality in God.

There are those, however, who cared little for this arrangement. Instead, they dreamed of an eternal present conferred by an absolute mastery of the world. One is constantly struck by the analogy between the crystalline space-time of children and the great mystics' yearning for unity. Thus

Gregory of Palamas described 'illumination' as a sort of insubstantial consciousness of unity (1381): "The light exists outside space and time . . . He who partakes of divine energy becomes in a sense Light himself; he becomes one with Light, and, like Light, he is fully aware of everything that remains obscure to those who have not received such grace."

This confused aspiration, which was bound to remain unclear if not inexpressible, has been popularised and clarified thanks to the transient bourgeois era. The bourgeoisie made this aspiration concrete by administering the *coup de grâce* to the aristocracy and its spiritualism, and it made it realistic by virtue of its own thorough-going decomposition. The history of separations comes slowly to an end with the end of separations themselves. The feudal unitary illusion gradually becomes embodied in the libertarian unity of a life freely constructed, in a world lying beyond the world of materially guaranteed survival.

4

EINSTEIN'S SPECULATIONS about space and time are in their own way a reminder of the death of God. Once myth no longer papered over the crack between space and time, consciousness fell heir to a malaise which gave rise to the heyday of Romanticism (the pull of the exotic, nostalgic feelings about the passage of time, etc).

What is time, to the bourgeois mind? No longer God's time, it has become Power's — and fragmentary Power's at that. A triturated time whose unit of measurement is the instant — that instant which is a feeble echo of cyclical time. No longer the circumference of a circle, but rather a finite and infinite straight line. No longer a mechanism synchronising each individual with God's time, but rather a sequence of states in which everyone chases after themselves, but in vain, as though the curse of Becoming somehow damned us to see nothing but our own backs, the human face remaining unknown, inaccessible, ever in the future. No longer a circular space encompassed by the eye of the Almighty lying at its centre, but rather a series of tiny points which, though seemingly independent, actually become an integral part, according to a specific order of succession, of the line they form as one follows the other.

In the Middle Ages time *flowed* — though it was always the same sand

that passed back and forth between the two bulbs of the hourglass. As represented on the circular clock face, by contrast, time is dispensed unit by unit, and never returns. Such is the irony of forms: the new mentality took its form from a dead reality, and when the bourgeoisie gave a cyclical appearance to everything — from wrist-watches to its half-baked humanist yearnings — what it was really dressing up in this way was the death of time, the death of its own time.

There is nothing for it, however: ours is the time of the watchmaker. Economic imperatives turn people into walking chronometers, with the mark of what they are around their wrists. This is the temporality of work, progress, productivity, production deadlines, consumption and planning. The spectacle's time: time for a kiss, snapshot time. A proper time for everything and everything in its proper time. Time is money. Commodity-time. Survival time.

Space is a point on the line of time, a place in the machine for changing future into past. Time controls lived space, but it does so from without, by causing it to pass, by making it transitory. The space of the individual life is not a pure space, however, nor is the time that sweeps it along a pure temporality. Let us examine the situation a little more closely.

Each terminal point on the temporal line is specific and unique, yet no sooner is the next point added than its predecessor disappears into the line's uniformity, mere grist to the mill of a past which draws no distinctions. It becomes quite indiscernible. Thus each point serves to extend the very line which will annihilate it.

This pattern of constant destruction and replacement is Power's way of enduring; but at the same time people who are encouraged to consume power destroy it and renew it by enduring. For if Power destroys everything it destroys itself, and if it destroys nothing it is destroyed. Power can only endure strung out between the two poles of this contradiction, a contradiction which the dictatorship of consumption aggravates day by day. Power's ability to last depends simply on the continuing existence of people, that is to say, on their permanent *survival*. This is why the problem of dissociated space-time is posed today in revolutionary terms.

No matter that lived space is a universe of dreams, desires and prodigious creative impulses: in terms of duration, it is merely one point following

another, and its emergence is governed by one principle only, that of its own annihilation. It appears, evolves and disappears into the anonymous line of the past, where its remains become raw material for flashes of memory and historical research.

The positive aspect of points of lived space is the fact that they may escape in part from generalised conditioning; on the debit side, they have no autonomous existence. The space of daily life manages to divert a little time to its own uses, capturing and appropriating it. But by the same token time-which-slips-away insinuates itself into lived space and turns the sense of passing time, the sense of destruction and death, inwards.

The crystalline space of daily life steals a portion of 'external' time, and thanks to this creates a small area of unitary space-time for itself. This is the space-time of the privileged moment, of creativity, of pleasure, of orgasm. The arena of this alchemy is minute, but it is experienced so intensely that it exercises an unrivalled fascination over most people. From Power's point of view, from the outside, such passionate moments are completely insignificant points, mere instants drained off from the future by the past. The line of objective time knows nothing — and wishes to know nothing — of the present as immediate subjective presence. As for subjective life, imprisoned within mere points — joy, gratification, reverie — it would rather know nothing of time-which-slips-away, linear time, the time of things. On the contrary, it seeks full knowledge of its present, for, after all, it is only a present.

Lived space, then, filches a small portion of the time that sweeps it on and makes a present out of it — or at least it seeks to do so, for the present is everywhere still to be constructed. It seeks to create the unitary space-time of love, of poetry, of pleasure, of communication: direct experience without dead time. Meanwhile linear time — objective time, time-which-slips-away — invades the space that has fallen to daily life in the shape of negative time, dead time, the expression of the temporality of destruction. This is the time of *roles*, that time within life itself which encourages disembodiment, the repudiation of authentically experienced space, the repression of that space and its replacement by appearances, by the spectacular function. The space-time produced by this hybrid union is, quite simply, that of survival.

What is private life? It is the amalgamation within one instant, within one point on its way to annihilation along the line of survival, of a real space-time (the moment) and a false one (the role). Of course, the actual structure of private life does not conform strictly to this dichotomy, for interaction goes on all the time. Thus the prohibitions which hem daily life in from all sides, confining it to far too small a space, seek to transform it into roles, into commodities under the reign of the time-which-slips-away, to make it espouse pure repetition, and create, as accelerated time, the illusory space of appearances. In the meanwhile, however, the malaise produced by inauthenticity, by space experienced falsely, stimulates the search for a real time, for the time of subjectivity, for the present. So, in dialectical terms, private life is: *a real lived space + an illusory spectacular time + an illusory spectacular space + a real lived time.*

The more illusory time conspires with the illusory space that it creates, the closer we come to being things, to being pure exchange value. The more the space of authentic life conspires with authentically lived time, the more human mastery asserts itself. Space-time lived in unitary fashion is the first *foco* of the coming guerrilla war, the spark of the qualitative in the night that still shrouds the revolution of daily life.

Objective time does not only set out, therefore, to destroy crystalline space by thrusting it into the past, it also gnaws at it from within by attempting to impose on it that accelerated rhythm which creates the role's density (the illusory space of roles is produced by the rapid repetition of an attitude, rather as the repetition of an image on film creates the illusion of life). The role invests subjective consciousness with the time-which-slips-away, the time of aging, of death. Here we have Artaud's "rut into which consciousness has been forced". Dominated from without by linear time, from within by the temporality of the role, subjectivity has no option but to become a thing, a prized commodity. History speeds this process up, moreover. In fact roles are now the consumption of time in a society where the official time is that of consumption. And here too the single-mindedness of oppression will bring about an equally single-minded opposition. What is death in our time? The absence of subjectivity, the absence of any present.

The will to live always reacts in unitary fashion. Most people have already learnt how to subvert time to the advantage of lived space. If only their

efforts to increase the intensity of lived experience, to expand authentic space-time, did not come to grief and confusion, or break up on the reefs of isolation, who can say that objective time, the time of death, might not be smashed forever. After all, is not the revolutionary moment a fountain of eternal youth?

✧

The project of enriching the space-time of direct experience presupposes a correct evaluation of the causes of its impoverishment. Linear time has no hold over people except in so far as it prohibits them from changing the world and so forces them to adapt to it. Freely radiating creativity is Power's public enemy number one. And creativity's strength lies in the unitary. How does Power attempt to smash the unity of lived space-time? By transforming lived experience into a commodity, launching it on the spectacular market, and abandoning it to the vicissitudes of supply and demand in the realm of roles and stereotypes (as discussed above in chapter fifteen). Further, by recourse to a particular kind of identification: the combined attraction of past and future annihilates the present. Lastly, by trying to co-opt the will to build a unitary space-time of lived experience (ie, to construct situations to be lived) and incorporate it into an ideology of history. Let us now examine these two tactics.

✧

From Power's viewpoint there is no such thing as lived moments (lived experience has no name): there is merely a sequence of interchangeable instants constituting the line of the past. A whole system of conditioning has been developed to mass-market this view of things, and all kinds of hidden persuasions help us internalise it. The results are not hard to see. Where has the present gone? Can it be skulking in some dark corner of daily existence? Hardly. The fact is that it has been obliterated.

All we have are things to look back on and things to look forward to, memory and anticipation. Meetings past and meetings future: two ghosts that haunt us. Each passing second merely conveys me from the instant that has just been to the instant next to come. Each second spirits me away from myself; no *now* ever materialises. Empty commotion serves admirably to give everyone a fleeting quality, to pass the time (as we say so accurately), and even to make time pass right through people — in one side and out

the other. Schopenhauer's "Before Kant we were in time; since Kant time is in us" is a fine way of evoking the fact that consciousness is now informed by the temporality of growing old and decrepit. But it did not occur to Schopenhauer that what drove him as a philosopher to develop a mysticism of despair was precisely humanity's torment on the rack of a time reduced to an apparent disjunction between future and past.

A desperate vertigo is indeed the inevitable lot of someone torn between two instants, which he must forever pursue in zigzag fashion without ever reaching either — and without ever taking charge of himself. If only passionate expectation were involved here: you are under the spell of a past moment — a moment of love, for instance; the woman you love is about to reappear, you are sure of it, you already feel her kisses . . . such passionate expectation is in effect the prefigurement of the situation to be constructed. But most of the time, alas, the whirligig of memory and anticipation inhibits both the expectation and the experience of the present by sweeping it along in the millrace of dead time, a sequence of hollow instants.

For Power the future is simply a past reiterated. A dose of known inauthenticity is projected by an act of anticipatory imagination into a time which it fills in advance with its utter vacuity. Our only memories are memories of roles once played, our only future a timeless remake. Human memory is supposed to answer to no requirement save Power's need to assert itself temporally by constantly reminding us of its presence. And this reminder takes the form: *nihil nove sub sole* — which being interpreted means "you always have to have leaders".

The future they try to sell me as 'different time' is the perfect complement to the different space they try to sell me in which to let it all hang out. They are always telling us to change time, change skins, change fashions or change roles: alienation, it seems, is the only constant. Whenever 'I am another', that other is condemned to hover between past and future. And roles *never* have a present. No wonder they can supply no comfort, much less health: if a person can create no present — in the role, *here* is always elsewhere — how in the world can he expect to look back on a pleasant past or forward to a pleasant future?

✧

Power's crowning achievement, in its attempt to trap people into identification with such a past-future, lies in its resort to historical ideology, which makes the individual and collective will to control history walk on it its head.

Time is a form of mental perception, clearly not a human invention so much as a dialectical relationship with external reality; a relationship therefore, dependent upon alienation, and upon humanity's struggle within and against alienation.

Animals, being entirely subject to the demands of adaptation, have no consciousness of time. Humans, however, refuse adaptation and attempt to change the world. Whenever they fail in this ambition to be a demiurge, they suffer the agony of having to adapt, the agony of knowing themselves reduced to animal-like passivity. Consciousness of the necessity for adaptation is also consciousness of time slipping by, which is why time is so intimately bound up with human suffering. The more necessity for adaptation to circumstances overrides the desire and capacity for changing it, the tighter becomes the stranglehold of the consciousness of time. Survival sickness is simply an acute consciousness of the evanescence of alienated time and space, the consciousness of alienation. The rejection of the consciousness of growing old, along with the objective conditions of the senescence of consciousness, means that the will to make history has to be expressed more vigorously, more cogently, and more in accordance with the dictates of everyone's subjectivity.

An ideology of history has one purpose only: to prevent people from making history. What better way could there be to distract people from their present than to draw them into that sphere where times slips away? This task falls to the historian. He organises the past, divides it up according to time's official line, and then assigns events to *ad hoc* categories. These easy-to-use categories put past events into quarantine. Solid parentheses isolate and contain them, preventing them from coming to life, from rising from the dead and running once more through the streets of our daily lives. The event is, so to speak, deep-frozen. It becomes illegal to retrieve it, remake it, complete it or attempt its transcendence. It is merely *there*, preserved forever in suspended animation, where the aesthetes can contemplate it at their ease. All it takes is a slight change of emphasis for this same

past event to be transported into the future. The future is historians repeating themselves. The future historians foretell is a collage of memories — of *their* memories. The much vaunted notion of the meaning of history has been so vulgarised by Stalinist thinkers that it has ended up stripping the future as well as the past of all humanity.

Prodded into identifying with another time and another personality, today's individual has let himself be robbed of his present in the name of historicism. His taste for authentic life has been lost in a spectacular space-time: "Comrades, you are entering upon the stage of History!" Moreover, those who *reject* the heroism of historical commitment are beset by a complementary mystification in the psychological realm. History and psychology work hand in hand; the two categories fuse in the indigence of co-optation. The choice is between History and a nice quiet life.

Historic or not, all roles are in decay. The crisis of history and the crisis of daily life are no longer distinct. An explosive mixture. The task now is to subvert history to subjective ends — and this with the participation of all humanity. Marx, be it said, never wished for anything less.

5

FOR THE BEST PART of a century the important movements in painting have been playing games, even joking, with space. Nothing was better equipped than artistic creativity to express the restless and impassioned search for a new lived space. And what better means than humour for venting the feeling that art could no longer provide much of a solution? (I am thinking of the early Impressionists, the Pointillists, the Fauvists, the Cubists, Dadaist collages and the first abstract painters.)

A malaise first felt by artists has, with the decay of art, come to affect the awareness of an ever-growing number of people. The construction of an art of life is now a widescale demand. Meanwhile there is a whole artistic past, the fruits of whose researches have been thrown carelessly aside: the time has come to concretise these discoveries in the context of an intensely experienced space-time.

The memories to which I am referring are memories of mortal wounds. Things left unfinished rot. The past is mistakenly treated as irremediable. Ironically, the very people who would have us believe in the past as definitive

spend all their time breaking it down, falsifying it and dolling it up according to the latest fashion. They are rather like poor Winston, in Orwell's *1984*, rewriting old official news items which have been contradicted by later developments.

There is only one valid way to forget: to wipe out the past by realising it. Decay averted by transcendence. No matter how far back in time, the facts of the past have never spoken their last. A radical change in the present can always topple them from the museum shelf and bring them live within our grasp. There exists no more poignant (nor, to my mind, more exemplary) testimony to the way the past may be rectified than that offered by Victor Serge in *Conquered City:* at the close of a lecture on the Paris Commune given at the height of the Bolshevik Revolution, a soldier rises ponderously from a leather armchair at the back of the room.

> In low tones, but tones of authority, he was clearly heard to say, "Tell us the story of Millière's execution".
>
> Erect, a giant of a man, his head bowed so that all you could see of his face was his hairy jowls, sullen mouth and uneven, wrinkled brow — he put one in mind of Beethoven's death mask — he listened to the account of how Dr Millière, in a dark blue overcoat and top hat, was dragged through the streets of Paris, forced to kneel on the steps of the Pantheon, crying "Long live humanity!" — and the retort of the Versaillese sentry leaning on a railing a few paces away: "Fuck your humanity, and fuck you!"
>
> In the dark night of the unlit street outside the meeting hall, the burly peasant approached the lecturer . . . . He clearly had a confidence to share, for his momentary hesitation was laden with import.
>
> "I was also in the Perm government, last year when the kulaks rebelled . . . . I had just read Arnould's pamphlet, *Les morts de la Commune*— a fine pamphlet. So Millière was in my thoughts. And listen, Citizen, I avenged him myself! That was a wonderful day in my life — and there haven't been many, I can tell you. I avenged Millière perfectly. It was on the steps of the church that I shot the fattest capitalist of the place without compunction. I can't remember his name now, and I couldn't care less."
>
> After a brief pause he added: "But this time it was me who shouted 'Long live humanity!'"

Past revolts take on a new dimension in my present, the dimension of an immanent reality crying out to be brought into being. The walks of the

Jardins du Luxembourg and the Square de la Tour St Jacques still resound with gunfire and the cries of the Commune suppressed. There will be more gunfire, though, and more heaps of corpses. One day the revolutionaries of all time will be joined by the revolutionaries of the world and together they will cleanse the Mur des Fédérés with the blood of the executioners.

To construct the present is to rectify the past, to change the psychogeography of our surroundings, to hew our unfulfilled dreams and wishes out of the veinstone that imprisons them, to let individual passions find harmonious collective expression. The time gap which separates the insurgents of 1525 from the Mulelist rebels, Spartacus from Pancho Villa, or Lucretius from Lautréamont, can be bridged only by my will to live.

Waiting for joyous tomorrows is what kills our joys today. The future is worse than the ocean itself, for it contains *nothing*. Blueprints, plans, the long-term view: castles in the air. A solidly constructed present is the only necessity — the rest will take care of itself.

Only the quick of the present, its multiplicity, is of interest to me. Despite all the strictures on it, I want to bathe in today as in a great light; to reduce other times and other's space to the immediacy of daily experience. I want to concretise Schwester Katrei's mystical formula: "Everything that is in me is in me; everything that is in me is outside me; everything that is in me is all around me; everything that is in me is mine, and nowhere can I see anything that is not in me." For this is no more than subjectivity's rightful triumph, a triumph which history has now put within our grasp. We have merely to tear down the Bastilles of the future, restructure the past and live each second as though an eternal return ensured its recurrence forever in an endless cycle.

Only the present can aspire to totality. It is a point of incredible density. We have to learn to slow time down, to live immediate experience as permanent passion. A tennis champion recalls how during a very tense match, when he had a very difficult and critical return to make, he suddenly saw everything in slow motion; he thus had plenty of time to weigh up the situation, judge distances and make a brilliant return shot. The fact is that in the zone of true creation time dilates. In the realm of inauthenticity, by contrast, it accelerates. Whoever masters the poetics of the present may expect adventures comparable to that of the little Chinese boy who fell in

love with the Queen of the Seas. He went searching for her in the depths of the ocean. When he returned to terra firma he came upon an old man pruning roses who said to him: "It is a strange thing, but my grandfather told me of a little boy lost at sea who had just the same name as you."

"All time resides in the moment", according to the Esoteric tradition. Passed through history's developing tray, a statement in the *Pistis Sophia* — "One day of light is a thousand years in the history of the world" — translates word for word into Lenin's assertion that there are days of revolution that are worth centuries.

The task is always to resolve the contradictions of the present, never to stop halfway or let oneself be 'distracted', but to head directly towards transcendence. This task is collective, passionate, poetic and playful (eternity is the world of play, according to Boehme). No matter how poor, the present always contains true wealth, the wealth of possible creation. This is the uninterrupted poem that can fill me with joy. But you all know — for you all live — everything that keeps it out of my grasp.

But can I let myself be sucked into the whirlpool of dead time, agree to grow old, to wear out slowly till nothing is left of my body and mind? Better to die in a way that defies duration. Citizen Anquetil, in his *Précis de l'Histoire Universelle*, published in Paris in Year VII of the Republic, tells the story of a Persian prince who was so offended by the world's vanity that he withdrew to a castle along with forty of the most beautiful and literate courtesans of the kingdom. There he died a month later from the effects of debauchery. What is death compared to such an infinity? If I must die, at least let me die as I have occasionally loved.

Chapter twenty-three

The unitary triad: self-realisation, communication, participation

The repressive unity of Power is three-fold: constraint, seduction and mediation are its three functions. This unity is merely the reflection of an equally tripartite, unitary project, its form inverted and perverted by the techniques of dissociation. In its chaotic, underground development, the new society tends to find practical expression as a transparency in human relationships which promotes the participation of everyone in the self-realisation of everyone else. Creativity, love and play are to life what the needs for nourishment and shelter are to survival (1). The project of self-realisation is grounded in the passion to create (2); the project of communication is grounded in the passion of love (4); the project of participation is grounded in the passion for play (6). Wherever these three projects are separated, Power's repressive unity is reinforced. Radical subjectivity is the pressure — discernible in practically everyone at the present time — of an indivisible will to build a passion-filled life (3). The erotic is the spontaneous coherence which gives practical unity to attempts to enrich lived experience (5).

1

THE CONSTRUCTION of daily life implies the most thorough-going fusion of reason and passion. The mystery with which life has always been deliberately surrounded has as its main function the concealment of survival's basic triviality. The will to live entails the demand for some measure of organisation. The attraction which the promise of a rich, multi-dimensional life has for each individual inevitably takes the form of a project governed in whole as in part by the very social power whose job it is to repress such desires. The oppression exercised by human government is essentially three-fold: constraint, alienating mediation and magical seduction. The will to live also draws its vitality and its coherence from the unity of a three-fold project: self-realisation, communication and participation.

If human history was neither reduced to, nor dissociated from, the history of human survival, the dialectic of this three-fold project, in conjunction with the dialectic of the productive forces, would prove sufficient explanation for most things human beings have done to themselves and to one another. Every riot, every revolution, reveals a passionate quest for exuberant life, for total clarity in human relations, for a collective form of transformation of the world. In fact three fundamental passions seem to inform historical development, passions that are to life as the needs for nourishment and shelter are to survival. The desire to create, the desire to love and the desire to play interact with the need to eat and the need to find shelter, just as the will to live never ceases to play havoc with the necessity of surviving. Naturally these factors have no significance outside their historical context, but the history of their dissociation is precisely what must be challenged by a continual invocation of their unity.

Today, with the welfare state, the question of survival tends to be subsumed under the problem of life as a whole, as I hope to have shown. Life-economy has gradually absorbed survival-economy, and in this context the dissociation of the three projects, and of the passions underlying them, emerges ever more clearly as an extension of the aberrant distinction between life and survival. Since the whole of existence is torn between two perspectives — that of separation, of Power, and that of revolution, of unity — and is therefore essentially ambiguous, I shall discuss each project at once separately and unitarily.

✧

The project of self-realisation is born of the passion for creation, in the moment when subjectivity wells up and aspires to reign universally. The project of communication is born of the passion of love, whenever people discover that they share the same desire for amorous conquest. The project of participation is born of the passion for playing, whenever group activity facilitates the self-realisation of each individual.

Isolated, the three passions are perverted. Dissociated, the three projects are falsified. The will to self-realisation is turned into the will to power; sacrificed to status and role-playing, it reigns in a world of restrictions and illusions. The will to communication becomes objective dishonesty; based on relationships between objects, it provides the semiologists with signs to

dress up in human guise. The will to participation serves to organise the loneliness of everyone in the crowd; it creates the tyranny of the illusion of community.

Once cut off from the others, any of these passions may be incorporated as an absolute into a metaphysical vision which renders it inaccessible. Our philosophers will have their little joke: first they turn off the main switch, then they say the power has failed. Thus full self-realisation becomes a chimera, unobfuscated communication becomes a pipe dream, and the idea of social harmony becomes a passing fad. True enough, so long as separation is the order of the day, everyone is confronted by impossibilities. The Cartesian mania for cutting everything up into little pieces, and for succeeding only one step at a time, necessarily produces an incomplete and crippled reality. No wonder that the armies of Order must be recruited from the ranks of the halt and the lame.

2 The project of self-realisation

The guarantee of material security leaves unused a large supply of energy formerly expended in the struggle for survival. The will to power tries to recuperate this free-floating energy, which should serve the blossoming of individual life, for the reinforcement of hierarchical slavery (a). Universal oppression forces almost everyone to withdraw strategically towards what they feel to be their only uncontaminated possession: their subjectivity. The revolution of everyday life must create practical forms for the countless attacks on the outside world launched daily by subjectivity (b).

(a) The historical stage of privative appropriation has prevented man from himself

becoming a creator God, obliging him instead to create such a God in ideal form in order to compensate for this failure. At heart, everyone wants to be God, but up to now this desire has been turned against humanity itself. I have shown how hierarchical social organisation builds the world up by breaking men down; how the perfection of its structure and machinery makes it function like a giant computer whose programmers are also programmed; how the cybernetic State being prepared for us will be the masterwork of men become the most cold-hearted of monsters.

In these conditions, the struggle for enough to eat, for comfort, for stable

employment and for security are, on the social front, so many aggressive raids which are slowly but surely becoming rearguard actions, their very real importance notwithstanding. The struggle for survival took up and still takes up an energy and creativity which are destined to fall on the welfare state like a pack of ravening wolves. Despite false conflicts and illusory activities, a constantly simulated creative energy is no longer being absorbed fast enough by consumer society. What will happen to this vitality suddenly at a loose end, to this surplus virility which neither coercion nor lies can really continue to handle? No longer recuperated by artistic and cultural consumption — by the ideological spectacle — creativity will turn spontaneously against the conditions of survival itself.

Rebels have nothing to lose but their survival. But there are two ways of losing it: by giving up life or by seeking to construct it. Since survival is simply to die very slowly, there is a temptation, containing a very great deal of genuine feeling, to speed the whole thing up and to die as fast as possible. To 'live' the negation of survival negatively. On the other hand, one can try and survive as an anti-survivor, focusing all one's energy on the enrichment of daily life. Survival can be negated through incorporation into joyous constructive activity. Both solutions further the unitary yet contradictory tendency of the dialectic of decomposition and transcendence.

Self-realisation cannot be divorced from transcendence. No matter how ferocious, the rebellion of desperation remains prisoner to the authoritarian dilemma: survival or death. This half rebellion, this savage creativity, so easily broken in by the order of *things* is the will to power.

✧

The will to power is the project of self-realisation falsified — divorced from communication and participation. It is the passion for creation, for self-creation, caught up in the hierarchical system, condemned to turn the mill of repression and appearances. Prestige and humiliation, authority and submission: the only music to which the will to power can dance. The hero sacrifices to the power of his role and his rifle. And when, finally, he is burnt out, he follows Voltaire's advice and cultivates his garden. Meantime his mediocrity becomes a model for the common run of mortals.

The hero, the ruler, the superstar, the millionaire, the expert . . . how often have they sold out all they held most dear? How many sacrifices have

they made to force people, whether a few people or a few million, whom they necessarily take for fools (otherwise they themselves would be fools!) to put their photograph on the wall, to remember their name, to stare at them in the street.

And yet the will to power does contain traces of an authentic will to live. Think of the *virtù* of the *condottiere*, of the exuberance of the giants of the Renaissance. But the *condottieri* are dead and buried. All we have left are industrial magnates, gangsters and hired guns, dealers in art and artillery. For an adventurer, we are given Tintin; for an explorer, Albert Schweitzer. And with these people Zarathustra dreamt of peopling the heights of Sils-Maria; in these abortions he thought he could see the adumbration of a future race! Nietzsche is, in fact, the last master, crucified by his own illusions. His death was a replay, with more brio and more wit, of the comedy of Golgotha. It explains the disappearance of the feudal lords just as Christ's death explained the disappearance of God. Nietzsche may have had a refined sensibility but the stench of Christianity did not stop him breathing it in by the lungful. And he pretends not to understand that Christianity, however much contempt it may have poured on the will to power, is in fact its best means of protection, its most faithful bodyguard, since it stands in the way of the emergence of masters without slaves. Nietzsche thus blessed a hierarchical world in which the will to live condemns itself never to be more than the will to power. His last letters were signed 'Dionysus the Crucified': he too was looking for a master, to whom he might humbly offer a crippled vitality. Meddling with the witch doctor of Bethlehem is a dangerous business.

Nazism is Nietzschean logic called to order by history. The question was: what can become of those who would be masters in a society from which all true masters have disappeared? And the answer: a super-slave. Even Nietzsche's concept of the superman, however threadbare it may have been, is worlds away from what we know of the flunkeys who ran the Third Reich. Fascism knows only one superman: the State.

The State as superman is the strength of the weak. This is why the demands of an isolated individual can always fit in with a role played impeccably in the official spectacle. The will to power is an exhibitionistic will. The isolated individual detests other people, feels contempt for the

masses of which he is a perfect specimen himself. He is, in fact, the most contemptible man of all. Showing off, amidst the crassest sort of illusory community, is his 'dynamism'; the rat-race is the perfect arena for him to display his 'love of danger'.

The manager, the leader, the tough guy, the mobster knows little joy. Ability to endure is his main qualification. His ethic is that of the pioneer, the spy, the scout — the shock-troops of conformity. "No animal would have done what I have done . . ." A will to *appear* since one cannot *be:* a way of escaping the emptiness of one's own existence by proclaiming one's existence ever more noisily. But only servants are proud of their sacrifices. The sovereignty of things is absolute here: now the artificiality of the role, now the 'authenticity' of an animal. Only animals can do what a human being would refuse to do. The heroes who march past, colours flying — the Red Army, the SS, the French *paras* — are the same people who burnt and cut living flesh in Budapest, Warsaw, Algiers. The discipline of armies has no other content than the canine savagery of the new recruit; the only thing a cop learns is when to snarl and when to fawn.

The will to power is a compensation for slavery. At the same time it is a hatred of slavery. The great men of the past never identified themselves with a Cause. They just used Causes to further their own personal hunger for power. But as great Causes began to break up and disappear, so did the ambitious individuals concerned. However, the game goes on. People rely on Causes because they haven't been able to make their own life a Cause sufficient unto itself. Through the Cause and the sacrifice it entails they stagger along, backwards, in search of their own will to live.

Sometimes desire for freedom and for play breaks out among law and order's conscripts. Think of Salvatore Giuliano, before he was co-opted by the landowners, of Billy the Kid, of various gangsters momentarily close to the anarchist terrorists. Legionnaires and mercenaries have defected to the side of the Algerian or Congolese rebels, thus choosing the party of open insurrection and taking their desire to play to its logical conclusion: the breaking of all taboos and the aspiration to complete freedom.

Teenage gangs also come to mind. The very childishness of their will to power has often kept their will to live almost uncontaminated. Obviously, the delinquent is always liable to be co-opted. First, as consumer, because

he wants things he cannot afford to buy; then as he gets older, as a producer. But, within the gang, playing remains of such great importance that a real revolutionary consciousness is always a possible outcome. If the violence of teenage gangs were not squandered in exhibitionistic and generally half-baked rumbles, and aspired instead to the real poetry which is to be found in a riot, then this game-playing could easily set off a chain reaction: a qualitative flash. Almost everyone is sick of the lies they are fed all day long. All that is needed is a spark — plus tactics. Should delinquents arrive at revolutionary consciousness simply through understanding what they already are, and by wanting to be more, they could quite conceivably become the catalyst of a widescale reversal of perspective. The federation of such gangs would amount to a first manifestation of that consciousness, and a precondition of its existence.

(b) So far the centre has never been man. Creativity has always been pushed to one side, suburbanised. Indeed, the history of cities is a very accurate reflection of the vicissitudes of the axis around which life has been organised for thousands of years. The first cities grew up around a stronghold or sacred spot, a temple or a church, a point where heaven and earth converged. Industrial towns, with their mean, dark streets, are focussed on a factory or industrial plant; administrative centres preside over empty rectilinear avenues. Finally, the most recent examples of city planning simply have no centre at all. It is increasingly obvious that the reference point they propose is *always somewhere else*. These are labyrinths in which you are allowed only to lose yourself. No games. No meetings. No living. A desert of plate-glass. A grid of roads. High-rise flats. Oppression is no longer centralised because oppression is everywhere. The positive aspect of this: everyone begins to see, in conditions of almost total isolation, that first and foremost it is they themselves that they have to save, they themselves that they have to choose as the centre, their own subjectivity out of which they have to build a world in which people can feel at home anywhere.

The only way of retrieving everyone's truth, the true roots of the social, is to retrieve a clear consciousness of oneself. As long as individual creativity is not the centre of social life, man's only freedom will be freedom to destroy and be destroyed. If you do other people's thinking for them, they will do

your thinking for you. And he who thinks for you judges you; he reduces you to his own norm; and, whatever his intentions may be, he will end by making you stupid — for stupidity doesn't come from a lack of intelligence, as stupid people imagine, it comes from renouncing, from abandoning one's true self. So if anyone asks you what you're doing, asks you to explain yourself, treat him as a judge — that is to say, as an enemy.

"I want someone to succeed me; I want children; I want disciples; I want a father; I don't want myself." A few words from those high on Christianity, whether the Roman or the Peking brand. Only unhappiness and neurosis can follow. My subjectivity is too important for me to take my lack of inhibition to the point of either asking other people for their help or of refusing it when it is offered. The point is neither to lose oneself in oneself nor to lose oneself in other people. People who realise that they depend ultimately on society must still first of all find themselves, else they will find nothing in others save the negation of themselves.

Strengthening the subjective centre is no easy matter — it is even hard to talk about. In the heart of each human being there is a hidden room, a *camera obscura*, to which only the mind and dreams can find the door. A magic circle in which the world and the self are reconciled, where every childish wish comes true. The passions flower there, brilliant, poisonous blossoms wide open to the mood of the moment. I create a universe for myself and, like some fantastic tyrannical god, people it with beings who will never live for anyone else. One of my favourite James Thurber stories is the one where Walter Mitty dreams that he is a swashbuckling captain, then an eminent surgeon, then a cold-blooded killer, and finally a war hero. All this as he drives his old Buick downtown to buy some dog biscuits.

The real importance of subjectivity can easily be measured by the general embarrassment with which it is approached. Everyone wants to pass it off as their mind 'wandering', as 'introversion', as 'being stoned'. Everyone censors their own daydreams. But isn't it the phantoms and visions of the mind that have dealt the most deadly blows to morality, authority, language and our collective hypnotic sleep? Isn't a fertile imagination the source of all creativity, the alembic distilling the quick of life: the bridgehead driven into the old world across which the coming invasions will pour?

Anyone who can be open-minded about their interior life will begin to

see a different world outside themselves: values change, things lose their glamour and become plain instruments. In the magic of the imaginary, things exist only to be picked up and toyed with, caressed, broken apart and put together again in any way one sees fit. Once the prime importance of subjectivity is accepted the spell things cast upon us is broken. Starting from other people, one's self-pursuit is fruitless; one repeats the same futile gestures time after time. Starting from oneself, on the contrary, gestures are not repeated but taken back into oneself, corrected and realised in an ideal way.

Our innermost dreams secrete an energy that demands nothing better than to drive the turbines of circumstance. The high technology of today bars the road to Utopia, and by the same token it suppresses the purely magical aspect of the dream. But all our dreams will come true when the modern world's technical know-how is placed at their disposal.

Even now — even without any help from technology — can subjectivity ever be really far from the mark? It is by no means impossible for me to give objective form to everything I have ever dreamt of being. Surely everyone, at least once in their life, has been a little like a Lassailly or a Nechaev: Lassailly, passing himself off at first as the author of a book he had never written, ended up as a true writer, as the author of the *Roueries de Trialph;* Nechaev, who began by cheating money out of Bakunin in the name of a non-existent terrorist organisation, would later become the guiding light of an authentic group of nihilists. One day I must be as I have wanted to seem; the particular spectacular role I have so long aspired to will surely become genuine. Thus subjectivity subverts roles and spectacular lies to its own ends: it reinvests appearance in reality.

Subjective imagination is not purely mental: it is always seeking its practical realisation. There can be no doubt that the artistic spectacle — and above all its narrative forms — plays on subjectivity's quest for self-realisation, but solely by captivating it, by making it function in terms of passive identification. Debord's propaganda film *Critique de la séparation* stresses the point: "As a rule the things that happen to us in our individul lives as organised at present, the things which really succeed in catching our attention and soliciting our involvement, are the very things that ought to leave us cold and distant spectators. By contrast many a situation glimpsed

through the lens of any old piece of artistic transposition is the very one that should attract us, and engage our participation. This paradox must be turned upside down — put back on its feet." The forces of the artistic spectacle must be dissolved so that their equipment can pass into the arsenal of individual dreams. Once they are thus armed, there will be no question of treating them as fantasies. This is the only way in which the problem of the realisation of art can be framed.

3 Radical subjectivity

Each subjectivity is unique, but all obey the same will to self-realisation. The problem is one of setting their variety in a common direction, of creating a united front of subjectivity. Any attempt to build a new society is subject to two conditions: first, that the realisation of each individual subjectivity will either take place in a collective form or it will not take place at all; and second that, "To tell the truth, the only reason anyone fights is for what they love. Fighting for everyone else is only the consequence" (Saint-Just).

MY SUBJECTIVITY feeds on events. The most varied events: a riot, a sexual fiasco, a meeting, a memory, a rotten tooth. The shock waves of reality in the making reverberate through the caverns of subjectivity. I am caught up in these oscillations whether I like it or not, and, though not everything affects me with equal force, I am always faced with the same paradox: no sooner do I become aware of the alchemy worked by my imagination upon reality than I see that reality reclaimed and borne away by the uncontrollable river of things. A bridge has to be built between the work of the imagination and the objective world. Only radical theory can confer on the individual inalienable rights over his surroundings and circumstances. Radical theory grasps the individual at the roots — and the roots of the individual lie in his subjectivity, in that soil which he possesses in common with all other individuals.

You can't make it on your own. But can any individual — any individual who has got anything at all straight about himself and the world — fail to see a will identical to his own in everyone he knows: the same search, the same starting points?

All forms of hierarchical power differ from one another, yet all perform

identical oppressive functions. Similarly, all subjectivities are different, but all contain an identical desire for complete self-realisation. This is the sense in which we speak of 'radical subjectivity'.

Each individual subjectivity is rooted in the will to realise oneself by transforming the world, the will to live every sensation, every experience, every possibility to the full. It can be seen in everyone, its intensity varying according to the degree of consciousness and determination. Its real power depends on the level of collective unity it can attain without losing its variety. Consciousness of this necessary unity comes from what one could call a *reflex of identity* — a diametrically opposite movement to that of identification. Through identification we lose our uniqueness in the multiplicity of roles; through the reflex of identity we strengthen the wealth of our individual possibilities in the unity of federated subjectivities.

Radical subjectivity is founded on the reflex of identity, on the individual's constant quest for himself *in others*. "While I was on a mission in the state of Tchou," says Confucius, "I saw some piglets sucking on their dead mother. After a short while they shuddered and went away. They had sensed that she could no longer see them and that *she was not like them any more*. What they loved in their mother was not her body, but whatever it was that made her body live." Likewise, what I look for in other people is the richest part of myself hidden within them. Is the reflex of identity bound to spread? Not necessarily. But present-day historical conditions certainly favour such a development.

No one is questioning the interest people take in being fed, sheltered, cared for, protected from hardship and disaster. The imperfections of technology — transformed at a very early date into social imperfections — have postponed the satisfaction of these universal desires. Today, however, a planned economy allows us to foresee the final solution of the problems of survival. Now that the needs of survival are well on the way to being satisfied, at least in the hyper-industrialised countries, it is becoming painfully obvious that there are also human passions which must be satisfied, that the satisfaction of these passions is of vital importance to everyone and, furthermore, that failure to satisfy them will undermine, if not destroy, all our acquisitions in the realm of material survival. As the problems of survival are slowly but surely resolved, they clash more and

more brutally with the problems of life, which, just as slowly and just as surely, are sacrificed to the needs of survival. In a way, this simplifies matters: it is now obvious that socialist-type planning is incompatible with the true harmonisation of life in common.

✧

Radical subjectivity is the common front of identity rediscovered. Those who cannot see themselves in other people are condemned for ever to be strangers to themselves. I can do nothing for other people if they can do nothing for themselves. This is the context in which we should re-examine such words as 'knowledge', 'recognition', 'sympathy' and 'supporter'.

Knowledge is only of value if it leads to the recognition of a common project — to the reflex of identity. True self-realisation calls for a good deal of knowledge of various kinds but much knowledge is worthless if it is not placed in the service of self-realisation. As the first years of the Situationist International have shown, the main enemies of a coherent revolutionary group are those closest to that group in knowledge and furthest away from it in their lived experience and the sense they give it. In the same way 'supporters' who identify with the group become an obstacle in its path. They understand everything except what is really at stake. They demand knowledge because they are incapable of demanding their own self-realisation.

By grasping myself, I break other people's hold over me, and thus let them see themselves in me. No one can develop in freedom without spreading freedom in the world.

"I want to be myself. I want to walk without impediment. I want to affirm myself alone in my freedom. May everyone do likewise. The fate of revolution need not concern us: it will be safer in the hands of everyone than in the hands of parties." So said Coeurderoy. I agree one hundred per cent. Nothing gives me the right to speak in the name of other people. I am my own delegate. Yet at the same time I can't help thinking that my life is not of concern to me alone, but that I serve the interests of thousands of other people by living the way I live, and by struggling to live more intensely and more freely. My friends and I are one, and we know it. Each of us is acting for each other by acting for himself. Such transparency is the only way to true participation.

4 The project of communication

Love offers the purest glimpse of true communication that any of us have had. But as communication in general tends to break down love becomes increasingly precarious. Everything tends to reduce lovers to objects. No real encounters, just mechanical sex — the posturing of countless playboys and bunnies. True love is revolutionary praxis or it is nothing.

ALTHOUGH THE three passions underlying the three-fold project of self-realisation, communication and participation are equally important, they are not equally repressed. While creativity and play have been blighted by prohibitions and by every sort of distortion, love, without escaping from repression, still remains relatively the freest and most easily accessible experience. The most democratic, so to speak.

Love offers the model of perfect communication: the orgasm, the total fusion of two separate beings. It is a transformed universe glimpsed from the shadows of everyday survival. Its intensity, its here-and-nowness, its physical exaltation, its emotional fluidity, its eager acceptance of precariousness, of change: everything indicates that love will prove the key factor in recreating the world. Our emotionally dead survival cries out for multidimensional passions. Lovemaking sums up and distils both the desire for, and the reality of, such a life. The universe lovers build of dreams and of one another's bodies is a transparent universe; lovers want to be at home everywhere.

Love has been able to stay free more successfully than the other passions. Creativity and play have always 'benefited' from an official representation, a spectacular acknowledgement which alienates them, as it were, at source. Love has always been clandestine — 'being alone together'. It was lucky enough to be protected by the bourgeois concept of private life: banished from the day (reserved for work and consumption), it found refuge in the night's shadows, lit only by the moon. Thus it partly escaped the mopping-up operations to which daytime activities were subjected. The same cannot be said for communication. And now the ashes of false daytime communication are threatening to stifle even this spark of nocturnal passion. Consumer society is extending falsification further and further into the reaches of the night, where the simplest gestures of love are contaminated by its logic.

People who talk about 'communication' when there are only things and their mechanical relations are working on the side of the process of reification that they pretend to attack. 'Understanding', 'friendship', 'being happy together' — what can these words mean when all I can see is exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled, actors and spectators. And all of them flailed like chaff by Power.

Things are not necessarily expressionless. Anything can become human if someone infuses it with his own subjectivity. But in a world ruled by privative appropriation, the object's only function is to justify its proprietor. If my subjectivity overflows, if my eyes make the landscape their own, it can only be ideally, without material or legal consequences. In the perspective of power, people and things are not there for my enjoyment, but to serve a master; nothing really *is*, everything is a function of an order based on property.

There cannot be any real communication in a world where almost everything one does is ruled by fetishes. The space between people and things is packed with alienating mediations. And as power becomes increasingly abstract its own signals become so numerous, so chaotic, as to demand systematic interpretation on the part of a body of scribes, semanticists, and mythologists. Trained to see only objects around him, the proprietor needs objective — and objectified — servants. Such are the communications experts, organising lies for masters of dead people. Only subjective truth, buttressed by historical conditions, can resist their machinations. The only way to counter the deeper thrusts of oppression is by taking immediate experience as Base One.

✧

The main pleasure of the bourgeoisie seems to have been to degrade pleasure in all its forms. Not content with imprisoning people's freedom to love in the squalid *ownership* of marriage (whence it can always be wheeled out for the purposes of adultery . . .), not content with setting things up so that deception and jealousy were bound to follow, this class has finally succeeded in separating lovers at the most basic level, within the physical act of love itself.

Love's despair doesn't come from sexual frustration. It comes from

suddenly losing contact with the person in your arms; of both of you suddenly seeing one another as objects. Swedish social democracy, as everyone knows, has already marketed a form of manipulated and hygienic sex under the brand name of 'free love'.

But in the end the disgust aroused by this world of inauthenticity revives an insatiable desire for human contact. Love, it seems at times, is our only break. Sometimes I think that nothing else is as real, nothing else is as human, as the feel of a woman's body, the softness of her skin, the warmth of her cunt. That even if this is all there is, it opens the door to a totality that even eternal life could not exhaust . . .

And then, even during really magical moments, the inert mass of objects suddenly becomes magnetic. The passivity of a lover unravels the bonds which were being woven; the dialogue is interrupted before it is really begun. Love's dialectic freezes. Two statues are left lying side by side. Two objects.

Although love is always born of subjectivity — a woman is beautiful because I love her — my desire cannot stop itself objectifying what it wants. Desire always makes an object of the loved person. But if I let my desire transform the loved person into an object, have I not condemned myself to conflict with this object and, through force of habit, to become detached from it?

What can ensure perfect communication between lovers? The union of these opposites:

— the more I detach myself from the object of my desire and the more objective strength I give to my desire, the more carefree my desire becomes towards its object;

— the more I detach myself from my desire, insofar as it is an object, and the more objective strength I give to the object of my desire, the more my desire finds its *raison d'être* in the loved person.

Socially, this interplay of attitudes can be expressed by changing partners at the same time as one is attached more or less permanently to a 'pivotal' partner. All these encounters would imply the communication of a single formulation endorsed by both partners. I have always wanted to be able to say: "I know you don't love me because you only love yourself. I am just the same. So love me."

Love can only be based on radical subjectivity. The time is up for all

Christian, self-sacrificial and militant forms of love. To love only oneself through other people, to be loved by others through the love they owe themselves. This is what the passion of love teaches, and what the conditions of authentic communication require.

✧

And love is also an adventure — a search for a Northwest Passage out of inauthenticity. To approach someone in any spectacular, exhibitionistic way is to condemn oneself to a reified relationship from the very first. The choice is between spectacular seduction — that of the playboy — and seduction by the qualitative, by a person who is seductive because he is not trying to seduce.

De Sade describes two possible attitudes. On the one hand, the libertines of *The 120 Days of Sodom* who can only really enjoy themselves by torturing to death the object they have seduced (and what more fitting homage to a *thing* than to make it suffer). On the other hand, the libertines of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, warm and playful, who do all they can to increase one another's pleasure. The former are the masters of old, vibrant with hatred and revolt; the latter are masters without slaves, discovering in one another only the reflection of their own pleasure.

Present-day seduction is sadistic in that the seducer refuses to forgive the desired person for being an object. Truly seductive people, on the contrary, contain the fullness of desire in themselves; they refuse to play roles and owe their seductiveness to this refusal. In de Sade this would be Dolmancé, Eugénie or Madame de Saint-Ange. This plenitude can only exist for the desired person, however, if he recognises his own will to live in the person who embodies it. Real seductiveness seduces solely by its honesty; which is why it is not given to all who wish it. This is what Schweidnitz's *Béguines* and their thirteenth century companions meant by saying that resistance to sexual advances was the sign of a crass spirit. The Brethren of the Free Spirit expressed the same idea. "Anyone who knows the God inhabiting him carries his own Heaven within himself. By the same token, ignorance of one's own divinity really is a mortal sin. This is the meaning of the Hell which one carries with oneself in earthly life."

Hell is the emptiness left by separation, the anguish of lovers lying side

by side without being together. Non-communication is always like the collapse of a revolutionary movement. The will to death reigns wherever the will to live has been defeated.

✧

Love must be freed from its myths, from its images, from its spectacular categories; its authenticity must be strengthened and its spontaneity renewed. There is no other way of fighting its reification and its recuperation in the spectacle. Love cannot survive either isolation or fragmentation; it is bound to overflow into the will to transform the whole of human activity, into the necessity of building a world where lovers feel themselves to be everywhere free.

The birth and the dissolution of the moment of love are bound up with the dialectic of memory and desire. During the *inception* of this moment, the present desire and the memory of the earliest satisfied desires (involving no resistance on the part of the parent) tend to reinforce one another. In the *moment* itself, memory and desire coincide: the moment of love is a space-time of authentic lived experience, a present embracing both the memory of the past and the taut bow of desire aimed at the future. At the stage of *breaking-up*, memory prolongs the impassioned moment but desire gradually ebbs away. The present disintegrates, memory turns nostalgically towards past happiness, while desire foresees the unhappiness to come. With *dissolution* the separation becomes real. The failure of the recent past cannot be forgotten, and memory eventually quells desire.

In love, as in every attempt to communicate, the problem is avoiding the stage of breaking up. One could suggest:

— developing the moment of love as far as one can, in as many directions as possible; in other words, refusing to dissociate it from either creativity or play, promoting it from the rank of a moment to that of the real construction of a situation;

— encouraging collective experiments in individual self-realisation; multiplying the possibilities of sexual attraction by bringing together a great variety of possible partners;

— permanently strengthening the pleasure-principle, which is the life-blood of every attempt to realise oneself, to communicate or to participate.

Pleasure is the principle of unification; love is desire for unity in a common *moment;* friendship, desire for unity in a common *project.*

5 The erotic or the dialectic of pleasure

There is no pleasure that does not seek its own coherence. Its interruption, its lack of satisfaction, causes a disturbance analogous to Reichian 'stasis'. Oppression by Power keeps human beings in a state of permanent crisis. Thus the function of pleasure, as of the anxiety born of its absence, is essentially a social function. The erotic is the development of the passions as they become unitary, a game of unity and variety without which revolutionary coherence cannot exist ("Boredom is always counter-revolutionary" — Internati•nale Situati•nniste, *no. 3).*

WILHELM REICH ATTRIBUTES most neurotic behaviour to disturbances of the orgasm, to what he called 'orgastic impotence'. He maintains that anxiety is created by inability to experience a complete orgasm, by a sexual discharge which fails to liquidate all the excitation mobilised by preliminary sexual activity. The accumulated and unspent energy becomes free-floating and is converted into anxiety. Anxiety in its turn still further impedes future orgastic potency.

But the problem of tensions and their liquidation does not exist solely on the level of sexuality. It characterises all human relationships. And Reich, although he sensed that this was so, failed to emphasise strongly enough that the present social crisis is also a crisis of an orgastic kind. If it is true that "the energy source of neurosis lies in the disparity between the accumulation and the discharge of sexual energy", it seems to me that such neurotic energy also derives from the disparity between the accumulation and the discharge of the energy set in motion by human relationships. Total enjoyment is still possible in the moment of love, but as soon as one tries to prolong this moment, to extend it into social life itself, one cannot avoid what Reich called 'stasis'. The world of dissatisfaction and non-consummation is a world of permanent crisis. What would a society without neurosis be like? An endless banquet, with pleasure as the only guide.

✧

"Everything is feminine in what one loves", wrote La Mettrie. "The empire of love recognises no other frontiers than those of pleasure." But

pleasure in general recognises no frontiers. Pleasure which does not increase evaporates. Repetition kills it, nor can it abide the fragmentary. The pleasure-principle is inseparable from the totality.

The erotic is pleasure seeking its own coherence. The movement of the passions towards intercommunication, interdependence and unity. Towards the re-creation in social life as a whole of the perfect pleasure experienced in the moment of love. And towards the establishment of the preconditions for playing with the one and the many, that is to say, for the individual's free and transparent participation in the quest for fulfilment.

Freud defines the goal of Eros as unification or the search for union. But when he maintains that fear of being separated and expelled from the group comes from an underlying fear of castration, he has things the wrong way round: fear of castration comes from the fear of being excluded. This anxiety becomes more marked as the isolation of individuals in an illusory community becomes more and more difficult to ignore.

Even while it seeks unification, Eros is essentially narcissistic and in love with itself. It wants a world to love as much as it loves itself. Norman O. Brown, in *Life Against Death*, points out the contradiction. How, he asks, can a narcissistic orientation lead to union with beings in the world? "In love, the abstract antimony of the Ego and the Other can be transcended if we return to the concrete reality of pleasure, to a definition of sexuality as being essentially a pleasurable activity of the body, and if we see love as the relationship between the Ego and the sources of pleasure." To be more exact, the source of pleasure lies less in the body than in the possibility of free activity in the world. The concrete reality of pleasure is based on the freedom to unite oneself with anyone who allows one to become united with oneself. The realisation of pleasure passes via pleasure of realisation, the pleasure of communication via the communication of pleasure, participation in pleasure via the pleasure of participation. This explains why narcissism turned towards the outside world, the narcissism Brown is talking about, can only lead to a wholesale demolition of social structures.

The more intense pleasure becomes, the more it demands the whole world. "Lovers, give one another greater and greater pleasure", said Breton. A truly revolutionary slogan.

Western civilisation is a civilisation of work and, as Diogenes observed,

"Love is the occupation of the unoccupied". With the gradual disappearance of forced labour, love is destined to retrieve all the ground it has lost. This naturally poses a direct threat to every kind of authority. Because the erotic is unitary, it implies the freedom of multiplicity. Freedom knows no propaganda more effective than people calmly enjoying the pleasures of the senses. Which is why pleasure, for the most part, is forced to be clandestine, love is locked away in a bedroom, creativity is confined to the backstairs of culture, and why alcohol and drugs cower under the shadow of the outstretched arm of the law.

The ethic of survival condemns the diversity of pleasures and their union-in-variety the better to promote obsessive repetition. But if pleasure-anxiety is satisfied by the repetitive, true pleasure can only occur thanks to diversity-in-unity. Clearly the simplest model of the erotic is the pivotal couple. Two people live their experiences as transparently and as freely as possible. This radiant complicity has all the charm of incest. Their wealth of common experiences can only lead to a brother-and-sister relationship. Great loves have always had something incestuous about them, a fact which suggests that love between brothers and sisters was privileged from the very first, and that it should be encouraged in every way. It is high time that this ancient and silly taboo was broken, and a process of 'sororisation' set in train: I would like to have a wife-cum-sister, all of whose friends were also my wives and sisters.

In the erotic realm there is no perversion apart from the negation of pleasure — its distortion into pleasure-anxiety. What matters the spring so long as the water runs? As the Chinese say: immobile in one another, we are borne along by pleasure.

Finally, the search for pleasure ensures the survival of the principle of play. It ensures real participation, protecting it against self-sacrifice, coercion and lies. The actual degree of intensity pleasure reaches is the measure of subjectivity's grasp on the world. Thus caprice the play of desire *in statu nascendi*; desire, the play of passion *in statu nascendi*. And the play of passion finds its coherent expression in the poetry of revolution.

Does this mean that the search for pleasure is incompatible with pain? Not at all — but pain has to be given a new meaning. Pleasure-anxiety is neither pleasure nor pain; it is just scratching yourself and letting the itch

get worse and worse. What is real pain? A setback in the play of desire or passion; a positive pain crying out with a corresponding degree of passion for another pleasure to construct.

6 The project of participation

A society based on organised survival can tolerate only false, spectacular forms of play. But with the crisis of the spectacle, playfulness, which had been hounded almost out of existence, tends to re-emerge on all sides. It is now taking the form of social upheaval and already adumbrates, over and above this negative aspect, the future society based on true participation. The praxis of play implies the refusal of leaders, of sacrifice, of roles, freedom for everyone to realise himself, and transparency in all social relationships (a). Tactics are the polemical stage of play. Individual creativity needs an organisation concentrating and strengthening it. Tactics entail a certain kind of hedonistic foresight. The point of every action, no matter how circumscribed, must be the total destruction of the enemy. Industrial societies have to evolve their own adequate forms of guerilla warfare (b). Subversion is the only possible revolutionary use of the spiritual and material values distributed by consumer society: the ultimate weapon of transcendence (c).

(a) Economic necessity and play don't mix. Financial transactions are deadly serious: you do not fool around with money. The elements of play contained within the feudal economy were gradually squeezed out by the rationality of money exchange. Playing with exchange meant bartering products without worrying too much about strictly standardised equivalents. But as soon as capitalism forced its commercial relationships on the world, all such caprice was forbidden; and today's dictatorship of the commodity shows clearly that this system intends to enforce these relationships everywhere, at every level of life.

The pastoral relationships of country life in the high Middle Ages tempered the purely economic necessities of feudalism with a sort of freedom; play often took the upper hand even in the corvée, in the dispensing of justice, in the settling of debts. By throwing the whole of everyday life onto the battlefield of production and consumption, capitalism crushes the urge to play while at the same time trying to harness it as a source of profit. So, over the last few decades, we have seen the attraction

of the unknown turned into mass tourism, adventure turned into scientific expeditions, the great game of war turned into operational strategy, and the taste for change turned into mere changes in taste.

Contemporary society has banned all real play. Play has become something for children only. (And even children are getting more and more pacifying, gadget-type toys rammed down their throats.) The adult is only allowed falsified and co-opted forms of play: competitions, TV games, elections, casino gambling . . . . Yet it is obvious that this kind of rubbish can never satisfy something as strong as people's desire to play — especially today, when play *could* flourish as never before in history.

The sacred order knew how to cope with the profane and iconoclastic game, witness the irreverent and obscene carvings to be found in cathedrals. Without muting them, the Church was able to embrace cynical laughter, biting fantasy and nihilistic scorn. Under its mantel, the demoniac game was safe. Bourgeois power, on the other hand, had to put play in quarantine, isolate it in a special ward, as though afraid that it might infect other human activities. This privileged and despised area set apart from commerce constituted the domain of artistic activity. And so things remained until economic imperialism reached even this sphere and redeveloped it into a cultural supermarket.

It was in fact from art — from the zone where it had survived longest — that the urge to play broke through the strata of prohibitions which had come to overlay it: this eruption was called Dada. "The Dadaist event awoke the primitive-irrational play instinct which had been held down in its audience", said Hugo Ball. Once embarked on the fatal path of pranks and scandals, art was bound to bring down with it, in its fall, the whole edifice which the Spirit of Seriousness had built to the greater glory of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, play in our time has donned the robe of insurrection. Henceforward, the total game and the revolution of everyday life are one.

The desire to play returns to destroy the hierarchical society which banished it. It becomes the motor of a new type of society based on real participation. It is impossible to foresee the details of such a society — a society in which play will be completely unrestricted — but we may expect to find the following:

— rejection of all leaders and all hierarchies;
— rejection of self-sacrifice;
— rejection of roles;
— freedom of genuine self-realisation;
— transparent social relationships.

✧

All true play involves rules and playing with rules. Watch children at play. They know the rules of the game, they can remember them perfectly well, but they are always breaking them, always dreaming up new ways of getting round them. But cheating, for children, does not have the connotations it does for adults. Cheating is part of the game, they play at cheating, accomplices even in their disputes. What they are really doing is spurring themselves on to create new games. And sometimes they are successful: a new game is found and unfolds. They revitalise their playfulness without interrupting its flow.

Play comes to an end as soon as an authority crystallises, becomes absolute and assumes a magical aura. Even so, playfulness, however lighthearted, always involves a certain spirit of organisation and the discipline this implies. If a play leader proves necessary, his power of decision is never wielded at the expense of the autonomous power of each individual. Rather it is the focus of each individual will, the collective counterpart of each particular desire. So the project of participation demands a coherent organisation allowing the decisions of each individual to be the decision of everyone concerned. Obviously, small intimate groups, micro-societies, offer the best conditions for such experiments. Within them, the game can be the sole arbiter of the intricacies of communal life, harmonising individual whims, desires and passions. This is especially true where the game in question is an insurrectionary one imposed upon a group by its wish to live outside the official world.

The urge to play is incompatible with self-sacrifice. You can lose, pay the forfeit, submit to the rules, be given a bad time; but this is the logic of the game, not the logic of a Cause, not the logic of self-sacrifice. Once the idea of sacrifice appears the game becomes sacred and its rules become rites. In true play, the rules come packaged with ways of getting round them, of playing with them. In the realm of the sacred, by contrast, rituals cannot

be played with, they can only be broken, can only be transgressed (let us not forget that pissing on the altar is still a way of paying homage to the Church). Only play can deconsecrate, open up the possibilities of total freedom. This is the principle of subversion, the freedom to change the sense of everything which serves Power: the freedom, for example, to turn Chartres Cathedral into a funfair, into a labyrinth, into a shooting-range, into a dream landscape . . .

In a group revolving around play, boring and domestic chores might be allotted as penalties — as the price paid, say, for losing a point in a game. Or, more simply, they could be used to fill unoccupied time, as a sort of active rest: having the value of a stimulant and making the resumption of play more exciting. The construction of such situations can only be based on the dialectic of presence and absence, richness and poverty, pleasure and pain, the intensity of each pole accentuating the intensity of the other.

In any case, any technique applied in an atmosphere of sacrifice and coercion loses much of its cutting edge. Its actual effectiveness is mixed up with a purely repressive purpose, and the repression of creativity reduces the effectiveness of the oppressive apparatus. Ludic attraction is the only possible basis for a non-alienated labour, for truly productive work.

Within the game, the playing of roles inevitably involves playing *with* roles. The spectacular role demands complete conviction; a ludic role, on the contrary, demands a certain distanciation. One has to watch oneself over one's shoulder, just as professional actors like to joke *sotto voce* between dramatic tirades. Spectacular organisation is completely out of its depth with this sort of thing. The Marx Brothers demonstrated what a role can become if you play with it, and this despite the cinema's ultimately recuperative function — which gives some idea of what would happen if people started playing with real-life roles.

When someone begins to play a permanent role, a serious role, he either wrecks the game or it wrecks him. Consider the unhappy case of the provocateur. The provocateur is an expert in collective games. He has mastered their techniques but not their dialectic. At times he is able to give expression to the group's offensive tendencies — the provocateur always urges immediate offensive action — but in the end he is always betrayed by the demands of his role and mission, which prevent him from incarnating

the group's need for defence. This contradiction is what seals his invariable fate. And who makes the best provocateur? The play leader who turns into a leader *tout court*.

The urge to play is the only possible basis for a community whose interests are identical with those of the individual. The traitor, unlike the provocateur, appears quite spontaneously in revolutionary groups. When does he appear? Whenever the spirit of play has died in a group, and with it, inevitably, the possibility of real participation. The traitor is one who cannot express himself through the sort of participation he is offered and decides to 'play' against this participation: not to correct but to destroy it. Treachery is the senile disease of revolutionary groups. And the betrayal of the principle of play is the prime treachery, the one which justifies all the others.

Inasmuch as it embodies the consciousness of radical subjectivity, the project of participation enhances the transparency of human relationships. The game of insurrection is part and parcel of the project of communication.

(b) *Tactics*. Tactics are the polemical stage of play. They provide the necessary continuity between poetry *in statu nascendi* (play) and the organisation of spontaneity (poetry). Essentially technical in nature, they prevent spontaneity burning itself out in the general confusion. We know how cruelly absent tactics have been from most popular uprisings. And we also know just how offhand historians can be about spontaneous revolutions. No serious study, no methodical analysis, nothing remotely comparable to Clausewitz's book on war. Revolutionaries have ignored Makhno's battles almost as thoroughly as bourgeois generals have studied Napoleon's.

In the absence of a more detailed analysis, a few remarks are in order.

An efficiently hierarchised army can win a war, but not a revolution; an undisciplined mob can win neither. The problem then is how to organise, without creating a hierarchy; in other words, how to make sure that the leader of the game does not become just 'the Leader'. The only safeguard against authority and rigidity setting in is a playful attitude. Creativity plus a machine gun is an unstoppable combination. Villa's and Makhno's troops routed the most hardened professional soldiers of their day. But once

playfulness rigidifies, the battle is lost. The revolution fails so that its leader can be infallible. Why was Villa defeated at Celaya? Because he fell back on old tactical and strategic games, instead of making up new ones. Technically, Villa was carried away by memories of Ciudad Juarez, where his men had fallen on the enemy from the rear by silently cutting their way through the walls of house after house. He failed to see the importance of the military advances of World War I: machine-gun nests, mortars, trenches, etc. Politically, a certain narrow-mindedness prevented him from seeing the importance of gaining the support of the industrial proletariat. It is significant that Obregón's army, which defeated Villa's *Dorados*, included both workers' militias and German military advisers.

The strength of revolutionary armies lies in their creativity. Frequently, the first days of an insurrection are a walk-over simply because nobody pays the slightest attention to the enemy's rules: because a new game is invented and because everyone takes part in its elaboration. But if this creativity flags, if it becomes repetitive, if the revolutionary army becomes a regular army, then blind devotion and hysteria try in vain to make up for military weakness. Infatuation with past victories breeds terrible defeats. The magic of the Cause and the Leader replaces the conscious unity of the will to live and the will to conquer. In 1525, having held the princes at bay for two years, some forty thousand peasants, for whom tactics had been replaced by religious fanaticism, were hacked to pieces at Frankenhaussen; the feudal army lost only three men. In 1964, at Stanleyville, hundreds of Mulelists, convinced they were invincible, allowed themselves to be massacred by throwing themselves onto a bridge defended by two machine-guns. Yet these were the same men who had previously captured trucks and arms from the National Congolese Army by pitting the road with elephant traps.

Hierarchical organisation and complete lack of discipline are both inefficient. In classical warfare, the inefficiency of one side triumphs over the inefficiency of its adversary through technical superiority. In revolutionary war, the poetic force of the rebels takes the enemy by surprise, so depriving him of his only possible advantage, the technical one. As soon as the guerrillero's tactics become repetitive, however, the enemy learns to play by his rules, and an anti-guerrilla campaign will then have every chance of destroying or at least blocking an already inhibited popular creativity.

✧

How can the discipline combat requires be maintained among troops who refuse blind obedience to leaders? Most of the time, it must be said, revolutionary armies either succumb to the devil of submission to a Cause or plunge into the deep blue sea of a heedless search for pleasure.

The call to self-sacrifice and renunciation in the name of freedom is the foundation stone of future slavery. On the other hand, premature rejoicing and haphazard pleasure-seeking invariably herald repression and the Bloody Sundays of order being restored. No, the game has to have coherence and discipline, but these must be supplied by the pleasure principle itself. The risk of pain is part and parcel of the quest for the greatest possible pleasure. Whence the energy with which this quest is pursued: there is no other explanation, for instance, for the verve with which the roistering soldiery of pre-Revolutionary France would attack a town over and over again, no matter how many times they were repelled. What drove them onward was their passionate anticipation of the *fête* to come — in this case, a *fête* of pillage and debauchery. Pleasure is heightened when it is long in the making. The most effective tactics are indistinguishable from calculated hedonism. The will to live, brutal and unvarnished, is the fighter's most deadly secret weapon — and one liable to be turned against any who do not take it seriously: when his own life is in the balance, a soldier has every reason to shoot those placed in authority over him. A revolutionary army has thus everything to gain from making its every member into a skilled tactician in his own right and, above all, into his own master, into someone who knows how to work logically and consistently towards his own gratification.

In the struggles to come, the desire to live intensely will replace the old motive of pillage. Tactics will become a science of pleasure, reflecting the fact that the search for pleasure is itself pleasurable. Such tactics, moreover, can be learned every day. The form of play known as armed combat differs in no essential way from that free play sought by everyone, more or less consciously, at every instant of their daily lives. Anyone who is prepared to learn, from his simple everyday experience, what tends to kill him and what tends to strengthen him as a free individual, is already well on the way to becoming a true tactician.

There is no such thing, however, as a tactician in isolation. Only a

federation of tacticians of daily life can meet the requirements of the desire to destroy the old society. To equip such a federation, to supply its technical needs, is one of the immediate goals of the Situationist International: strategy is the collective construction of the launching pad of the revolution on the basis of the tactics of the individual's daily life.

✧

The ambiguous notion of humanity sometimes generates a degree of indecision in spontaneous revolutionary movements. Only too frequently, the desire to make people the central concern opens the door to a paralysing humanism. How often have revolutionaries spared their future executioners! How often have they accepted a truce which has given the enemy forces time to regroup! The ideology of humanism serves reaction and underwrites the worst inhumanity: Belgian paratroopers in Stanleyville.

No compromise is possible with the enemies of freedom — and humanism does not apply to mankind's oppressors. The ruthless elimination of counter-revolutionaries is a humanitarian act because it is the only course that averts the cruelties of bureaucratised humanism.

Lastly, another problem of spontaneous insurrection derives from the paradoxical fact that it must destroy Power *totally* by means of *partial* actions. The struggle for economic emancipation alone has made survival possible for everyone, but it has also subjected everyone to survival's limitations. Now there can be no doubt that the masses have always fought for a much broader goal, for an overall transformation of their condition, a change in life as a whole. Of course, the idea that the whole world can be changed in one fell swoop has a mystical dimension, which is why it can so easily degenerate into the crudest reformism. Apocalypticism and demands for gradual reform eventually form an unholy alliance of undialectically resolved antagonisms. It is not surprising that pseudo-revolutionary parties always pretend that compromises are the same as tactics.

The revolution cannot be won either by accumulating minor victories or by an all-out frontal assault. Guerrilla war is total war. This is the path on which the Situationist International is set: calculated harassment on every front — cultural, political, economic and social. Concentrating on everyday life will ensure the unity of the combat.

(c) *Subversion.* In its broadest sense, subversion (*détournement*) is an all-embracing reinsertion of things into play. It is the act whereby play grasps and reunites beings and things hitherto frozen solid in a hierarchy of fragments.

One evening, as night fell, my friends and I wandered into the Palais de Justice in Brussels. The building is a monstrosity, crushing the poor quarters beneath it and standing guard over the fashionable Avenue Louise — out of which, some day, we will make a breathtakingly beautiful wasteland. As we drifted through the labyrinth of corridors, staircases and suite after suite of rooms, we discussed what could be done to make the place habitable; for a time we occupied the enemy's territory; through the power of our imagination we transformed the thieves' den into a fantastic funfair, into a sunny pleasure dome, where the most amazing adventures would, for the first time, be really lived. In short, subversion is the basic expression of creativity. Daydreaming subverts the world. Sometimes subversion is like Monsieur Jourdain speaking prose; sometimes it is more like James Joyce writing *Ulysses.* That is, it may be spontaneous or it may require a good deal of reflection.

It was in 1955 that Debord, struck by Lautréamont's systematic use of subversion, first drew attention to the virtually unlimited possibilities of the technique. In 1960, Jorn was to write: "Subversion is a game made possible by the fact that things can be *devalorised.* Every element of past culture must be either re-invested or scrapped." Debord, in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 3, developed the concept further: "The two basic principles of subversion are the loss of importance of each originally independent element (which may even lose its first sense completely), and the organisation of a new significant whole which confers a fresh meaning on each element." Recent history allows one to be still more precise. From now on it is clear that:

— As more and more things rot and fall apart, subversion appears spontaneously. Consumer society plays into the hands of those who want to create new significant wholes.

— Culture is no longer a particularly privileged theatre. The art of subversion can be an integral part of all forms of resistance to the organisation of everyday life.

— Since part-truths rule our world, subversion is now the only technique at the service of the total view. As a revolutionary act, subversion is the most coherent, the most popular and the best suited to the praxis of insurrection. By a sort of natural evolution — the desire to play — it leads people to take up an ever more extreme and radical stance.

✧

Our experience, both spiritual and material, is falling to pieces about our ears, and its disintegration is a direct consequence of the development of consumer society. The 'devalorising' phase of *détournement* has in a sense been taken care of by contemporary history itself; negativity has thus taken up residence in the reality of the facts, while subversion has come more and more to resemble a tactic of transcendence, an essentially *positive* act.

While the abundance of consumer goods is hailed everywhere as a major step forward, the way these goods are used by society, as we know, invalidates all their positive aspects. Because the *gadget* is primarily a source of profit for capitalist and bureaucratic regimes, it cannot be allowed to serve any other purpose. The ideology of consumerism acts like a fault in manufacture, sabotaging the commodity it packages and turning what could be the material basis of happiness into a new form of slavery. In this context, subversion broadcasts new ways of using commodities; it invents superior *uses* of goods, uses whereby subjectivity can take strength from something that was originally marketed to weaken it. The crisis of the spectacle will throw the forces now mobilised for deception into the camp of lived truth. The problems of tactics and strategy revolve around the question of how to turn against capitalism the weapons that commercial necessity has forced it to distribute. We need a manual of subversion — a 'Consumer's Guide to Not Consuming'.

Subversion, which forged its first weapons in the artistic sphere, has now become the art of handling every sort of weapon. Having first appeared amidst the cultural crisis of the years 1910-25, it has gradually spread to every area touched by social decomposition. Despite which, art still offers a field of valid experiment for the techniques of subversion; and there is still much to be learnt from the past. Surrealism failed because it tried to re-invest Dadaist anti-values which had not been completely reduced to zero. Any attempt to build on values which have not been thoroughly

purged by a nihilistic crisis must end in the same way: recuperation by the dominant mechanisms of social organisation. Contemporary cyberneticians have taken their 'combinatory' attitude towards art so far as to hail any accumulation of disparate elements whatsoever, even if the particular elements *have not been devalued at all.* Pop art or Jean-Luc Godard — the same apologetics of the junk-yard.

In the realm of art it is also possible to undertake a tentative search for new forms of agitation and propaganda. In 1963, for instance, Michèle Bernstein produced a series of works in plaster with toy soldiers, cars, tanks, etc. With such titles as 'The Victory of the Bonnot Gang', 'The Victory of the Paris Commune', 'The Victory of the Budapest Workers' Councils of 1956', these works sought to dereify historical events, to rescue them from artificial entombment in the past. They tended at once towards two goals: the rectification of the history of the workers' movement and the realisation of art. No matter how limited and speculative, agitational art of this kind opens the door to everyone's creative spontaneity, if only by proving that in the particularly distorted realm of art subversion is the only language, the only kind of action, that contains its own self-criticism.

There are no limits to creativity. There is no end to subversion.

Chapter twenty-four

The interworld and the new innocence

The interworld is the wasteland of subjectivity, the sphere where the residues of power and of its corrosion mix with the will to live (1). The new innocence liberates the monsters of interiority, and hurls the murky violence of the interworld against the old order of things from which it stems (2).

1

THERE IS A TURBULENT FRONTIER of subjectivity afflicted by the sickness of power. This zone is rife with undying hatreds, inhabited by the gods of vengeance, the tyranny of envy, the snarls of frustrated desire. Its corruption is a marginal one, yet it threatens on every side. It is an interworld.

The interworld is the wasteland of subjectivity. It contains cruelty in its starkest form — the cruelty of the cop and the cruelty of the rebel, the cruelty of oppression and the cruelty of the poetry of revolt. Resisting spectacular co-optation yet never turned to the ends of insurrection, the dreamer's superior space-time takes monstrous forms as the norms of individual will are warped by the perspective of Power. The growing poverty of everyday life has ended up by making it a completely public realm, open to every kind of experiment, an exposed battlefield between creative spontaneity and its corruption. Being an intrepid explorer of the mind, Artaud is able to describe this uncertain combat with great clarity:

"The unconscious belongs to me only in dreams, and even there I cannot tell if what I see lingering is a form marked for birth or filth that I have rejected. The subconscious is what emerges from the premises of my internal will, but I am very unsure as to who reigns there, though I suspect that it is not I, but rather a pack of adverse wills which, for reasons unknown to me, think in me, but have

> never had any other thought than that of usurping my very own place in my body and in my self. But in my preconscious where all these same adverse wills seek to abuse and distract me with their temptations, I can see them clearly once I arm myself with my full consciousness: what do I care for all their harassment, so long as I feel myself *there*. . . . I thus came to feel that I must travel upstream, and delve into my preconscious until I could see myself evolving and *desiring*."

And, as Artaud added later, "It was peyote that got me there".

The itinerary of the hermit of Rodez sounds a dire warning. Artaud's break with the surrealist movement is significant. He reproached the group for allying itself with Bolshevism; for putting itself at the service of a revolution (a revolution, be it said, that was caked with the blood of Kronstadt) instead of putting the revolution at its own service. Artaud was absolutely right in attacking surrealism's failure to found its revolutionary coherence on its most fruitful demand, on the primacy it accorded subjectivity. But no sooner had he made his break than he completely lost himself in solipsistic ravings and magical thought. He abandoned all notion of realising subjective will through the transformation of the world. Instead of externalising what lies within, he sought to make it holy, to discover a permanent mythic reality in the rigid world of symbols. The only road to this kind of revelation is the road of impotence. Those who hesitate to cast out the flames that devour them within can only burn, can only be themselves consumed in accordance with the laws of consumption, in ideology's tunic of Nessus. Ideology, be it the ideology of drugs, art, psychoanalysis, theosophy or revolution, is the one thing that never changes history in the slightest.

✧

The world of imagination is the exact science of possible solutions, not a parallel world granted to the mind in compensation for its real failures. It is a force destined to bridge the gap between internal and external. A praxis condemned for now to inaction.

With its phantoms, its obsessions, its outbursts of hate, its sadism, the interworld is like a cage of wild animals driven mad by their imprisonment. Anyone is free to go down there by means of dreams, drugs, alcohol or the disordering of the senses. Its violence asks only to be freed. A good climate

in which to steep oneself, if only to reach the consciousness that dances and kills — what Norman O. Brown calls the 'Dionysian consciousness'.

2

THE RED DAWN of riots cannot banish the monstrous creatures of the night. It clothes them in light and fire, strewing them across town and countryside. The new innocence is baleful dreams becoming reality. Subjectivity cannot construct itself without destroying whatever stands in its way; the violence necessary for this it draws from the interworld. The new innocence is the clear-sighted construction of an annihilation.

The most peace-loving of people are haunted by dreams of blood. How hard it is to be solicitous towards those whom one cannot kill on the spot; to use kindness to disarm those one cannot disarm by force. I have a great debt of hatred towards those who have very nearly succeeded in enslaving me. How can hate be destroyed without destroying its causes? The barbarity of riots, the arson, the people's savagery, all the excesses which terrify bourgeois historians, are exactly the right vaccine against the chill atrocity of the forces of law, order and hierarchical oppression.

In the new innocence, the interworld suddenly erupts and sweeps oppressive structures away. The play of pure violence is transcended by the pure violence of revolutionary play.

The shock of freedom works miracles. Nothing can withstand it — not sickness of mind, not remorse, not guilt, not the sense of importance, not the brutalisation produced by the world of Power. When a water pipe broke in Pavlov's laboratory, none of the dogs who survived the flood showed the slightest trace of their long conditioning. Can the high tide of social upheaval have less effect on people than a broken water pipe on dogs? Reich recommends explosions of anger for neurotics with emotional blocks and muscular armouring. This kind of neurosis is, I think, particularly widespread today; it is, simply, survival sickness. And the most consistent explosion of anger will probably bear a suspicious resemblance to general insurrection.

Three thousand years of darkness will not withstand ten days of revolutionary violence. The reconstruction of society will necessarily entail the simultaneous reconstruction of everyone's unconscious.

✧

The revolution of everyday life obliterates the notions of justice, of punishment, of torture — notions determined by exchange and by the reign of the fragmentary. We do not want to be judges but masters without slaves, rediscovering, beyond the destruction of slavery, a new innocence, a life of grace. The point is not to judge the enemy but to destroy him. Whenever he liberated a village, Durruti gathered the peasants of the place together and asked them to point out the fascists. These he summarily executed. The coming revolution will do the same. With equanimity. We know that there will be no-one to judge us thereafter: judges will be no more, for we shall have eaten every last one of them.

The new innocence means the destruction of an order of things which has never done more than impede the art of living, and which today threatens what little remains of authentic life. I have no need to justify defending my own freedom. Not a moment passes without Power's putting me in a posture of legitimate self-defence. The spontaneous justice of the new innocence is well-expressed in this exchange between the anarchist Duval and the cop sent to arrest him.

"Duval, I arrest you in the name of the Law!"

"And I suppress you in the name of freedom!"

Things don't bleed. Those who weigh with the dead weight of things will die the death of things. Victor Serge tells how, during the sack of Razoumovskoe, some revolutionaries were criticised for smashing some porcelain. Their reply was: "We shall smash all the porcelain in the world to change life. You love things too much and people too little . . . you love people too much as things, and people as people you don't love enough." Everything we do not have to destroy should be saved: such, in its most succinct form, is our future penal code.

Chapter twenty-five

You won't fuck with us much longer!'

(Sequel to 'Vous foutez-vous de nous? — Address of the Sansculottes of the Rue Mouffetard to the Convention, 9 December 1792)

WATTS, PRAGUE, Stockholm, Stanleyville, Turin, Mieres, the Dominican Republic, Amsterdam: wherever passionate acts of refusal and a passionate consciousness of the necessity of resistance trigger stoppages in the factories of collective illusion, there the revolution of everyday life is under way. Resistance intensifies as poverty becomes more general. Things which for years justified fighting over particular issues — hunger, oppression, boredom, sickness, mental anguish, isolation, deceit — now all serve to underscore poverty's basic coherence, its omnipresent emptiness, its appallingly oppressive abstractness. It is the whole world of hierarchical power, of the State, of sacrifice, of exchange, of the quantitative — of the commodity as will and representation of the world — that is now coming under attack from the moving forces of an entirely new society, a society still to be invented, yet already with us. Revolutionary praxis now affects every cranny of this world, changing negative into positive, illuminating the hidden face of the earth with the fires of insurrection and mapping out the contours of the planet's imminent conquest.

Only authentic revolutionary praxis can invest blueprints for armed rebellion with the precision they must have if they are not to remain hopelessly tentative and partial. But this same praxis becomes eminently corruptible once it breaks with its own rationality. Revolutionary rationality is concrete rather than abstract, transcending the empty and universal form of the commodity. It is the only road to a non-alienating objectification — to the actualisation of art and philosophy in individual, lived experience. Its thrust and orientation are determined by a non-fortuitous encounter

between two poles under tension: it is a spark leaping from a subjectivity whose will to be everything is born of the totalitarianism of oppressive conditions to the objective decay which, thanks to history, now affects the generalised commodity system.

Existential conflicts do not differ qualitatively from those which affect mankind as a whole. Thus people cannot hope to control the laws governing their collective history if they do not at the same time master their individual histories. To fight for the revolution while abandoning oneself — as all militants do — is to work arse-backwards. Against voluntarism on the one hand, and against the mystique of revolution's historical inevitability on the other, we must promote the idea of a strategy of access to revolution, of a construction at once rational and passionate which dialectically unites immediate subjective demands and the objective conditions of our time. Within the dialectic of partial and total, the launching ramp of the revolution is the project of building daily life, in and through the struggle against the commodity form, in such a way as to ensure that each phase of the revolutionary process is a faithful reflection of the ultimate goal. No maximum programme, no minimum programme — and no transitional programme. Rather, an overall strategy framed on the basis of the essential characteristics of the system that has to be destroyed, the system against which our first assaults must be directed.

When the time for insurrection comes — and hence, for that matter, *right away* — revolutionary groups must arrive at a global formulation of the entire range of problems created by the circumstances of the moment, just as the proletariat will solve these problems in a global way in the process of its self-dissolution. These problems include: the concrete transcendence of work, of the division of labour and of the antagonism between work and leisure (ie, the problem of the reconstruction of human relations by means of a passionate and conscious praxis affecting every sphere of social life, etc); the concrete transcendence of exchange (the problem of the devalorisation of money: the subversive use of counterfeiting, the establishment of relationships incompatible with the old economic system, the liquidation of parasitic sectors, etc); the concrete transcendence of the State and of every kind of alienating collectivity (the problem of the construction of situations, of self-managing assemblies, of *positive* laws designed to encourage every

freedom and suppress regressive trends, etc); the organisation of the movement, and its expansion outwards from key areas in such a way as to revolutionise established arrangements everywhere (self-defence, relations with unliberated areas, massification of the use and manufacture of arms, etc).

Between the increasingly disorganised old society and the new society yet to be built, the Situationist International exemplifies the group in search of revolutionary coherence. Its significance, like that of any group which expresses the poetic impulse, is that it will supply a model for the future organisation of society. External oppression (hierarchy, bureaucratisation) must not therefore be allowed to emerge within the movement itself. This can be ensured only by making participation conditional upon the maintenance of real equality among members, not as a metaphysical right, but on the contrary as a norm expected and insisted upon. It is precisely in order to *avoid* authoritarianism and passivity (leaders versus militants) that a revolutionary group should unhesitatingly take sanctions in the event of any drop in theoretical level, any practical backsliding, any compromise. There is no justification for putting up with people whom the system can very well put up with. Expulsions and breaks are the only defence of an imperilled coherence.

By the same token, the project of massing poetry's disparate forces presupposes the ability to recognise or catalyse autonomous revolutionary groups, to radicalise and federate them, without ever assuming leadership. A group such as the Situationist International has an axial function: the function of operating everywhere as an axis which is rotated in the first instance by the power of popular resistance, but which increases this initial motor energy and disseminates it. The situationists' only yardstick for identifying their allies is that of revolutionary coherence.

The long revolution means that we have to build a parallel society which can counter the dominant system until such time as it is strong enough to replace it. More specifically, we shall have to set up federations of micro-societies, true guerrilla *focos* fighting for generalised self-management. Real radicalism is not orthodox: it fosters variation and guards every freedom. The situationists have no blueprint for the ideal society to which people are supposed to pay constant homage. They simply show, by fighting for

themselves and by maintaining the highest possible consciousness of this struggle, why people really fight and why consciousness of the struggle is essential.

(1963-1965)

A toast to revolutionary workers

RADICAL CRITICISM has merely analysed the Old World and its negation. It must now either realise itself in the practical activity of the revolutionary masses or betray itself by becoming a barrier to that activity.

So long as the project of the whole human being remains the spectre haunting the void of unmediated self-realisation, so long as the proletariat does not achieve a *de facto* reappropriation of theory from those who have distilled it from the proletariat's own movement, so long will each radical step forward be followed by ideology's two steps back.

By urging proletarians to lay hold of a theory derived from direct daily experience (and from the lack of it), my *Traité de savoir-vivre* cast its lot unequivocably with the cause of transcendence. But by the same token it laid itself open to all the falsifications that are bound to accompany any and all delay in putting these lessons into insurrectional practice. The moment radical theory becomes independent of the self-movement of revolutionary consciousness, as when this consciousness is suddenly inhibited by history, it becomes other than itself while remaining itself, and cannot completely evade capture by a parallel but contrary movement — by regression towards separated thought, towards the spectacle. Even when a book like this one contrives to embody its own self-criticism, this merely exposes it to ideological parasites; these run the gamut, in this instance, from subjectivism to nihilism, via communitarianism and apolitical hedonism — to say nothing of our old friends the puffed-up bullfrogs of critical criticism.

Before too long, radical working-class action will subordinate the spheres of production and consumption to the needs and passions of individuals. Working-class action is, initially at least, the only force capable of subverting these spheres. The historical procrastinations of this movement show, however, that the portion of the proletariat which has no direct control over economic processes has been capable at best, in its ascendant phase, of framing and disseminating a theory which it could not itself actualise or

adjust. In a period of defeat, moreover, it has turned this theory into a regression of the intellect: a consciousness which never attained a true purchase on its own time has developed into a strictly retrospective parading of banners.

The subjective expression of the situationist project reached its highest point when it prepared the ground for May 1968 and accelerated the growth of consciousness of the new forms of exploitation. Its lowest ebb has been an intellectualised reading born of the inability of a large number of people to destroy what can *only* be destroyed (through sabotage and subversion — not occupations) by the workers responsible for the economy's key sectors.

The situationist project nevertheless represented the most advanced practical thought of a proletarian sector with no access to the levers of the commodity process. What is more, in its formulation this project never for a moment relinquished as its appointed and indivisible task the annihilation of the social organisation of survival in favour of generalised workers' control. It is therefore bound to rediscover its real internal movement in a working-class context, and there resurface, leaving the spectacle's hot-air specialists picking over the carcass of its former incarnation to see what use they can make of these remains.

Radical theory belongs to whoever causes it to progress. To defend it against books or other cultural merchandise wherein it reposes too often and too long *on display* is not to set an anti-work, anti-self-sacrifice, anti-hierarchy worker against a proletarian restricted to an unarmed consciousness of the same refusals; rather, it is to call upon those who find themselves at the most basic level of the unitary struggle against the society of survival to use the forms of expression most effectively available to them, and to perform revolutionary deeds which forge their own language by creating conditions from which there is no possible turning back. Sabotage of the forced-labour system, destruction of the processes of commodity production and reproduction, expropriation of stores and plant in the name of the revolutionary forces and of all those allied with them by reason of passionate attraction — here are means capable of putting an end, not only to the bureaucratic reserve army constituted by intellectualising workers and workerist intellectuals alike, but also to the intellectual-manual dichotomy itself — and indeed eventually to the whole world of separations. Down

with the division of labour and the universal factory! Long live the unity of non-work and generalised workers' control!

The main theses of the *Traité de savoir-vivre* must now find corroboration of a concrete sort in the actions of its anti-readers: not in the shape of student agitation but in the shape of total revolution. The task of theory henceforth is to carry violence where violence already holds sway. Workers of Asturias, Limburg, Poznan, Lyons, Detroit, Csepel, Leningrad, Canton, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Liverpool, Kiruna, Coimbra — it is you who are destined to let the entire proletariat add the joy of revolution made for one and for all to the lesser, everyday pleasures of love, iconoclasm and obedience to the dictates of passion!

Without the criticism of arms, the arms of criticism are but weapons of suicide. Many proletarians successfully avoid the despair of terrorism and the poverty of militantism only to become voyeurs of the working class, spectators of their own shelved potential. Cuckolded and defeated as revolutionaries *sans* revolution, they settle for the role of revolutionary-by-proxy, awaiting the moment when the falling rate of petty-bureaucratic power hands them a chance to offer themselves as mediators and play the leader under the banner of their very inability to smash the spectacle. They are the reason why the organisation of insurgent workers — the only revolutionary organisation needed henceforth — must be the work of the insurgent workers themselves. Otherwise the proletariat as a whole will have no organisational model in its fight for generalised workers' control. The advent of this type of organisation will mark the final passing of repressive organisations (States, parties, unions, hierarchical groups of all kinds) along with their critical corollary, that fetishism of organisation which flourishes in the ranks of the non-productive proletariat. The immediate practice of such an organisation will eradicate the contradiction between voluntarism and realism which marked the limits of the Situationist International:* confronted by the perpetual re-emergence within itself of the relationships characteristic of the dominant world outside, that group found that its own means of dealing with this situation, exclusion and rupture, were inade-

*I left the Situationist International and its growing burden of empty self-importance in November 1970.

te, and a way was never found to harmonise inter-subjective agreements and differences. It will become clear eventually that the portion of the proletariat with no concrete possibility of subverting the means of production is in need not of organisations but rather of individuals acting for themselves. Such individuals may federate from time to time into commando groups for the purposes of sabotage (attacks on the apparatus of repression, occupation of radio stations, etc). They will intervene wherever and whenever the prospect of tactical and strategic effectiveness is offered. Their sole concern will be to pursue undivided gratification and, inseparably, to kindle the fire of working-class guerrilla warfare — that negative and positive fire which, though it begins in the very heart of the proletariat, is nevertheless the only possible basis for that class's abolition as part of the abolition of class society in its entirety.

The workers may still lack the coherence of their own potential strength, but one thing is certain: once they do achieve that coherence, their victory will be definitive. The recent history of wildcat actions and riots is the writing on the wall which announces the resurgence of workers' councils and the return of Communes. The sudden reappearance of these forms — sure to be met by a repressive counter-attack whose violence will put the repression of intellectual movements in the shade — is likely to surprise only those who cannot discern, beneath the pluralisms of the spectacle's immobility, the unitary progress of the old mole, the proletariat's continuing clandestine struggle for the appropriation of history and the global overthrow of all the conditions of daily life. In the meantime, the necessity of history-for-itself may be perceived in all its cunning in the *negative* coherence attained by a proletariat disarmed, a sort of concave unanimity which stands as a monumental warning to everything which threatens the radicalism of the working class from within: to intellectualising tendencies, which cause consciousness to regress to the level of book learning and culture; to uncontrolled mediators and their bureaucratic 'opposition'; to the status-lovers, more enamoured of the renewal of roles than of their dissolution in the playful emulation characteristic of the basic guerrilla group; and to all those forces which press for the abandonment of concrete subversion, of the revolutionary conquest of territory, of the unitary, international march towards the end of separations, the end of self-sacrifice,

the end of forced labour, the end of hierarchy, and the end of the commodity in its every last manifestation.

The gauntlet thrown down by reification to each person's creativity can no longer be picked up by means of some theoretical "What is to be done?". The proper response lies rather in the practice of the revolutionary act. Anyone who fails to discover in revolution the crucial passion which opens the door to all others can attain but a travesty of real pleasure. The *Traité de savoir-vivre* sought to trace the shortest path from individual subjectivity to its actualisation in history-made-by-all. From the standpoint of the long revolution, it was a mere point of departure — on the road towards communalism and generalised self-management. Similarly, the *Traité* is merely an outline — albeit an outline of the death sentence which the society of survival pronounces upon itself, and which will one day be executed without appeal by the international of factories, fields and streets.

We have a world of pleasures to win, and nothing to lose but boredom.

October 1972