

Your Revolution Is Not My Revolution: Thirty Years After May '68 – François Lonchamp and Alain Tizon

“The whole root, all the exacerbations of our quarrel, turn on the word ‘Revolution’.”
Antonin Artaud, “À la grande nuit ou le bluff surréaliste”

Foreword

In 1968, at the high point of consumer society and peak full employment, the first wildcat general strike to paralyze a major European country took place. All institutions were questioned, factories, offices and public buildings were occupied, “action committees” sprang up everywhere, an extraordinary degree of freedom of speech was manifested, and there were even some attempts to carry out a revolutionary reorganization of exchange under the control of committees. In this climate of exaltation and freedom, some people thought they saw the possibility of pursuing the critique of commodity society to its ultimate conclusion and of once again picking up the thread of the dream of a history that will finally be transparent to the men and women who make it. Not all of those who then plunged into all kinds of journeys and adventures, both political and existential, preserved in their innermost being the necessary reserve to execute a timely and reasonable strategic change of course.

Not all of those who were once inspired by the tremors unleashed by May have become big-time fashion designers, journalists for *Libé* [the French newspaper, *Libération*], or film producers, who for the most part cast a cynical glance at their past and are today trampling what constituted the honor of their youth. These people fully deserve all our contempt.

Others did not withstand the test of what Pasolini called in his *Écrits corsaires* “one of the most violent and perhaps most decisive reactionary periods in history.”¹ We all know someone for whom this history had a very bad ending. Drunk on life in May, they did not weather the dark years to come and were incapable of finding direction in their lives. Some committed suicide; others sank into poverty, became drug addicts, or fell victim to stupid and predictable accidents.

It is to these people that we dedicate this book, as well as to those who have maintained their dignity to this day.

This text is the product of an attempt to transcend the disappointments of the last twenty years, to honor the spirit of May, despite its ambiguities, and to provide arguments for those who have not given up hope, as well as for the younger generations who are being suffocated by the worship of the Ego-God and who usually only hear about May '68 from our enemies.

And if, at the conclusion of these reflections—which we shall commence, as André Prudhommeaux recommended, by calling attention to certain “awkward and urgent problems that reality will force us to

¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits corsaires*, Flammarion, 1976.

confront sooner or later”—we succeed in correctly framing some of the questions that so-called scientific socialism summarily buried under the vain certainties of *historical experience* and that a victorious capitalism is preparing to definitively entomb forever, then we shall have achieved a small part of our goal.

In order to write this text, and in order to exorcise the ghosts of our misfortune, it was necessary for us to painfully submerge ourselves in a past in which many of our dreams were shipwrecked, since it seems that all our efforts have only contributed to bringing about the world that we have before us today.

For, up until quite recently, we still lived in the hope of a decisive confrontation that would ineluctably lead to the final breakdown, the decline and fall of the commodity economy, the advent of a classless society and the reign of freedom. Utterly convinced that “postponing the moment of the uprising of the workers in every country constitutes the sole real preoccupation of the global political strategy of all States”,² just like the authors of an ultra-left journal published in 1976,³ we were capable of writing that “our era beholds the development, and will behold the further extension, of a tendency inherent in all the institutions and all the aspects of the prevailing way of life ... the crisis proves the fragility of the system ... the riots of the American blacks, May ’68, the Italian rampant May, the Polish insurrection, the Portuguese revolution, the Spanish strikes and demonstrations that foreshadow a confrontation on a vast scale, have shown and illustrated the new starting point of the revolution ... the general trend of development seems clear to us. It is leading to communism”.

But the assault of the proletarians on the strongholds of the old world was neutralized, and we have witnessed the failure of that *revolution in a capitalist system that works so well*, the revolution that had been announced by the Situationist International.

The translation of what people experienced in 1968 into the language of radical theory was less successful than fast food and video games; the masses listened to advertisers rather than to the theoreticians of their emancipation, and the persistence of a world that, as we naively believed, was supposed to collapse in short order to give way to the new society that we thought we could discern in May, has forced us to confront “a historical period in which the possibility of the communist revolution is absent”.⁴ And, what is even worse, it is precisely during this period that we have had to live.⁵

² P. Beaufils and P. Locuratolo, *Apologie de Jacques Bonhomme*, Paris, 1975.

³ *King-Kong International*, No. 1, 1976.

⁴ “The decadence of the capitalist regime is the period during which it enters into a state of permanent crisis while it continues to develop the material and human premises for the socialist revolution. The decomposition of the capitalist regime will begin, on the other hand, from the moment when the objective possibility for the creation of a higher social order disappears, that is, when the system drags down with it in its decline the premises for the socialist revolution. It is precisely at this juncture when the possibility of modern barbarism arises, no longer as a tendency that is constantly developing in the society of exploitation, but as a phase of decomposition during which both the productive forces, as well as revolutionary class consciousness, undergo an evident and long-lasting regression. Modern barbarism is the historical period in which the possibility of the communist revolution is absent”. P. Chalieu, “La consolidation temporaire du capitalisme mondial”, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 1948.

⁵ Of course, what we mean by communist revolution has nothing to do with the revolutions that have laid claim to this name or have been victorious under this name in the 20th century.

As painful as it may be, we have to question a good number of our erstwhile convictions and try to understand how this society that we wanted to destroy caught up to us, and then overtook us; this society that we have helped to perfect, contrary to our desires.

The first such conviction is the obstinate and blind faith according to which class society shuts off and rejects from the very depths of its being the historical possibility of its own improvement. This faith was characteristic of the entire workers movement, inherited from Christian eschatology, and allows “critical consciousnesses” to lie undisturbed in the deepest slumber; and Marxism established it as a dogma in modern thought.

The second such conviction is the *comfortable theory of alienation* (or of *the underdevelopment of consciousness*), not the philosophical idea that we shall carefully refrain from discussing here, but that theoretical vulgate that throws fuel on the fire of the most vacuous constructs of “radicality”, attributing to individuals and social groups motivations or intentions invented to suit the needs of the cause.

The third such conviction, and it is with this one that we shall begin, is the conviction that we are at the threshold of decisive uprisings that are guaranteed by the *laws of history*, a conviction that arises largely from the underestimation of an enemy that was deemed to be condemned by those very same laws, which prevented us from recognizing the bourgeoisie as it was and as it still is, the only class that to have carried out its revolution in the 20th century, the only class that is capable of development on its own account.

Our roots lie in the generation that was profoundly affected by May '68. We were never members of a party or group of the extreme left, but we were delighted to frequent certain radical milieus in the sphere of anarchism, the ultra-left and the Situationist International, whose theory was our main influence. And we are continuing from that starting point.

There were also journeys, numerous jobs, adventurous forays on various continents, friendships, love affairs, all with their share of insufficiency, fullness and very solid moments of solitude.

When we found ourselves attending a vocational training course for the unemployed during the early 1980s, we thought that the revolution we caught a glimpse of in May was still on the agenda and we believed that it was from within the working class that we would be most effective in hastening its onset. And although history did not prove us correct, we were still convinced even then, and for a few more years, that the revolution was not so far off. But what we had neither foreseen nor understood was that this society was still capable of sufficiently developing in such a way as to satisfy many of the aspirations that were expressed in May, even the ones that seemed to be the most provocative. And this is why we were not able to comprehend the whole range of transformations that had taken place since then.

For the Bourgeoisie, There Is Never a Situation With No Way Out

Permitted Revolts

“When we were militants, we sold ideas that we believed in. Today I sell products that I believe in, I apply the same ethic.”

—A former Maoist militant

(Quoted by Alain Etchegoyen in *La valse des éthiques*)

“An incredible array of bargains, covering two floors with nightgowns and Skai handbags. The alarm clocks are manufactured by Chinese political prisoners.”

“Morality or Savings: You Choose!”

Nova magazine, 1997

“Simone Weil is ugly, misshapen, there’s something wrong with her body, she’s hunchbacked, does she have scoliosis?”

20 Ans, February 1997

A Thousand Triumphant Ubus

Fortunately, some of the old forms of human stupidity have diminished considerably. The old-style domineering shop foreman has disappeared, and the aggressive and racist *beauf*,⁶ who hates homosexuals, longhairs and women who wear miniskirts, has lost all his arrogance. But along with these miserable figures that no one will miss, others more worthy and rich in humanity have also disappeared. The teacher who, above and beyond his dedication to teaching, was convinced that he was performing the most noble mission, the worker who loved his job, who considered it an honor to teach his trade to another person, the self-taught proletarian, with a passion for knowledge and proud of his class, the militant convinced of the greatness of his struggle....

We know that there is a world of difference between the modern proletarian consumer and the confederated workers of 1871 or the poor peasants of Aragon, who had hardly any experience with money and for whom the anarchist social goal was immediately transparent and applicable. We know that the modern proletarian consumer is very far removed from “the crystalline times of the workers movement when everything could be discussed without fear”⁷ evoked by the Greek revolutionary Stinas in his *Mémoires*; we know that the Commune will never return, any more than the Spanish Revolution or any other revolution of the past. We know that, in the upheavals of the future, we will have to deal with people who have been ruined by commodity and media prostheses, who have been educated and reared in a world whose forces work to undermine the qualities that might have allowed them to confront the demands of a more free and dignified

⁶ An abbreviated form of *beau frère* (brother-in-law), as featured in the comic strip by Cabu. The “*beauf*” is a typical figure of the 1970s and early 1980s: he detests young men with long hair, women who wear miniskirts, homosexuals, etc. He is rude, vulgar, and he drinks beer. He is viscerally opposed to the transformation of customs, even if it benefits him, and he is ready to kill you if you touch his car. Cabu’s comic strip was very popular, and the term eventually became part of the common parlance. We must point out, however, the ambiguity of this caricature, because it was also used to stigmatize the working class as a whole, at the very moment in history when it found itself exposed to an unprecedented offensive that took the form of industrial restructuring: as if the workers were all backward reactionaries who stood in the way of progress. (Note added by the authors to the Spanish edition—editor’s note.)

⁷ A. Stinas, *Mémoires. 60 ans sous le drapeau de la Révolution sociale*, Athens, 1977. Republished by La Brèche, 1990.

life, forces that have so completely perverted their intelligence and their imagination that it would be difficult for most of them to even conceive the slightest idea.

While revolutionaries have addressed themselves to mythical proletarians, their enemies spoke to the really existing proletarians in the realistic language of consumption, and with more success; and today, the immense majority of our fellow citizens no longer pose any questions except questions of consumption, and they are so inclined to take refuge in consumption that relations with their own kind have often become a source of boredom or unwanted rivalry, or just a nuisance.

We are beginning to see everywhere the model prototypes of the *new man* created by the bourgeoisie, truly adapted to his time, in his thousand forms, most of which are detestable. Hygienic, pleasant, tolerant (with the false tolerance conceded by power), ready to sever every kind of relationship, since his commitments are weak, submissive to the powers that be and, in advance, to every future power, since they guarantee his comfort; he only exercises his freedom by way of the rejection of all responsibility. For this new man, where there is no advertising, there is no freedom; where there is no supermarket, poverty reigns. Not all of these new men are property owners, although most of them aspire to be, and this fragile hope is sometimes the only meaning of their lives, since access to property is one of the essential vectors that contribute to the dynamic of this society. *But they love this world that, in a way, has become their world*, produced for their use and to make them comfortable in their status, through the desire for accumulation that it arouses and maintains, remarkably, even among the most impoverished. They love its technological horizon that so fascinates them, the pleasures that it authorizes, its promise of happiness endlessly deferred, but which they will never renounce for anything in the world, and it is for them that this ideology of consensus is produced, the ideology of openness, of the right to difference, of smug, self-satisfied respect for all cultures, of tolerance and fair-play, a more palatable version of a utilitarian Christianity purged of all its disturbing elements.

Yet more testimony regarding this “new man” is provided by the vanity or the shocking vulgarity of most conversations, even if they are badly camouflaged by the inevitable background music that is injected *wherever human beings have not been liberated from the need to gather together*, in cafés, restaurants, commuter trains and in the shopping centers that are tending to monopolize the entire landscape, as well as in the generalized loss of forms of courtesy created to facilitate human relations and make them more pleasant; or in the ignorance, the illiteracy, the brutal mannerisms, the hostile, unintelligent looks, filled with hatred or simply devoid of any expression at all, which we come across every day, *even among children*, and in the lame shopkeeper’s smile that greets us everywhere, *even when there is nothing to sell*, the anxiety resulting from the degradation of sensitive intelligence in everyday relations.

We have reached the point where we can ask ourselves whether capitalism has not colonized humanity so thoroughly that it has rendered it inadequate for any other fate than the one reserved for it by capitalism itself, ruining in advance any possibility for a new society, by way of the mass production of beings that are so dispossessed that they can no longer defend anything besides their own alienation, experienced as their last possession (the only possession that gives meaning to their lives), beings that would perceive the eventual exercise of free will as a threat and who will always line up behind the flag of any party that will guarantee that they can return to their condition of resignation, to the peace of the absence of commitment and irresponsibility, and to the obsession with security that makes servitude so agreeable. Therefore the success of capitalism lies in the fact that it continues to make people sleep and *it knows very well how to spare them the pain of thinking*.

But the new man is also a phony rebel, an anti-social provocateur, determined to make himself unbearable everywhere. Furthermore, this type of crass stupidity, insolent and joyless, that we encounter in every class of society, does not demand merely to be tolerated. It displays itself in all its insolence, it shouts and tries to occupy every square inch of space that our hesitation to confront it grants it. Even the most inoffensive and sheltered petty bourgeois, if he considers himself to be emancipated, will also reward us with the tough-guy sneer of hatred he learned from American movies,⁸ the ineffable and ridiculous attribute of contemporary virility and the inevitable manifestation of the worship of oneself. The most timorous weaklings want to jump on a moving train to take advantage of this new license, the authorization to go berserk without any risk, that has been conceded to them. Cloaked in the irresistible affirmation of the right of each person to his individual freedom, they want to do their part, like everyone else, to insult retail clerks and shoplift in supermarkets and department stores when the opportunity arises. All of this (and the rest) allows them to engage in a grotesque parody of rebellion with hardly any risk since, in times like these, in which eccentricity forms part of the norm, behaviors that are considered to be original often merely take the form of the exploration of the most direct route to consumerist frenzy.

Stupidity, ignorance, the brutalization of the senses, and the persecution of poetry, are the best guarantees of the current disorder and tend to destroy in advance any possibility of humanity ever acceding to a more free and just condition. This is why pseudo-rebellion and bargain-basement non-conformism are so effectively encouraged by all the powers that participate in the vulgar modeling of subjectivities for the purpose of making a profit from them.

“The subculture of power has absorbed the subculture of opposition and has made it its own”, as Pasolini wrote in his *Dialogues en public*, and if it is presently good form to be a rebel, for each person to pursue his own advantage and to exhibit an arrogant scorn for conventions, this is because these rebellions are permitted and even encouraged: who is scandalized these days by someone who steals CDs or smokes hashish? Who is scandalized by the ubiquitous fraud or by people who boldly display their ignorance? Are they not merely so many ways of convulsively demonstrating that each person is integrated in his own way? The little world of the media boasts of its drug use; the most inoffensive young people openly display all the signs of their adherence to the order prescribed by the media’s hucksters (headphones, basketball sneakers, “walkman”, and, sometimes, weapons); the most vulgar radio personalities, and the most sinister and stupid filmmakers, can pass themselves off as real libertarians; and any aphasic steeped in a subculture will be defined as a young rebel by the intelligentsia, as long as he bears the stamp of some dangerous neighborhood.

Saint-Just in a black leather jacket⁹

For years, an insidious propaganda has sought to make us accept and internalize a diffuse everyday violence that one part of society has made sacrosanct to the extent that it has raised it up as a value at the

⁸ As is the case with hundreds of other movies advertised on its trains and in its stations, the policy of RATP [the State-owned mass transit company serving the Paris region] at least had the honesty to conceal nothing in an advertisement for one particular film, where we read: “Sex, murder, betrayal. Everything that makes life worth living. A film by Oliver Stone....”

⁹ *Blouson noir*. This is a reference to the black leather jacket worn by certain young people who, during the 1960s, adopted a tough, anti-conventional look. (Spanish translator’s note.)

same level as any other achievement or effort, and concerning which one is shocked to see that it has penetrated the schools and that it is attributed without distinctions to the “young people of the *banlieus*”, despite the young people themselves, who do not recognize themselves in the behavior of those whose principal victims they are.¹⁰ In a way, violence has been turned into the particular property of the *excluded*, even for those of them who do not like it, which stigmatizes them even more in their exclusion, with the falsely benevolent and respectable applause for the circus act dispensed from afar by a claue of fans who are very careful not to participate. There is a fascination for wallowing in the gutter, with its left-wing and ultra-left variants, in the correct line of the Situationist International and its ridiculous *Saint-Just in a black leather jacket*, with its ideology of the punch in the nose, the guarantee of authenticity that certifies the fearsome truth of revolt.

In fact, there is no “reappearance of the ‘dangerous classes’ in the cities”, contrary to what Ignacio Ramonet wrote in *Le Monde Diplomatique*,¹¹ in an article in which he concocted a dubious amalgam between the neighborhoods of the urban periphery and the gangs that are trying to impose their law on those neighborhoods, and the annoyance and fear that they inspire in their residents, and the old *red threat*. The “overflow of the cities”, as Laurent Joffrin¹² modestly characterizes acts of true barbarism, has nothing to do with the “popular emotions that come from the *banlieus*”, as he wants us to believe, with all the dishonesty that certain journalists are capable of, just as resolute in their will to rid themselves of a history that they find annoying, as they are in their anxiety to justify phenomena that they have provided with extensive coverage.

But the State is not afraid of the predictable outbursts of frenzy in the *banlieus*; the useless acts of violence that are constantly being produced throughout all of society, excluding *de facto* any sociability that is not that of the clan and of those who disseminate models of behavior that are decidedly incompatible with any life in society, have never challenged any aspect of a world in which *it is often forgotten that those who perpetrate these acts of violence share its essential values* (the law of the jungle, competition, aggression, worship of success...), except for the fact that they reject the idea of making even the least effort to make themselves bearable. Forerunners of a new world that we are invited to cheerfully accept, they explain to us in their deliberately inarticulate language that they have perfectly understood the unwritten rules that are destined to replace the sociability inherited from the past that are currently in the process of becoming extinct, since they are the hallmarks of an annoying humanism in every sense of the term. Contrary to what a complacent rhetoric would have us believe, most of them have chosen to deliberately exclude themselves, refusing to establish any kind of communication except by way of provocation and confrontation, cultivating everything that opposes them to the proletarians whom they scorn and who are their main victims. Generally hated by ordinary people of all trades and backgrounds, whom they force to stay home in front of their televisions, they are determined to impose their law on increasingly larger territories, deliberately trusting to their capacity for intimidation that is conferred upon them by their youth, their recklessness and their unscrupulousness, counting on the weakness and even the cowardice of a population

¹⁰ As was revealed, despite the inevitable political recuperations, by the growth of the Stop the Violence movement in 1998.

¹¹ *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 1998.

¹² Editorial in *Libération*, May 13, 1998. See, also, Alain Touraine, in *Le Monde de l'éducation*, May 1998: “... And everyone is called upon to defend the State of rights, the guardian of the public peace and of personal safety against the gangs or the ‘dangerous classes’ that were the object of so much fear in the 19th century.”

that is not accustomed to physical confrontation, many of them belonging to what Pasolini, speaking of the *Teddy boys* who murdered a gas station employee,¹³ described as a “typology of neo-fascist delinquency” in 1960.

Although some of them are only imitating their elders, for lack of more appropriate models, and others end up settling down and becoming insignificant nobodies as soon as the time is right, as many criminals do in their time, how do we define the others, who profess their racism without compunction, who blackmail the most impoverished people, who only respect brute force and who detest the culture that insults them, undoubtedly because it still has sufficient vitality to show them up for what they really are? What are we to do with those who only find pleasure in the fear that they inspire and who only pick on the weakest, who profess their admiration for the Mafia, who get together in groups of fifteen or twenty to massacre a kid their own age, who in the last resort will even use torture to inspire the terror and the submissiveness that they need for their rackets?

In any case, we very much fear that this morbid ferocity, unfortunately closely connected with the brutality and ignorance that are spreading throughout all classes of society, will not be without its uses for much longer, especially in the case of a serious social crisis; for what these people want is power, and the bourgeoisie is beginning to give it to them, delegating to them the job of maintaining the dismal order that already reigns in some *banlieus*, a Mafia order in which civil peace is conceded in exchange for allowing them to carry on with their drug dealing with impunity; an order to which it would seem that many workers and unemployed persons have been condemned, including a large number of immigrants.

Due to its ideological content, because it is authoritatively modeled on mass propaganda and tolerated by a milieu that, due to exhaustion and fear, allows it to spread, does it not seem that this phenomenon, in many respects, is not unlike the escalating brutality and ignorance that spread during the 1930s? And as if this was not disturbing enough, it also nourishes the imbecilic and primitive reaction of the National Front, the refuge of no small part of those who have found all doors closed to them, since *the left*, which has for so long given itself over to an opportunistic demagogy, has nothing to say to these people, either French or foreign-born, who suffer their everyday fate of anxiety, harassment and humiliation. And it indirectly encourages that “formal, useless, hypocritical anti-fascism that is basically appreciated by the regime”,¹⁴ which Pasolini so insightfully denounced in his time, and which contributes to tranquilizing the consciousness of naive persons who only mount an attack against the ghosts of the past in order to better accommodate themselves to the present and to the rest of society. In any case, it deserves a proper response, since nothing justifies our having to meekly submit to hateful arrogance and terrorist provocation, regardless of its origin, even if it is the beneficiary of a certain kind of conformism that is particularly widespread on the left, a conformism whose libertarian variant requires us to pause to examine it more closely. For this conformism still has enough support to make any reflection on this and other questions difficult.

¹³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Dialogues en public*, Les Éditions du Sorbier, 1978.

¹⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits corsaires*, Flammarion, 1976; likewise, in *Dialogues en public*, 1962, Éditions du Sorbier, 1980: “There is no need to be strong to confront fascism when it presents itself under senseless and ridiculous aspects; but one must be very strong indeed to confront the fascism of normalcy, of the cheerful, mundane, accepted codes of behavior, of the brutally egotistical foundation of a society.”

Prêt-à-penser¹⁵

The commercial basis of freedom

With their baggage train of distinctive signs that display the fact that they belong to the community of the elect, a certain kind of libertarian conformism is very much suited to the mentally lazy who find in it the means of providing a basis for their narcissistic claim to the smoldering banner of the great revolts of the century.

We are profoundly bored by these immoralists, who are as stupid and as devout as frogs in holy water, especially those men and women who have the pretense of teaching us their revolution of customs by arrogating to themselves the right to legislate, under the aegis of their extremism, concerning what constitutes the spontaneity, the unpredictability, the taste for risk and playfulness of the human being, and everything that makes him or her a unique individual. Certified managers of the commercial basis of freedom, who live without restrictions in the extraordinary atmosphere of those who possess the keys of a paradisiacal society over which they have sovereign rights, the most fanatical even have the gall to compete with the bourgeoisie on its favorite territory, pleasure, since their own pleasure is obviously more intense and more authentic, for they live in opposition to *alienation*.

Armored with the convictions that are most useful for fleeing from reality, devout and unyielding in the absolute and fragile certainty of possessing a revealed truth, tolerating every kind of eccentricity that will bring grist to their mill, in the name of freedom, of course, adept in the most unrealizable, most falsely ingenuous and provocative solutions, certain that no one will ever have the audacity or the madness to demand that they put them into practice, some of them eternally enjoy the comfort of a delightful extremism, they have the luxury of openly cultivating irresponsibility and grow boastful and vain with their little revolutionary battles.

But this whole façade of exceptional individualism often only serves as a cover for absolute inertia and crass ignorance once you look behind the authorized dogmas. In many of these alleged libertarians, even if there is no model, there is a good accumulation of *prêt-à-penser* and the same limited contents from their display case of insolence are eternally repeated: nonsense, foul language that might have scandalized the bourgeoisie of the 19th century, trite phrases and stereotyped attitudes that are just as impoverished as those wielded by the self-righteous Puritans of other times.

They take it for granted that all norms are oppressive, that all authority is destructive of freedom, that minorities are always oppressed, that women and homosexuals are the bearers of a subversive potential, that immigrants are our brothers in revolution, that love is always subversive and incompatible with social roles and power, that the “youth of the *banlieus*” are resisting the established order, etc. And woe to the shameless scoundrel who would attempt to dispute even just one of these articles of faith with these supposed lovers of freedom, who are in fact just as intolerant as the priests of the past!

¹⁵ An expression that refers to all the stereotypes and commonplaces of the dissident language of that era, whose banalized use is compared to the fashion of wearing mass-produced clothing (*Prêt-à-porter*) (Spanish translator’s note). [*Prêt-à-porter*: “ready-to-wear”; *prêt-à-penser*: “ready-to-think” (American translator’s supplemental note.)]

But we know that there is no society without norms, that love is also the battlefield upon which all powers are arrayed, that behind the rejection of all hierarchy there is often nothing but hatred of intelligence, of all distinction and merit, that certain egalitarian passions generally only serve to camouflage everything that might reveal mediocrity, and that a lot of authority will be needed if one wants to overthrow this society some day, an authority whose legitimacy must be seriously considered starting right now. We know that there are numerous homosexuals who do nothing but *project upon the other sex the responsibility for the disappointment that characterizes the current state of heterosexual relations*,¹⁶ manifesting an insatiable desire to integrate themselves into this world so that they can make some changes that will make it more pleasant for them. We know that women, after having obtained memorable victories on the terrain of customs¹⁷ and the workplace, now seem to be incapable of finding a way to liberate themselves from the consequences of their most recent liberation (since it seems as if their victories were only permitted in order to fasten their chains on them more securely, by means of more subtle, but not less restraining, bonds).

We know we are not perfect, and we also know that the male of our time has not for his part refrained from marching in lockstep with this *parade* that the bourgeoisie has been able to stage by exacerbating the *war of the sexes* that it turns to its profit. The market thus finds itself on familiar ground. This is what confers an unprecedented vulgarity upon the last years of this century in which fashionable cynicism seems to reign over the disaster of love.

Finally, we know that many immigrants bring the worst kinds of backwardness with them in their luggage. And just as, in other times, we should have taken the really existing worker into consideration, the one that can be found and spoken to, rather than the embodiment of the mythical class, it would be advantageous at this point for us to consider, without exaggerated complaisance, the really existing immigrant of our times, and that we should cease to believe or attempt to make others believe that all “undocumented persons” are expelled from their countries by poverty, civil war or political persecution. We would therefore no longer be able to argue about immigration by evoking the memory and the example of Frankel and Dombrowsky,¹⁸ as if anyone is immigrating to France these days to participate in a common struggle and complete the work of fraternity begun in 1789, as if this was still the fatherland of the Rights of Man, of Voltaire, and of the Liberty that resounded throughout the world for all to share.

Many of these self-proclaimed libertarians, who are living on a hundred year old legacy, have a great need for power that would allow them to stay the same, eternally irresponsible; and this is proven, as if such proof were necessary, by their behavior, their way of eating and conducting themselves, the tenor of their table talk and the feeble passion that often moves them when they speak of women, and the fact that their irresponsible slogans have no possible practical application, that they merely reinforce the neoliberal window dressing of bourgeois society where, it seems to us, their radicality does not seem so out of place.

¹⁶ Benjamin Péret, *Anthologie de l'amour sublime*, Albin Michel, 1975.

¹⁷ No one is scandalized today by a woman wearing a miniskirt, or smoking in a café; contraception is available to everyone; now, no woman has to get an abortion under scandalous conditions; and a certain imbecile machismo has been suppressed at the workplace and elsewhere....

¹⁸ Frankel, a Hungarian revolutionary and member of the First International, was a working class delegate in the Paris Commune (1871). Dombrowsky, a Polish revolutionary, was a general in the military forces of the Paris Commune. Political exiles, both of them went to France to participate in the revolutionary battles and died during the “bloody week” (Note of the Spanish translator).

Indeed, is it not the bourgeoisie who, in other respects, proclaim the downfall of authority and hierarchy, who sing the praises of subversive desire and creative disorder, who have decided to promote pleasure and passion, as well as a certain degree of breakdown of social bonds, in order to more effectively confine the individual in all his consumerist frenzy, who cheat on their taxes, and who laugh at politicians and bureaucrats? And just as every mansion once had its priest in attendance at Sunday brunch, the bourgeoisie, obliged by necessity, have replaced the priest with their intellectuals, poets or artists (Balzac clearly foresaw this development).¹⁹ The bourgeois, who is so often a feminist and anti-racist—is he not himself also a rebel? So what are radicals good for? For example, Michel Onfray, a moderate Vaneigemist, *left-wing Nietzschean* and inveterate rebel, who recuperates everything and everybody, from Céline to Cécile Guilbert, along with Jünger, Debord and the Dalai-Lama, for the benefit of the society of tolerance and of a hedonism that has become completely tolerable for the powers that be, for whom “there is no future world of peace, nor any harmonious society, but only the eternal return of violence, for nothing will change substantially. The only solipsistic hope lies in the cultivation of oneself.” But if the only foundation of the impulse to revolution, hoping to spur the Stirnerite associations to action, was the desire for pleasure, we would probably still be living under a monarchy. And these stupid slogans are very convenient for our times, when the bourgeoisie itself is trying to create a completely new human type, one that represents a total break with those that preceded it, a type that is discreetly asocial, but that does not present any threat.

Recyclables

Some brief considerations, finally, on the former Stalinists, currently in the process of shedding their skins, who are calling for the most broad-based consensus, demanding that everyone forget their hardly-brilliant past as if it was minor indiscretion, as if everyone was implicated in it, as if everyone had plaited flowery crowns for the *little father of the peoples*,²⁰ as if everyone was an accomplice of the executioners of the proletariat.

They give themselves an aura of *radicality*, because this radicality is the sign of our times, they seek to take advantage of the beautiful name of revolutionary and of all the prestige of the old workers movement, but having learned the hard lessons of the past, not without complacency and cowardice, they no longer want to be party leaders or even useful intellectuals. They lay claim to the incentive for change, they no longer have fixed convictions, *they refuse to adopt a prescriptive attitude, since they cannot say what should be done* and they want to *abolish* the class struggle; their friends are “on the left” and they are preparing for *a struggle without either direct conflict or goal* that is quite useless to undertake since there is no hope that it will have a positive outcome. With such slogans, these penitent Marxists who have purged Marx of everything that once forced them to commit to something, can at least be sure of one thing: those who support them on the basis of such a program will not be the kind of people whom you can call upon to risk their lives, or even their jobs, on its behalf, nor are they the kind of people you can ask to make their actions accord with their ideas.

¹⁹ Honoré de Balzac, *Les Paysans*, Gallimard, 1975.

²⁰ In French, “*le petit père des peuples*”, was a term used to refer to Stalin. In Italian dialect, he was “*il baffone*” (the man with the moustache) (Spanish translator’s note). [In the United States, he was sometimes referred to during World War Two as “Uncle Joe” or “Country Joe” (American translator’s supplemental note)].

Instead of calling upon their supporters to lend a hand to help them in all the stages of their betrayals, they have the courage, from the very start, to write off, once and for all, that revolution that is so annoying to them, and let history take its course without them!

But they must not forget that many comrades, both well-known and obscure, were liquidated in the chekas of Russia, Spain, China and other countries; and that we do not cultivate amnesia in politics—to the contrary, history has often reminded us of the price of amnesia. There is a disgusting opportunism that we cannot endure and that we shall never put up with! When they have said so many stupid things and praised so many outrages, the least they can do is have the decency to keep their mouths shut!

As for the Leninists, along with all their Trotskyist variants, they were never able to convince us that the Bolshevik system had nothing to do with the Stalinist abomination. And they try our patience again and again with a dead past that they are trying to render up-to-date, although in the last few years some groups have engaged in attempts to find a way out of the *Bolshevik darkness*.

The revolution that benefits the bourgeoisie itself

“The restoration or authentic reaction that began in 1971-1972 (after the intermission of 1968) was in fact a revolution. That is why it restores nothing, nor does it return to anything; to the contrary, it tends to erase the past.”
Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits corsaires* (1976)

“For the bourgeoisie, there is never a situation with no way out.”
Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933)²¹

“Side by side with those who came to this continent for the sake of a new world, or rather for the sake of building a new world on a newly discovered continent, there had always been those who hoped for nothing more than a new ‘way of life’. It is not surprising that the latter should have outnumbered the former.”
Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*.

A vast movement of inclusion

Revolutionaries called for man’s conquest of his own unknown nature, but the bourgeoisie outflanked them by seizing the reins of change so that nothing changed unless it was to its benefit, and to rid itself of all the archaic forms of domination in the economy, the State and consciousness that might constitute obstacles to this task.

Driven by the pressure of radical movements, it carried out this mission in fits and starts, on a scale that escaped our notice, as it undertook the remodeling of needs, dreams and desires, and took hold of our

²¹ I was unable to locate a corresponding passage in the English language edition of Reich’s book. This quotation appears to be a variant of a statement attributed to Lenin, “there is no such thing as a situation with no way out for capitalism” (quoted by Karl Korsch in his essay, “Some Fundamental Presuppositions for a Materialist Discussion of Crisis Theory”, published in 1933) [American translator’s note].

critique, as radical as it was, and turned it *entirely* to its own benefit, snatching legitimacy from the hands of all other social forces in order to implement this transformation.

Although the May movement was immediately buried by the “silent majority”, and the old social order survived, *it is the modernist bourgeoisie, rather than the proletariat or any other revolutionary subject that might replace it, which revealed itself to be the only force capable of uniting radical dissent against the established order with the project of reorganization by way of a hedonist program that corresponded closely enough with the average consciousness of the movement*: first, more pleasure, fewer restraints, less seriousness, in addition to the liquidation of a large number of moral obstacles that were considered to be obsolete; the promotion of enjoyment, of the individual and his sovereign subjectivity, *the accelerated erosion of all authority that is not functional or technical*, a permissive attitude towards the boldest of the longhairs and miniskirt-wearing women, and what was even more serious, a timid beginning, but still a beginning, finally, to grant recognition to homosexuality, while an unbridled eroticization began to trespass against social codes and customs. Everything that used to be shocking, disturbing or provocative, now became commonplace and ordinary....

Against such a realistic and not at all demanding project, which so effectively addresses the dissatisfied man of our time, promising much without demanding anything in return, calling for the expansion of the horizon of consumption (a vacation, an adventure, a stroll, an emotion, communication, fresh air, feelings—everything ends up on the market), thus extending the benefits of consumption while limiting all its inconveniences; against the *hedonism* of power, both revolutionary *asceticism*, inspired by the examples and the language of the past, as well as the slogans of May, are powerless.

Dissent dissipated its strength by going around in circles in the void with its superannuated slogans, put out of commission by the rapidity of the transformations that it helped to bring about, which have affected western societies at every level during the last thirty years. Revolutionary theory is in crisis everywhere, because it has not been capable of forging the concepts that might have allowed it to establish itself in the real world in order to transform it, and the “serious problems of modern industrial society are still being conceived and, above all, experienced, among us, in the light of a basically archaic culture that is alien to the world that must be confronted”, as Lucio Coletti correctly maintains.²²

The dissidents who still exist, taken as a whole, have not risen to the occasion of the challenge that they themselves first proclaimed. Some, rather than face the problems of the present, are still advocating the revolution that failed between 1917 and 1939, and one can at least say with respect to this position, that it certainly does not call upon its proponents to face the slightest practical consequence of their commitment, insofar as the world in which such a revolution is supposed to take place does not exist! The others have participated in the development of customs and the modernization of society, at first without wholeheartedly supporting it, as was demonstrated by their criticism of the trends associated with this development, trends that in fact constituted their *most recent possible conquests*, and later more concretely, by experimenting with new ways of working, inventing another use of life. They discovered that they aspired to a revolution of information technology, of virtual reality, of multimedia, of a greater autonomy in their jobs, and they have cast their lot with the class that is most capable of granting them such benefits. All of them are still sleepwalking in a universe of references, most of which are obsolete due to their incompatibility with the new reality (*workers councils, self-management*); some eke out their existence,

²² Lucio Coletti, *Le déclin du Marxisme*, PUF, 1980.

distracted by public relations campaigns and the opportunist hodgepodge of political programs in which these references contribute to the inflation of electoral promises (“change life” in 1981, “*change the future*” in 1996), while others have been incorporated by the bourgeoisie which has found them well adapted to the revolution that is really taking place (*freedom, emancipation, passion, everyday life, pleasure...*). And it is only where it fits the new aspirations of society, and to the extent that it is inscribed in the revolutionary project of the *new power*, by advocating the liberation of customs and the emancipation of all minorities, that a certain kind of libertarian leftism has become popular.

What might be described as an extension of rebellion into every aspect of life, which effectively liquidated some all-too-scandalous and anachronistic oppressions (such as the fate reserved for homosexuals or single women), would pave the way for a real leap forward in the colonization of everyday life by the commodity and an intensification of the domestication of the individual. As some young revolutionaries have understood since the 1970s, subjectivity, desire, pleasure, youth, deviance, dissidence, madness, identities and differences, everything that was demanding to be recognized, and which were then the object of theoretical inquiries by certain intellectuals as new themes of subversion, would soon be absorbed in *a vast movement of inclusion*²³ that leads to the renovation of all the norms of sociability and of the very framework that was supposed to be shattered, a movement that continues to this very day. In 1998, one of the largest American computer manufacturers did not hesitate to dedicate an entire page of advertising in a major daily newspaper²⁴ to “the marginalized, the rebels, nonconformists, dissidents”, to all those “who see things differently, who do not follow the rules ... those who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world....”.

Thanks to the *crisis*, which has become the justification for everything and the privileged arena for the staging of social demands, all institutions, all aspects of the prevailing way of life have been questioned. But the *change* called for by the left (for if it seeks to change anything in the order of things and social relations it is with the hope of contributing to the emancipation of the most disadvantaged classes), was carried out *by the right*, in the sense that Pasolini spoke of a *revolution from the right*, since from then on all change was oriented to consolidating the power of the class that in our society is best situated not only to reap the fruits of growth, but also those of crisis.

Now that the mortgage of an irreducible antagonism between social classes has been paid off, the management of discontent nourishes change, and it has been said that conflicts only help renovate the

²³ “One could then see in what the positive realization of the totalitarian process consisted, precisely in a systematic movement of inclusion, not only of still-marginal categories, but above all of the very desire for participation, for communication and ‘individual’ realization in the social framework: for these critiques have this in common, that they were incapable of proceeding beyond this framework, while they distinguish their latest possible conquests. To the contrary, they have constituted the real process of fermentation of social individualization in the sense that we discussed above, of the complete absorption of individuals by Society.” Alain Ajax and Dominique Fauquet, *L’Unique et son ombre*, No. 1, 1983.

²⁴ *Le Monde*, February 6, 1998: “The fools, the marginalized, the rebels, nonconformists, dissidents, those who see things differently, who do not follow the rules. You can admire or disapprove of them, glorify or denigrate them, but you cannot ignore them. Because they change things, they invent, they imagine, they explore, they create, they inspire, they advance humanity. Where some will only see madness, we see genius. Only for those who are crazy enough to think they can change the world and succeed.”

problematic and modalities of exploitation.²⁵ In 1995, for example, in an analysis of the lessons of the crisis accompanied by the simultaneous examination of the last dying embers of the movement, and then of the long story of the sad fate of the SDFs²⁶ and the unemployed, the immediate victims of the social movement, Alain Lebaude expressed his satisfaction in *Le Monde*²⁷ concerning the weak impact of the strikes due to the development of “forms of organization and ways of life”: “the content of labor itself is undergoing a radical change. Fewer people are engaged in production, and more are involved in informal or service jobs, there was no major slowdown, as in the past, due to one of the biggest strikes in the history of France.... It is obvious that new and less arduous forms of labor have exercised their seduction ... this strike has allowed us to understand various phenomena that are at work in our modern era. In the past, the more sensitive economic activity was to any number of contingent events, the more it seemed to be susceptible to disruption”.

Thus, one of the most important strike movements of the post-war era was immediately defined as a contingent event that only disturbed the SDFs and provided a decisive impulse to the new forms of exploitation.²⁸

And faced with a changing system that has above all been transformed due to revolutionary upheavals, and which is permanently developing in the sense of disarming all opposition and absorbing and using the impact of movements that seek to oppose it, it would seem that it is the revolutionary phenomenon itself that is beginning to decompose, losing its coherence, and that it is even necessary to consider that perhaps this world only gives rise to revolutions that are identical to itself.

The class of consciousness

“The economy in the broadest sense (from production to consumption) passes for the most perfect expression of the rationality of capitalism and of modern societies. But it is the economy that exhibits most strikingly the domination of the imaginary at every level—precisely because it claims to be entirely and exhaustively rational”, Castoriadis wrote.²⁹ Having transformed itself into *the only completely revolutionary class*, and without any serious competition, the bourgeoisie also necessarily became the only class of consciousness, calling the mercenary social sciences and philosophy to its aid. For it is not only a matter of warding off a proletarian threat that is everywhere almost totally decomposed, and of defending interests that are incidentally only subjected to the weakest challenges. After having made so much progress with respect to the domestication of the old class enemy, it now proposes to abolish wage labor in favor of more radical forms of exploitation;³⁰ and it is the ruling class, rather than the movement of social critique, that is presently seeking to *concretely show the masses of the workers what they have to gain by ceasing to be workers*, with the brutal reminder of the servitude of their condition by way of the unmitigated policy of massive layoffs. Seizing upon the project of the creation of the new man for its own

²⁵ Daniel Sibony, *Libération*, November 26, 1996.

²⁶ SDF (*Sans Domicile Fixe*). A journalistic expression that has passed into the common parlance, designating those who live on the streets. (Note of the Spanish translator.)

²⁷ *Le Monde Initiatives*, “Après la grève”, January 17, 1996.

²⁸ See also, *Capital*, July 1996: “The Strikes of last December? They did not prevent me from working....”

²⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, tr. Kathleen Blamey, Polity Press, Malden, Massachusetts, 1987.

³⁰ See, among other sources, *Les Echos*, October 1, 1997.

benefit, a project abandoned long ago by the revolutionary parties, continuously overturning the conditions of production and perception of all of social reality in a movement in which everything must be questioned *except, precisely, its own power*, the bourgeoisie has now undertaken the reconstruction of the world for its own benefit. The perspectives opened up by the progress of science are dizzying and allow for a convulsion of sufficient scope to render all the experience of the workers movement obsolete, along with the humanist tradition and the humanist critique once championed by the bourgeoisie itself, and everything that in its own history represented an impediment to the *great leap forward*. For, from now on, a qualitative advance seems to be possible that would commit humanity to a such a new, unprecedented, disorienting course, that the old questions will become inapplicable, so that the words used to formulate them would no longer have any meaning, and the old specters will vanish, finally producing that terroristic subjectivity, educated by all kinds of extremely violent spectacles that contribute to the molding of sensibility, transforming human nature by usurping, over the course of this process, the meaning of its fate.

After having annihilated a series of human types that were necessary for its growth,³¹ and after having almost reduced man to his biological dimension, dispossessing him of his past and of practically all the cultural determinations inherited from the old class society,³² in order to create a solvent consumer, it is man's biological nature that presently appears to be an obstacle in the flight forward of the bourgeoisie. *Whether because they are not capable of keeping pace and succumb to illness or depression, or because they can no longer reproduce, or go insane,*³³ humans seem to be quite ill-adapted to their new environment. This is why the corporate directors of the industrial-genetic complex³⁴ plan to create another kind of human being and thus resolve all problems (education, health, security, food, productivity, etc.) by exploring this *final frontier* through the reprogramming of the genetic patrimony of all living beings that is now made possible by the development of biotechnology. Assuming the demiurgic project of the creation of the *total man* on its own account, yet at the risk of *sowing chaos throughout the biosphere by disarticulating the immemorial language of evolution, opening up dizzying eugenic perspectives*, "molecular biologists ... are boasting that they can bypass millions of years of evolution ... by creating totally new bio-industrial beings with an unlimited commercial potential". "The globalization of commerce and trade makes possible the wholesale reseedling of the Earth's biosphere with a laboratory-conceived Second Genesis", as Jeremy Rifkin explains.³⁵ This is what allowed Francis Fukuyama to update the famous "prediction" he made ten years ago, since "in two generations, biotechnology will give us tools that will allow us to do what the specialists in social engineering were unable to do. In this phase we will have

³¹ "Capitalism would not have been able to function if it had not inherited a series of anthropological types that it had not created and that it would not have been able to create by itself.... These types did not arise, nor could they arise, on their own, they were created in the previous historical periods with reference to sacred and unquestionable values ... for we live in societies in which these values have become derisory.... we are witnessing the destruction of anthropological types that have conditioned the existence of the system itself." Cornelius Castoriadis, *La montée de l'insignifiance*, Seuil, 1998.

³² These themes were extensively addressed by the journal, *Invariance*—Series II, between 1972 and 1976.

³³ See, especially, Baudoin de Bodinat, *La vie sur terre*, Éditions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 1996.

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Berlan and Richard C. Lewontin, "La menace du complexe génético-industriel", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1998.

³⁵ Jeremy Rifkin, *The Biotech Century: Harnessing the Gene and Remaking the World*, Jeremy P.

Tarcher/Putnam, 1999. See also: "La tentation de l'homme transgénique", *Libération*, March 31, 1998.

definitively brought human history to an end because we shall have abolished human beings as such. Then another history will begin, beyond the human”.³⁶

But a kind of revolution has already taken place—and *is still taking place even as we write these lines*—and “like an infernal clockwork mechanism, perfectly programmed, with each passing year we see how one or another pillar of the old social contract is undermined a little more”, as the newspaper of the business class, *Les Echos*, learnedly explains.³⁷ *This revolution is being led by the bourgeoisie for its own benefit*, realizing in its own way in all developed countries the essential plank of the practical program that Karl Marx had assigned to the proletariat,³⁸ eviscerating it and, after having purged it of all humanistic content, usurping the historical mission that the theoreticians of socialism had imputed to the proletariat.

In the western world, the old separation between town and country is on the verge of being abolished, and although city air emancipates no one, agricultural labor has been industrialized, religious sentiment has faded away, the movement of the unification of customs and cultures has continued to advance since the 1960s, breaking everywhere with regional particularity, and wage labor, in brief, has been generalized, and labor is no longer experienced as coercion (everyone considers it to be *the primary need of existence*).

Marxist ideology, evacuated of its content, with nothing to say about social organization, no longer inspires any important party in Europe, and no ruling class in history has ever wielded as much power and influence as the one that currently rules the continent. As it tramples its obstacles everywhere, it inevitably becomes solely responsible for its actions, and is therefore obliged to plunge even deeper into falsification. Yet, because it was capable of creating its partners, although not without difficulty (unlike the nobility, which never had anything but slaves), it has made every one of us into an accomplice, by compulsion or by conviction, thereby causing a kind of collective responsibility to fall upon all social layers, requiring each individual to assume in his love life, his family life and his professional life, the field of tensions that are assigned to him.³⁹ It is for this reason that this same ruling class has become “pedagogical” (*the pedagogy of change*), learnedly explaining to the workers all the reasons why their services must soon be dispensed with, and that they are henceforth obliged to love the company they work for and to concern themselves with large-scale financial equilibrium.

The stage-management of freedom

In the process in which man internalizes economic mechanisms, in which he addresses the management of his relations and the regulation of the economy of his pleasures, anything opposed to consumerism seems

³⁶ “La fin de l’histoire dix ans après”, *Le Monde*, June 17, 1999.

³⁷ *Les Echos*, October 1, 1997, in a review of a book by Robert Rochefort, president of Credoc: “Like an infernal clockwork mechanism, perfectly programmed, with each passing year we see how one or another pillar of the old social contract is undermined a little more. As a result, we are seeing the decline of the compartmentalization of our lives, with work on the one hand, and private life on the other. This separation, Rochefort declares, is in the process of disappearing. Now, the two worlds are interpenetrating each other. A new form of the organization of labor, which is making its appearance, announces the advent of a new era, that of the ‘entrepreneurial consumer’, which he claims will gradually revitalize consumption in France.”

³⁸ As Jacques Camatte has explained in the journal, *Invariance*.

³⁹ V. Giorgio Cesarano, “Chronique d’un bal de masque”, July 1974, *Invariance*, No. 1, Series III, Year IX.

criminal, or, at best, utterly deranged. Ever since the collapse of that simulacrum of utopia that took the form of the bloody edifice of East Bloc communism, the bourgeoisie has proclaimed itself more than ever before to be the sole authority, assuming the position once held by the Church in other times, legitimizing its power by the simple fact that this is its world and there is no other, to the point that even the suggestion that “another politics” is possible is an almost subversive assertion. Its resolutions have no reply, with the necessary adaptation to the values they imply and that only it determines.

Its iniquitous arrogance is derived mainly from the fact that the people who profit from it or who want to benefit from it occupy the entire terrain and even organize all dissent, even the most radical, for their own advantage; the contemporary triumph of *situationism* is proof of this, as was the victory of the surrealists in another era. Nor is this merely a matter of recuperation, since revolt nourishes and gives aid and comfort to the system that it seeks to challenge by allowing it to renew itself, which confers upon each individual the freedom to be anything he wants to be, no matter what, a communist, a Catholic, a liberal, an anarchist, a Buddhist, or apolitical, leaving individuals without any possibility of real intervention in the world, and allows for every kind of manipulation, recantation, and falsification.

In this permanent revolution everyone is welcome; it does not matter if you change your views or perspectives, since this also forms part of the stage scenery of that freedom that the bourgeoisie proclaims and claims to defend against enemies who are no longer called by the same names as in the past. For it is no longer the hand of Moscow, or the Jesuits, or the Freemasons, but instead the influence of vague and diffuse states of mind that contradict the common sense and the interest of every individual, enemies whose base is located in some part of ourselves, a lack of faith, an insufficient desire to consume or to take risks, reticence in the face of change, obstinate attachment to previously acquired benefits, etc. This is why not a day passes without some celebrity of politics, of the spectacle, of journalism, of the communications media, or an *expert*, denouncing a corporation that is dragging its feet and standing in the way of an inevitable developmental trend, by deserting the economic battlefield, but also by deserting the war against AIDS, intolerance, unemployment, exclusion or terrorism.

The very language of rebellion has returned, and only serves to augment the confusion without which “le n’importe quoi vide de toute pensée”,⁴⁰ so dear to the editorialist Poirot-Delpech,⁴¹ would not enjoy such a tranquil reign. And this confusionism blurs the tracks, freezes every hint of opposition, and contributes to the erosion of resistance by a systematic alteration of the meaning of words and the images that accompany them, in a vast range of domains that extend from the humanitarian to advertising, by way of entertainment, culture and politics.

This is why there are no longer any “real” elderly people, but only older persons who are immediately transformed into *people of the third age*, and even *senior citizens*; there are no more unemployed, but only *job seekers* and even *service providers*, there is no more poverty but only *exclusion*, there is no more class

⁴⁰ An original expression coined by Poirot-Delpech, which may be imperfectly translated as “everything’s OK for those who don’t think” (Spanish translator’s note). [In American English, not to be outdone, we have the vacuous popular expression, “It’s all good” (dating from the 1990s), and now (2018) the even more exasperating tautology, “It is what it is” (American translator’s supplemental note)].

⁴¹ A commentator for the daily newspaper, *Le Monde*, who tirelessly denounces the degradation of thought by way of the degradation of language (Note of the Spanish editor).

struggle but only *social fracture*,⁴² there are no more poor people, but only RMIs and “SDFs” who die of hypothermia, there are no more problems but only *fulcrums of progress*.... Just as *enterprises* are not run by employers but by *entrepreneurs*, there are no more workers, but only *technical agents* or *operatives*; no more bosses but only *organizers*; no more layoffs, just *restructuring plans* or even *viability plans with employment readjustment*, and instead of wage cuts, there are *offers to participate in the resumption of competitiveness*. And as occurred to one of Nicole Notat’s⁴³ spokespersons, when he could not provide any reasons to justify the liquidation of “acquired benefits” and “socially correct” programs, as part of “the review and questioning of certain truths from a tempestuous past”, he only needed to marshal this decisive argument: “everyone is saying it: the right, the left, the government, the opposition, the employers, the trade unions, the church, the freemasons, the NGOs and everyone else”.⁴⁴

Image and control

Well-equipped to create situations, the bourgeoisie, which has understood that *everything must change so that nothing changes*, is also the only class that invents concepts and prescribes norms of conduct for the other classes of society. Just as it has insisted on destroying the labor value that it had so enthusiastically forged, and encouraged a freedom of behavior that it had harshly repressed in the past, it is now teaching the people not only how to work but how to cope with unemployment, how to keep busy, how to cultivate their bodies and their minds, it displays everywhere the technological gadgets of permitted pleasures, barely tolerating those who ignore them, and demands that from now on they use the concepts that it disseminates on the communications market.⁴⁵ Merely to ignore them is to render oneself suspicious, to expose oneself to a call to order.

Having received all its power from the industrial revolution that allowed it to impose its world view, the bourgeoisie does not have to be told about all the benefits it can derive from the mental conditioning that is made possible by the new media technologies whose contribution is essential for implementing the emotional codes that are more adequate for this new era. And this invasion is all the more devastating the more that the imposition of models of behavior takes place on mental and emotional terrains that have been weakened by the increasing individualization of our society, which subtly mediates a philosophy of submission that is increasingly more effectively internalized by the consumer, and which permits every kind of manipulation in the field of information.⁴⁶

⁴² This expression was introduced for the presidential elections of 1995 by Jacques Chirac’s advisors, who made the inequalities of French society one of his main campaign themes. It was necessary to “reduce social fracture”. (Note of the Spanish editor).

⁴³ Until recently, the secretary general of the CFTD (Confédération Française du Travail), the second largest trade union confederation in France. Known as “the Czarina”, she did everything possible to forge closer relations with the CNPF (Confédération National du Patronat Français, today known as MEDEF [the French national employers’ association]) (Note of the Spanish editor).

⁴⁴ Jean Caspar, *Le Monde*, January 28, 1997.

⁴⁵ Human resources, exclusion, managerial science, the emergence of planning, passion, the achievement of the goal, difference, etc.

⁴⁶ Philippe Delmas explains that “three weeks of images and testimonials of horror in the information media of the United Kingdom during the summer of 1992 swept aside the prudence and hesitations of the British government with respect to intervention in the conflict in Bosnia. Fifteen days of reports by CNN on Somalia, in January of 1993, brought about the intervention of the American government that was not

The transmission of knowledge is principally colonized by television,⁴⁷ a redoubtable competitor of the school. As its influence grows in the daily life of the family, parents are gradually abandoning all instructive and educational functions and becoming second-rate models, and we can ask ourselves what is left to transmit in a family subverted in what was unique about its role by the action of technologies that deprive it of its space and its time. Electronics and computer technology, as they penetrate the “private sphere”, impose on everyone a new norm of the use of time. The technological transformation of everyday life proceeds along with its own way of use, mental and gestural, just like the organization of space that it implies, and this intrusion without reply imposes by its particular determinations a social model of play, of discovery, of knowledge, and more generally, a relation with the world in which it is prohibited to withdraw from it or else face exclusion. For the adult, not having a television can still be taken for a manifestation of eccentricity, but it is not the same for the child who will quickly feel inferior to his classmates and he will have to justify this deviation as in other times and other places one formerly had to justify not going to church.

In a general way, the information media are instituting a new relation of the individual with a world in which the commodity and its laws must reign, which necessitates more police regulation of social life, but a more subtle regulation of private life, and its novelties disrupt customs that are thousands of years old, such as the practice of eating together or exchanging news within what is called private life. In the same way as in the domain of work, old traditions impede the free development of capital, and just as it was necessary to put an end to those traditions and the ways of life in which they are rooted, so, too, is it necessary to put an end to the old family, all-too-extensive and open, with its own occupations and history, its uniqueness formed and codified in another time. The space-time of the “nuclear family” must be inserted perfectly into the process of capitalist production-consumption, exposing the nuclear family to the risk of disintegration, and it is this disintegration that we are witnessing now, although the family is still allowed to form, for it remains one of the last places of exchange and communication where the human still finds a little space. But it is the televised ritual that, often enough, organizes the family’s time and teaches the valid ways of behavior that must be maintained, and which have few possibilities of being adopted without the legitimacy of the cathode seal, since the environment of the workplace no longer has any impact in this sense, and the school has even less impact than the workplace, since it is increasingly experienced as a place of constraints.

However, many media personalities share with the spectator the same relations that are currently imposed in the world of labor: false familiarity in a pseudo-respect for others, team spirit, etc. What is perfectly understood, as at the workplace, is that there are no more classes, but only differences, there is no more face-to-face confrontation, but only dialogue, no more agreements reached after struggles (with a winner and a loser), but a consensus that recognizes that we are all in the same boat, responsible for and committed to meeting the same challenge, which is only economic, which has taken the place of all the other

eager to get involved in Somalia. With an impressive symmetry, the same volume of images, this time concentrated on the losses and confusion of the American troops, brought about their withdrawal”. Philippe Delmas, *La bel avenir de la guerre*, Gallimard, 1995.

⁴⁷ According to John Condry, “American children spend an average of forty hours a week watching television or playing video games. If one adds the forty hours they spend in school, and travel time and chores, they only have thirty-two hours to spend with their friends and family”. John Condry and Karl Popper, *La TV un danger pour la démocratie*, Anatolie, 1995.

challenges and is internalized by everyone, from Aubervilliers to Neuilly,⁴⁸ by SDFs [homeless people] as well as by property owners in the upscale neighborhoods.

The degree to which television allows people who are exhausted by commuting, work, unemployment or the fear of unemployment and so many other justified anxieties about the future to escape from everyday life, and how this escape is just as necessary as paid vacations (with the difference that the latter were obtained by means of serious struggles), cannot be overemphasized. At the end of this century [the French edition of this book was published in 1999], television has everywhere become the principal mental prosthesis, from the ghettos to the more upscale residential areas, and every excess of stupidity and vulgarity is permitted to it, since what is demanded of it is not good programming, but much more than that: an immediate and joyous abandonment and sublimation of reality, while maintaining a connection with reality. But it is a connection that operates in such a way as to permanently maintain the lack that is experienced by drug addicts without their drug, and that almost life-and-death need for the commodity image and the dreams that it arouses gets worse as the ideological hammer-blows increase in intensity and reality is revealed, for its part, as frustrating. The systematic organization of this dependency and its cumulative effects progresses with each passing day with the help of the most cutting-edge psychological sciences, the images to be consumed must be more exciting than the experienced reality and their flow must never be interrupted, just as the world in which the commodity rules and directs life must never end.

All things must pass, however! The child gets tired of the game that does not move fast enough, and the image, when it is extinguished, leaves behind the confused frustrations that its appearance only momentarily erased, exacerbated by a lack that can only with the greatest difficulty be satisfied in the real world, helping to maintain the latent aggression that affects the entire social domain regardless of how the players play and who controls them.

Guy Debord and the situationists

“Orbem terrarum adspexit ac jam tantum umbilicum vidit.”
—Suetonius⁴⁹

Anyone who was ever passionately interested in the social question during the 1960s and the 1970s could hardly have resisted feeling a certain fascination for the Situationist International and its extremist theses, whose critical architecture, with its crystalline coherence, had everything needed to please our twenty-year old hearts. And those who presented themselves as the masters of the modern adventure, who seemed to possess the keys to a passionate world under construction, imposed their brilliant style and their incontestable maxims on us, as well as their openly-proclaimed, aristocratic taste for annoying people.

The Situationist International undertook the critique of class society on its own modern terms, elaborating the program of an insurrection that sought its reasons and its basis in the very heart of the life lived by its contemporaries; it proposed to reinvent the project of the proletarian revolution in the conditions of its own

⁴⁸ Aubervilliers and Neuilly (whose mayor is Nicholas Sarkozy) are two cities in the urban periphery; both are emblematic in their own way, the first, of the world of the people, with deep working class traditions, and the latter, of the world of the good bourgeoisie (Note of the Spanish editors).

⁴⁹ I was unable to locate this passage in the extant works of Suetonius. It can be translated as, “He looked at the world, and saw only its center”. [American translator’s note].

time.⁵⁰ This is why one cannot discount its contribution to the renewal of critical thought, which was then bogged down in disputes inherited from the turn of the century. Due to its dogmatic character, however, its answers for everything, and its serial edicts, the Situationist International (SI) certainly made its own contribution to creating obstacles for the thought and imagination of the rebels who came of age in the wave of '68, and also drove away the young generations from an encounter that seemed to be inevitable.

Starting in the early 1960s, in opposition to the fossilized sects that subsisted in a spartan fashion on the mummified legacy of 1917, the situationists proclaimed the end of the old proletarian movement. And in opposition to the modernist thinkers and third worldists who were going to great lengths to bury the working class, the situationists situated the class struggle at the heart of a subversive movement whose epicenter was located in the developed countries, which would have to bring to fruition and realize in new conditions the program set forth in the *Manifesto*, understood as the suppression of work in favor of a new type of free activity,⁵¹ the end to an impoverished history, the establishment of generalized self-management with the advent of a society of masters without slaves, and the realization of art.

Invoking the demand that one's life must be consistent with one's ideas, the Situationist International sought to bring the subversive will of the avant-garde artists to the heart of the revolutionary project. Criticizing the *new poverty* dissimulated under the abundance of commodities, it called for the *decolonization of everyday life*, with respect to which it believed it had identified the current misery as the principal result of an impoverished utilization of the technical means accumulated by modern capitalism. It fought against ideology, specialized politics and specialists in general, denounced militantism as alienated activity, and sought to inaugurate a certain kind of lifestyle as a condition of participation in the avant-garde,⁵² and in opposition to the economy of needs it called for an "economy of desires" ("technological society plus the imagination of what could be done with it").⁵³ By embarking on the project of imbuing life with passion, it was aware that it was advancing on the same terrain as its enemies, the managers, modernizers and advertising executives of commodity society; but it hoped to outflank them and attract to its side the practical forces of the new insurrection that were supposed to combine the old themes of subversion, only now enriched by the new reasons for dissatisfaction.

In its assessment of the potential forces of *subversion*, the Situationist International overestimated to the point of delirium the new revolutionary subjects that it thought it had identified: the Mulelist rebels of the Congo, *blousons noirs*, and even the famous *wildcat strikers* who undoubtedly gave factory managers some headaches during the 1960s and 1970s, but to whom it attributed capacities and desires that very few of them actually possessed.

⁵⁰ "The point is simply that revolution has to be reinvented", *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 6, April 1961; and "The only useful thing left to do is to reconstruct society and life on other foundations", *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 7, April 1962, p. 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, No. 8, 1963, "Ideologies, Classes and the Domination of Nature".

⁵² "The groups that recognize the fundamental (not merely circumstantial) failure of the old politics must also recognize that they can claim to be an *ongoing avant-garde* (authors' emphasis) only if they themselves exemplify a new style of life, a new passion." *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 7, April 1962. "Les mauvais jours finiront" ["The Bad Days Will End"].

⁵³ *Ibid.*

With their very Marxist refutation of all idealist consciousness and their draconian critique of the old militantism and its humanist content, the situationists unknowingly paved the way for the petty narcissism that would later flourish in an atmosphere of discouragement with all political commitment.

Identifying with “the most profound desires that exist in all, giving them every license”, betting on the *wild* forms of the “rejection of the narrow range of allowed behaviors”, the SI engaged in apologetics for a certain kind of gutter lifestyle, which had already been popular among certain circles of the literary left, and pursued them to their logical conclusion. And “by introducing the aggressiveness of the *blousons noirs* to the plane of ideas”,⁵⁴ they articulated an odious sectarianism built on an affirmation of revolt that was supposed to serve as a model, as well as on a tendency towards intolerance and rudeness, attributes of an alleged “radical lifestyle” to which it laid claim that became increasingly more violent, more arrogant and more emphatic in the group’s exclusions, and the SI exercised these traits so successfully that it could operate in those times of liberation without any risk of succumbing to the forms of “bourgeois” courtesy.

And expressing their satisfaction at the breakdown of the family and “the disappearance of the minimum common conventions between people—and more importantly between generations”,⁵⁵ completely convinced that everything that contributes to decomposition paves the way to a liberated world, they demonstrated a mediocre lucidity, quite inferior to that of Pasolini, who identified the aphasia of young people as precisely one of the symptoms of society’s drift towards fascism.

Although they were capable of recognizing and calling attention to the libertarian and anti-bureaucratic tendencies in the history of the workers movement that were persecuted by Leninism (not to speak of Stalinism), and everything that furthered “*the abolition of all existing classes in a way that does not bring about a new division of society*”,⁵⁶ the situationists, like many other revolutionaries before them, were nonetheless incapable of distinguishing their practice from the Bolshevik model that obviously fascinated them so much that the style of the SI was to a large extent very similar to that of the first years of the Third International, with its edicts and exclusions, its wildly vanguardist style, its “central committee” (for several years), and its pretense to possess the monopoly on consciousness and leadership, a pretense that, in Vaneigem, was accentuated to the point of mystical delirium, for, in his “Basic Banalities”, he even compared the SI to God, as Gianfranco Marelli has correctly pointed out.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 7, 1962, Editorial Notes, “The Role of the SI”.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 6, 1961, p. 14: “And despite the fortunate collapse of domestic supervision and the previously acceptable reasons to live, as well as the disappearance of the minimum common conventions between people—and more importantly between generations—older generations continue to buy into the fragmentary of illusions of the past. . . .”

⁵⁶ “Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations”, adopted at the 7th Conference of the Situationist International.

⁵⁷ In *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 8, January 1963 (“Basic Banalities”), he wrote: “*Just as God constituted the reference point of past unitary society, we are preparing to create the central reference point for a new unitary society now possible*”, quoted by Gianfranco Marelli in *L’amère victoire du situationnisme*, Sulliver, 1998.

For the Situationist International, which had foreseen the return of subversion in the very heart of developed capitalism, and in 1966 announced *the decline and fall of the spectacular-commodity society*,⁵⁸ the May movement was the prelude to the final assault of the proletariat.⁵⁹ However, “In most of the factories [the workers] proved incapable of really speaking on their own behalf and of saying what they wanted”, nor did they “create, through their own autonomous action, the concrete conditions that enable them to speak and act, conditions that now exist nowhere”. Why didn’t they create those conditions at that time? When will they do so? When will that famous perennial *level of consciousness* measure up to the challenge? By means of what miracle? And if it does arise, why at one particular time and no other? The Situationist International did not spare the gymnastics that allowed it to cheerfully leap over all barriers without knocking any of them down. And it used the Sorbonne as its platform, rather than the occupied factories, which was paradoxical for a group that spent so much time flattering the working class, and which called for the reorganization of all social life by means of the workers assemblies while exhibiting a profound scorn for students.

Claiming to represent nothing less than *the general theoretical expression of a historical movement*, the SI nonetheless dissolved precisely when it had to confront the success of some of its ideas, when some of the most lucid and least careerist members of a rebel generation were ready to join it. For despite a notably polished dialectic that allowed it to proceed by leaps and bounds towards the inevitable goal, the extravagant character of its pretensions made them disintegrate on contact with reality.

Explicitly declaring that the moment of its victory would mark its end as a separate organization, the Situationist International proclaimed that it was, above all, *anti-hierarchical*, and presented itself as an example of a critical community whose members were called upon to equally appropriate the full coherence of its *unitary critique* of all aspects of life. But the history of its last days would belie this prudently maintained illusion.⁶⁰ Under the pretext of the stupidity, or the all-too-obvious ignorance, of a certain number of their followers, rather than analyzing what there was about situationist theory that might have produced such a multitude of admirers,⁶¹ they put everyone into the same bag by calling all of them intolerable “pro-situs”, that is, inveterate follower-types, clearly articulating in detail everything that was pejorative about the term. For their greater tranquility, since they never had to confront the practical consequences of their actions, nor did they have to render accounts to anyone, thanks to the *blackmail of autonomy* which they imposed on their followers (which required that every radical who really lives his radicality is only answerable to himself), they rejected the inconveniences of power without, however, disdaining all its advantages. The supporters of the Situationist International did not have to debate the precepts that, practiced to the letter in the 1970s, when the prospect of a new world was receding more and more into the distance with each passing day, could only lead the most honest or the most fragile to complete marginalization, to desperation, and sometimes to suicide.

⁵⁸ *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 10, 1966, republished by Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Les Belles Lettres, 1993.

⁵⁹ “The ‘sunburst that in a flash reveals the features of the new world’ was seen in France in that month of May, with the intermingled red and black flags of workers’ democracy. The follow-up will appear everywhere.” *Ibid.*, No. 12, 1969.

⁶⁰ *La véritable scission dans l’Internationale*, Guy Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti, Champ Libre, 1972.

⁶¹ This was accurately exposed by the journal, *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, in its 15th issue, p. 63, “Abrégé”, April 1992.

For the situationists, one could never be radical enough, demanding enough, or strict enough with respect to carrying out exclusions, which obliged them to be always on the defensive, extending the desert that surrounded them; and furthermore, we know that there is no worse authoritarianism than that of a power that is not recognized as such, nor a worse compulsion than the sort that is exercised in the guise of autonomy and anti-hierarchical values.⁶²

Situationism has now become fashionable. Raoul Vaneigem plays the role of advisor to the teachers whom he told us during his golden age to greet with a “Drop dead, bastard!”, and, along with Debord, ended up allowing Gallimard to publish his books, after they had sworn during their golden age, with a battery of insults, that Gallimard would never publish a situationist book.⁶³ After *Commentaries...*,⁶⁴ Debord discreetly abandoned all references to the proletariat and the revolution, and plunged into the unmitigated celebration of his own personality, entertaining us with the radiation of his ego, going so far as to claim that in his youth he bore a resemblance to the actor, Philippe Noiret!⁶⁵

After his death, Debord was praised everywhere, and everyone tried to outdo everyone else in flattery and adulation, and we were shocked to discover that these rebel attitudes prevailed throughout the world of the media, where so many true libertarians were only waiting for a chance to reveal themselves, and to give free rein to their secret veneration for the great situationist, their zeal for a good fight and their visceral hatred for a world that the bourgeoisie had already begun to liquidate more than twenty-five years earlier due to its vulnerability to old-style revolutionary upheavals. And it is just maddening to see how the cream of the intellectual elite, whose multitude of compromises display as much cheap careerism as unconsciousness, come around today to snatch a few relics from Debord’s corpse after having arrogantly ignored him while he was alive, when they shamelessly admired everything that he reviled.⁶⁶

No commentator, it would seem, has called attention to the boundless vanity and the unprecedented conceit that led Debord even to organize in advance the ceremony of his own cult and to write his epitaph in laudatory terms, or to the overwhelming defeat he suffered on the very terrain on which his pretensions were based; that is, on his project to rally supporters throughout the world to organize the *party of subversion*. Generally ignored by the workers, whose support he sought, those who did flock to join him in his heyday, immediately after May, seemed to him to be of such poor quality that he had to show all of them the door. And even the wave of flattery that arose shortly before he died was completely ignored.

⁶² The SI imposed limits on anti-hierarchy. Thus, “the momentary preeminence of the SI is a fact that must also be recognized and taken into account: a gratifying disgrace, like the ambiguous smile of the Cheshire Cat of invisible revolutions” (*Internationale Situationniste*, No. 11, October 1967, p. 39).

⁶³ “The Situationist International to Claude Gallimard, Paris, January 21, 1969. There is no reason for you to be amused by our letter of January 16. And you are even more mistaken if you think that you are going to reach some kind of arrangement with us or even meet us over a few drinks. Our witnesses are reliable, certain and well-known to us. You have been told that you will never have one more book by a situationist. That’s all. Fuck off. Forget us. For the Situationist International: Christian Sébastiani, Raoul Vaneigem, René Vienet.”

⁶⁴ Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la Société du spectacle*, Ed. Gérard Lebovici, 1998.

⁶⁵ Guy Debord, *Panegyrique*, Gerard Lebovici, 1989.

⁶⁶ Pride of place in this respect must be attributed to our ineffable Phillippe Sollers, who even recently wrote a laudatory article about Debord in *Le Monde des Livres*, published on October 15, 1999: “L’étrange vie de Guy Debord”.

It must be acknowledged that Debord had the merit of having broken with an artistic-literary milieu in which he might have enjoyed a certain success, and of having utilized the available means of his time for the purposes of a very unpopular social critique which, in that era, was not without risk and required no small amount of courage. But if he has acquired a certain notoriety today, it is as a model of an ill-tempered gadfly, of a kind suited to the end of the twentieth century; a lover of the classics, of good wine and strategy, a libertine and a precursor of an opportunistic hedonism that is compatible with the pleasures that are currently being promoted, and certainly not as an *agitator* of a revolutionary party. The writer, Debord, is suited to our time due to his frigidity and his aggressiveness, and his rhetorical arrogance, since everyone is excused in advance from putting such obviously impractical precepts into practice. His apologetics for the *qualitative*, his ideology of desire, of passion and play, are currently being adopted by the advertising industry, by women's magazines and by a significant sector of society, and even by the mainstream media whose promoters know better than anyone else the kind of *détournement*⁶⁷ that suits them. And if his new admirers display an Olympian disregard for his failure, it is not because they want to remedy it, since for them the kinds of ideas he espoused are only good for discarding as the quaint illusions of youth that one leaves behind without any qualms when the time comes to assume one's place in society.

More than any other group, the Situationist International privileged the art of *critique* and resorted to the negative to sketch the contours of a new society; hence the allusive character of their program, reduced to generalized self-management, the creation of situations and, in the final stage, to the international power of "workers councils" that smelled a little musty even back then. On the terrain of everyday life and style, to which it devoted so much attention, all the talk about *passionate situations* that were supposed to be created or *a life that was really lived*, sounds hollow today, almost like a con game; and as far as we can tell, we may add, there is nothing in the life of Guy Debord that we find seductive.

Some young people who read books are today rediscovering the Situationist International and its radical theses. We hope they do not embrace either its icy sectarianism, or its cutting tone, or its trenchant emphasis, or its ridiculous *world of pleasures*, or its dubious fascination with the aristocracy and the criminal underworld, and that they learn to make a fresh start and invent anew, by way of a critical examination both of the bankrupt avant-gardes, as well as of a certain kind of rebel *prêt-à-penser* that is currently fashionable.

Situationism, which sought to spearhead the most radical challenge of the society of its time, in fact only managed to contribute to the renovation of that society's style.

L'Encyclopédie

The editors of the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances* (1984-1992), during a rather bleak period, and long before it became fashionable to be *radical*, had the merit of publishing a dignified-looking journal that proposed to

⁶⁷ *Détournement* (diversion, change of meaning). According to the SI's definition, in *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 1, June 1958, "Short for 'détournement of preexisting aesthetic elements.' The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres." (Spanish translator's note.)

unite the cutting edge of the *latent forces of rejection* (those who have made dissatisfaction their cause), in order to *rewrite theory with facts*,⁶⁸ and thus updating *the universal condemnation of the order of things* that situationist theory had brought up to date and “leave the labyrinth of perturbation and resentment whose random paths indefinitely prolong the suspension of an unfinished revolution”.⁶⁹

Like Debord, and unlike most of the revolutionaries before them, they understood the danger entailed by an unambiguous identification with the party of the movement, and they abandoned the beautiful *certainty of inheriting the world*, coldly confronting the perspective that Chaliou and others evoked after World War Two, that of “the modern barbarism that could take shape in the historical period during which the possibility of communist revolution is absent”. From their point of view, the loss of all the conditions that allowed men to *formulate and communicate their dissatisfaction* would be accompanied by such a quantity of harmful phenomena that the earth would be in danger of becoming a place unsuitable for human use, “foreclosing from now through eternity the chance of any revolutionary re-appropriation”. They therefore discovered the vocation of having something to defend in this world, “that which serves as the basis for the possibility of imagining and constructing a free life”, and they thought that they could “mobilize for their cause, together with the desire of the unknown, the instinct for self-preservation”, rejecting the theory of the *tabula rasa* that was still very much in vogue among radical milieus.

Asserting the need to immediately subject everything to debate⁷⁰ in order to engage in the “practical search for means by which society can understand its problems, discuss them and resolve them”, the editors of the *Encyclopédie* also attempted, to a certain extent, to break with the facile, and very common, stratagem that consists in postponing the solution for everything for the day after the revolution, a disastrous shortcut that makes extremism easy and which has always contributed to isolating revolutionaries and seriously undermining the credibility of their project.

By honestly assuming the task of revising some of the crucial aspects of the old revolutionary project modernized by the situationists, even if only to salvage what was essential from the doctrinal corpus inherited from that *internationale* to which an unbreakable bond seems to attach them for all time, the men and women of the *Encyclopédie* nonetheless contributed, contrary to their intentions, to its necessary eclipse and to clearing the way for a revolution that must be reinvented. Incapable, however, of drawing all the conclusions from their first intuitions, undoubtedly due to the self-satisfaction one has when it is *the negative that is at work* and as a radical one need only record its achievements, only needing to tirelessly document the spread of human misery in order to bring to bear upon it the hot iron of *critique*, they

⁶⁸ “Our task at present does not consist in arousing the discontent that has spread everywhere by publicizing a general theory that condemns the established order, but rather in a quite contrary mission: to bring the universal condemnation up to date and to give it a new basis by connecting it with the multiplicity of the partial discontents that are now being expressed.... In short, this involves once again rewriting theories with the help of facts, and thus making them more adequate for being introduced in practice.” *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 1, November 1984, “Discours préliminaire”, p. 15. [For an English translation of Part One of this “Preliminary Discourse”, which does not include the above quotation, see: <https://libcom.org/library/preliminary-discourse-encyclopedie-des-nuisances> (American translator’s note)]

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 1, November 1984.

⁷⁰ “... And we say that if there is too much discussion at the moment of practical verification, it is because there was not enough before.” *Ibid.*, No. 13, Appendix 1, p. 295, July 1988.

persisted in “putting all their hopes in the forces unleashed by social liquidation”, exasperated by the advent of an “atomized society where one person cannot relate to another except through the spectacle”, but expressing their satisfaction, with Marx, that most individuals “have become abstract individuals, but who, for this very reason and only from that moment, are prepared to relate to each other as individuals” and to effectively rebel against the capitalist forces of production.⁷¹ But they did not foretell the particular fantastic process of transmutation that would turn this defeated humanity into a humanity that will be in a position to perform such great tasks.

In fact, from the very beginning of their collaboration, they discreetly dethroned the workers from the central role that all socialist theories had previously attributed to them, because “it seems impossible for them to organize a practical critique by opening new perspectives”,⁷² for “proletarians have seen how the testament according to which they were named as inheritors of the Earth has become blurred and lost”.⁷³ Having admitted that “the possible confluence between the workers struggles of the past ... and the new revolt spontaneously born from the soil of the society of the spectacle ... a confluence that momentarily almost took place in some of the developed countries, can no longer be considered and expected as the inevitable result of the objective unfolding of the dominant conditions”,⁷⁴ and therefore lamenting the *disappearance of the party of subversion*,⁷⁵ they nonetheless attempted to organize and arm a *vast and informal conspiracy of equals* that would replace the proletariat in their historical perspective. But the *protest movements against harmful phenomena (nuisances)* (against the construction of highways or nuclear power plants, for example), which they ingenuously believed would reveal their *real reasons and their universal content*,⁷⁶ as well as “the critique of the economy and of labor which is in fact entailed by their initial motives”,⁷⁷ have fallen far short of the hopes that they harbored regarding their development.

Sovereign possessors of the *theory* that, just like the Scholasticism of the old religions, forever assured them of being one step ahead of everyone else on the terrain of consciousness, immobilized by the antiquated problematics inherited from situationism and blinded by the radical pride that oozes from their

⁷¹ *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 14, “Ab Ovo”, November 1989. [In English:

<https://libcom.org/library/ab-ovo-encyclopedie-des-nuisances> (American translator’s note).]

⁷² *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 2, “Histoire de dix ans”, February 1985, p. 40. [In English:

<https://libcom.org/library/history-ten-years-encyclopedie-des-nuisances> (American translator’s note).]

⁷³ *Ibid.*, No. 14, “Ab Ovo”, November 1989, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 2, “Histoire de dix ans”, February 1985; and No. 13, “Aboutissement”, p. 34: “... This latter point of view supposes that the proletarians are somehow destined to acquire consciousness by sinking into the growing dispossession that the autonomous development of the economy brings in its wake. But this is by no means certain, because as their technical content assumes an ever more hierarchical form, the means of radical change which the workers had in their hands with the means of production recede into an uncontrollable abstraction.”

⁷⁵ “... it is the disappearance of the party of subversion which has allowed the economy’s owners to proceed so far into disaster”, *Ibid.*, No. 15, “Abrégé”, p. 70.

⁷⁶ “But we will not be totally correct except by helping the practical movements that are born spontaneously everywhere from the soil of the society of dispossession to discover their universal content by breaking with every idea of economic progress and with the idea of an anti-state organization that entails the conscious control of all existing technology”, *Ibid.*, No. 14, “Que sommes-nous sans elle?”, November 1989, p. IV.

⁷⁷ *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 14, “Ab Ovo”, November 1989, p. 12.

every pore, satisfied that they alone wield the critique that is immediately applicable to society, all-too-satisfied with themselves and, in short, practicing self-criticism as if the errors they so harshly condemn (*prophetic catastrophism* and *apocalyptic lyricism*) are only attributable to others, the encyclopedists were distinguished by the fact that they attributed every virtue to themselves.

But if their intentions were left unfulfilled, these *specialists who were effectively determined to undermine their own specialty* and who sought to disseminate incitements to reinforce the party of subversion,⁷⁸ it is undoubtedly because modern society has known *how to make itself loved as much as it is feared*, because capital offers more adventure, drama, responsibility, play, risk, enjoyment and passion, in the long run, than the new theoretician-priests can offer with their devout predictions of apocalypse.

In 1997, in his book, *L'Abîme se repeuple*,⁷⁹ the editor-in-chief of the Encyclopédie des Nuisances, Jaime Semprun, denounced the universal dissemination of a “utilitarian brutality ... made to pass for emancipation”, and did not hesitate to characterize youth gangs, still praised by some radicals as the embodiment of revolt in its purest state, as “*storm troops of barbarism*”, sketching the impressive portrait of a generation that has boldly surrendered to “digitalized life”, a humanity that “*degenerates by being hardened*”, a humanity that has become accustomed to catastrophes. Without quoting the Situationist International even once, he engages in a full-scale liquidation of almost everything that remained of its old legacy, especially the prescribed forms of conduct that were so important for the SI, vilifying the impoverished ideology of play and festival, with its cult of subjectivity and the famous *untrammelled enjoyment*, and clearly demonstrating how all this nonsense has contributed to forging the prevailing contemporary sensibility that is incapable of mounting the least resistance to everything that now threatens to destroy us.

Very lucid in some respects, and not with regard to the least important matters, although too respectful of the prohibitions that have long weighed down dissident thought, Jaime Semprun has not been bold enough in his confrontation with the questions that are posed by our time. Properly denouncing the accommodationist hopes that some people, in every epoch, have been able to postulate with respect to the hypothetical emancipatory potential of an ineluctable catastrophe, he timidly stops short at the threshold of a fertile inquiry without opening up a new road, forgetting that *people need, in order to launch the assault on the existing world, or simply even to oppose it, a new concept of the world and of life*; he was too preoccupied, undoubtedly, with the threat of succumbing to a *foolish utopianism* or a *mystical dilettantism* which are not, however, the greatest dangers we face today.

The spirit of the working class and the victory of the consumer

A less direct, but safer road

⁷⁸ “And the effectiveness of this Encyclopedia will be measured, among other ways, by our ability to encourage in the enemy camp other desertions by those who are susceptible to understanding that we are giving them the chance to make a better use of their talent and their knowledge”, *Ibid.*, No. 1, “Discours préliminaire”, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Jaime Semprun, *L'Abîme se repeuple*, Ed. Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 1997. [For an English translation of this book entitled, *The Abyss Repopulates Itself*, see <https://libcom.org/library/abyss-repopulates-itself-jaime-semprun> (American translator's note).]

“The mania of consumption is a mania of obedience to an unspoken order.”
Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits corsaires*.

“The ‘little jobs’ that, according to the formula of the former Minister of the Economy, ‘do not deserve to be scornfully rejected’, are the object of numerous suggestions. The ‘friendliness coaches for shopkeepers’ imagined by Fabrice Sergent (Grollier Interactive); the ‘kinesiotherapists who explain to motorists how to sit in their new vehicles’, proposed by René Sylvestre (L’étudiant).... [and] the creation of a business that invents a game to learn how to create a society, proposed by Patrick Zelnick (Virgin France), have provided the outlines of the new jobs that have been engendered, according to other participants, as much by the VTT as by the Internet.”

“Madeline and employers have rescinded the ban on the ‘new jobs’.”
Le Monde, January 1997.

In a context of confrontation in which the working class had to fight above all for its survival, reflection concerning the day after victory was gradually postponed in favor of organizational questions, and then was subjected by Marxism to a veritable prohibition.

The New Prometheus who embodies the loss of humanity crucified in the chains of wage labor, the sovereign possessor of the truth, the herald of the restoration of the golden age, of the end times or the earthly paradise of the first socialists, the industrial proletariat was soon established in the messianic function that scientific socialism, as well as the proletariat itself, reserved for it, dressing up the old millenarian dreams that were always alive in the workers movement in scientific clothing, preventing it from developing the new, creative dimension that it needed to respond to the challenges of the times and the consequences of its own actions.

And even up until quite recently, for '68-style spontaneism any and all plans for the society of the future constituted a veritable attack on the creative genius of the masses.⁸⁰

As Marx said: “They [the working class] know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant”;⁸¹ for Marx, “capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation” (*Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 32).

⁸⁰ It is precisely this tendency that Denis Meuret criticized in 1970, in a journal whose articles are for the most part not at all to our taste, when he asked “if, despite all appearances, with regard to the attitude that we do not want to know what should be done after the revolution (Oh! We must not propose a model, only the masses (?) during the course of their struggle will define it, etc.), might it not also be a religious and ahistorical attitude (it exaggerates the role of the revolution and makes the post-revolutionary period the kingdom of the INEFFABLE)”? Denis Meuret, “Fin du gauchisme”, *Le Semeur*, Series 67-70, No. 6, October 1970.

⁸¹ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*.

And to explain Marx's rapprochement with bourgeois economic science, Karl Korsch invoked the influence of the defeat of the Parisian workers in 1848, the long period of repression that followed, and the necessary development of a workers movement that had finally come of age after "a preceding phase of Utopian illusions and immediate revolutionary attempts". Thus, "Marx's materialistic theory, grounded on firm economic foundations, seemed to point out a new way to the workers, who had now passed the period of their first Utopian enthusiasm and spontaneous aggressive activity. Though this new way might not ensure a quick and easy advance to victory, nor even a direct approach to decisive battles, yet in comparison with the meager chances of the earlier period, it afforded a distinctly better opportunity, nay even a practical certainty of success".⁸² With this viewpoint, the proletariat, the new Christ who was supposed to redeem humanity, must therefore expiate its sins to be reborn; and only when it is martyred by reaction is it in any condition to listen to adult advice.

For Marx, who desired the defeat of France in the war with Prussia in order to force the displacement of the center of gravity of the workers movement from France to Germany, "defeated armies are better learners". The Parisian proletariat responded on March 18, 1871 and suffered one of those bloody defeats that was supposed to have taught it the indirect, but safe, road of historical determinism. But everyone knows about the "materialistic theory, grounded on firm economic foundations" that was supposed to replace the movement that was hamstrung by "Utopian enthusiasm and spontaneous aggressive activity", and how the "decisive battles" actually turned out. The revolution did not take place in either England, or the United States, contrary to his predictions, and, crushed by the "heroic imperatives of a superhuman task",⁸³ the working class would soon thereafter leave its fate to the hands of a caste of politicians, and was subsequently recruited to defend the supposedly soviet republics that were soviet in nothing but name.

At the helm of that first stage after a victorious proletarian revolution, for decades, were the Bolsheviks, who held the key to the transition to a society of happiness. Their power exercised an almost religious hold on immense multitudes and they enjoyed an unparalleled margin of maneuver. But they renounced the world revolution after the defeat of the Spartacists in Germany, and after having crushed the rebellions of Kronstadt and the Ukrainian Makhnovists, the revolutionary socialists and all democracy in the soviets.

Through the Third International, they devoted themselves to "Bolshevizing" the workers parties of the entire world, with well-known consequences: after having exiled Trotsky, who had repressed all the forces

⁸² Korsch evokes Marx's "greater emphasis on economic theory itself, as against a mere critical attack on its philosophical, historical, and practical premises", and he adds: "Just as the tremendous depression and stagnation following the defeat of the Paris workers in 1848 had imposed upon the materialistic investigator a long period of leisure for his ever-expanding, ever-deepening economic studies, so at the same time many revolutionary impulses within the actual workers' movement were forcibly repressed in their genuine practical function.... All those historical changes were reflected in the later development of Marx's revolutionary theory. The social revolution of the proletariat was now mainly represented as a necessary development of society, during which capitalistic production by the working of an inevitable economic law brings forth its negation with the inexorability of a natural process." Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx*.

⁸³ André Prudhommeaux, *La tragedie de Spartacus*, 1934. Republished in *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin*, Ed. Spartacus, 1972.

within the party that might have been able to defend him,⁸⁴ Stalin annihilated the elite of the international communist movement, sacrificed the Spanish revolution to his great power diplomacy and dragged the proletariat down to defeat everywhere, mercilessly eradicating any and all opposition within its ranks.

Much has been written about this tragic fiasco, ranging from the ultra-left to the PCF [French Communist Party] perspective, as well as from the viewpoints of the Trotskyist and “Maoist” cults. But this bloody saga remains a mystery to us! For we are not told anything about the threads with which this tragedy was woven: how were so many revolutionaries taken by surprise, revolutionaries who were not unacquainted with torture, prison, and exile, as much among the ranks of the Bolsheviks as among the anarchists and social revolutionaries, and despite the intelligence and the solid experience they possessed, nevertheless isolated, crushed, or, even worse, integrated by the bloody Stalinist dictatorship?

In any case, there is no rational explanation, and the historical sciences that claim to provide a definitive answer to a drama of this magnitude leave us unsatisfied.

Household appliances

The working class, by means of its struggles, propels the development of the capitalist form that in turn transforms it in such a way that the conditions of its own combat are completely altered. But since the 1930s, in the developed countries, apart from conscious minorities, and with the notable exception of libertarian Spain, the working class has increasingly more explicitly renounced challenging the power of the bourgeoisie. Ever since consumer goods began to be mass-produced, now that advances in productivity are sufficient to allow for the redistribution of some of the profits to the producers, and the most enlightened fractions of the ruling classes now think of wages as an investment and a means of control (and not only as an expense), it appears that the working class, instead of “acquiring consciousness of its possible role as an autonomous force that could be the master of its own fate”⁸⁵ and preparing for the decisive battle, only bestirs itself for the purpose of converting its strategic position in production into money, and delegates the task of negotiating social peace at the highest price to its political and trade union representatives. Now that it is totally dependent on wages for its survival, all its connections with the countryside having been severed, and with all its consumer goods produced at the lowest cost to be sold on the market, its paradoxical victory consists in having acquired civil rights as a class of consumers by imposing its indispensability at the heart of the process of economic expansion, for after World War Two its social conflict became the motor force for growth founded on mass production and no economic policy can be implemented without taking into account and manipulating the working class demand for manufactured goods.

The rising standard of living, especially during the 1960s, access to property and household appliances, the improvement of living conditions, the generalization of credit and the leadership of a Communist Party that knew how to speak the language of order and consumption when necessary, made it possible to maintain the movements for higher wages and better living conditions within the limits assigned by the government development plans.

⁸⁴ Groups like the Workers Opposition and Workers Truth, which considered the NEP to be a return to capitalism, were expelled from the party and some of their members were arrested and deported.

⁸⁵ M. Landry, *La Révolution Proletarienne*, No. 31, New Series, 1949.

As Serge Mallet perceived so accurately, outside of his working time the worker enters a system of values and representations that is no longer working class, and an entire generation obtained access to the new models of behavior and consumption. Imperceptibly, with the capitalist conquest of private life, often experienced as true liberation, with the opportunity of upward mobility and popular trends leading the way, the prospect of exorcising the age-old proletarian curse while avoiding the distress of a violent revolution ended up replacing the quest for collective emancipation whose likelihood was considerably reduced by betrayals, defeats and compromises.⁸⁶ If the class struggle still continues, it is within the system where it finds its points of application, even if it threatens the system's equilibrium. Numerous households of ordinary people therefore perceive the possibility of real upward social mobility for their children in the only way that lies open to them (in view of the failure of revolutions and of all attempts to create an alternative society), that of capitalism, which in the past as well as the present, as we write these lines, is the only existing possibility. And as the Situationist International pointed out, "the old workers' movement failed, not without obtaining enormous results, but not the intended ones".

The urgent need for security that the proletariat inherited from a history of poverty has been transformed into the dream of a kind of happiness obtained through the acquisition of commodities, but the working class of the 1960s had only attained the consumption of second-rate appliances and objects that were specially designed for their use, whose enjoyment was often postponed since the fruits of progress were subject to the laws of the lowest cost and mass production. And that access to commodities (which undoubtedly is not something to be regretted) has contributed to the considerable weakening of the working class by opening up a whole new field of confrontations for which it, unlike the bourgeoisie, was not at all prepared.

Having already been divided into different sectors of producers, the working class now had to experience competition between consumers within its own ranks, which only created new separations, contributing to the further weakening of a class consciousness already led astray by decades of Stalinism. And in the face of this sudden eruption of the consumer market, which was at first aimed at salaried executives, in all aspects of life, confronted by the violence of this mercantile conquest that, in a way, was reminiscent with respect to its invasiveness of the first stages of the industrial revolution in the 19th century, the working class was stabilized and divided, offering only the mildest resistance; and this long battle also produced its casualties.

The commodity that instills the desire of possession acts as a factor of divisiveness as soon as it is possessed, since there are many commodities and many subjects that can enter into competition with each other to dominate them or, even better, to divert them to themselves, but rarely to share them. Consumption, hierarchically stratified, never compensates for the misery experienced by the working class, the frustrations produced by the everyday operations of this society in conditions of brutally modernized survival are transformed into the reserve warehouse of pseudo-needs that are infinitely renewable and for which the advertisers seek to provide the adequate form, and dissatisfaction is transformed into the object of a permanently-managed inflation and exploited by the class that profits from it. But this dissatisfaction would also give rise to new reasons for discontent that would contribute to the explosion of May.

Delenda est

⁸⁶ Olivier Schwartz, *Le monde privé des ouvriers*, PUF, 1990; and J. P. Terrail, *Destins ouvriers, la fin d'une classe*, PUF, 1990.

The Occupations movement that broke out like lightning from a overcast sky, like a paving stone tossed into the quiet pond of those who were complacently lecturing about the integration or the historical failure of the proletariat, and the wildcat strikes of the 1970s, temporarily restored the credit that the working class retained among those who were still devoted to the ideals of socialism.⁸⁷ Although the workers proved in 1968 that they were still the *decisive force that can shut down this society*, they were incapable of asserting themselves as the *indispensable force for reinventing society's foundations*. To the contrary, by going back to work after having obtained some of their demands, they showed just how uninterested they were, as a whole, in the millenarian hopes that the most conscious students, as well as other people from other social classes, sought to make them responsible for realizing. This demonstration of both power and impotence, the confirmation of its capacity to inflict damage combined with its utter lack of any plan, meant the decline and fall of the old working class. The rapid liquidation of its customs and its neighborhoods by urban planning and the advertising industry would only accelerate this trend. And to put an end to the old perceptions of the working class, with its memory and various relations that are heavily inflected by history, to produce the man of tomorrow, totally adapted to the jobs that await him, not only have the conditions of his participation in production been transformed, but so, too, have all the conditions of his life.

A revolution from the right

In 1957, the English sociologist Richard Hoggart explained in *La culture du pauvre* [The Culture of Poverty]⁸⁸ that “the time when one could distinguish at a glance a worker from a member of the middle class has passed ... the recent changes in industrial societies are tending to dispossess the popular classes of the best of their own culture ... the frontiers pertaining to class have a tendency to undergo transformation as the greater part of the members of a modern society have increasingly more objects of cultural consumption in common”. But he thought at the time that “cultural influences only have a very gradual effect on the transformation of attitudes and that they are often neutralized by older forces”, that “the members of the popular classes have not lost their old resistance to external pressure”, and that “they are much less influenced by their cultural consumption than they seem or are claimed to be”.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ In 1968, at the height of the general strike, some individuals sounded a note of caution and recommended that the workerist illusions aroused by the powerful movement of the occupations should be reined in. “We must abandon the idea that only the workers are revolutionaries; that view leads to *attentisme* [waiting for the great day of the proletarian revolution—Spanish translator’s note]”, declared a pamphlet of the time, quoted in Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Journál de la Commune étudiante*, Le Seuil, 1968.

⁸⁸ The book’s original title was *The Uses of Literacy*, originally published in English in 1957. The authors quote the French edition of the book, entitled *La culture du pauvre* (Éditions de Minuit, 1970). The French edition is very different from the original English language edition; I have translated the excerpts from Hoggart from the Spanish translation of the French text, as I could not find corresponding passages in the English language edition I was able to consult [American translator’s note].

⁸⁹ Hoggart added: “What influence can the modern communications industries have on people’s age-old fear of war, on the world of labor, on family relations or friendship, on everyday life and housekeeping, on the relations between neighbors, on the style of entertainment of the small circle of friends and on the feelings that accompany illness, old age, birth or death? (...) Language is practically the same, despite the style of the big newspapers that seems, nonetheless, to disseminate a debased form of the middle class idiom. The original forms of culture still survive, too, like workingmen’s clubs, singing groups, amateur

More than twenty years have passed since Pasolini described the cultural annihilation of the working and peasant classes by the new power, the brutal leveling of behavior on the model of the *petit bourgeoisie*, the total and unconditional adherence to centrally-imposed patterns, the dissemination without any reply of an inter-class mass culture, as well as the vulgarity and neurosis that inevitably accompany these trends.⁹⁰

The real revolution from the right—in which television, the urbanism that makes their own history alien to people, the standardization of the territory, the proliferation of infrastructure projects and the unilateral communication that is organized around access to commodities, would soon destroy the foundations of all class consciousness—raised the individual consumer on a pedestal and brutally remodeled his environment. As the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances* noted in 1985, “the destruction of the working class milieu, that is, of the old practical foundations of an autonomous proletarian confrontation, has been the *Delenda Cartago Est* of all the innovative discourses of technological capitalism for the last twenty years.”⁹¹ And the cultural resistance of the working class has practically collapsed on every front. The world of labor, like that of the family, has been radically transformed, consumer credit has profoundly altered the management of household finances, relations between neighbors have deteriorated terribly, the style of entertainment is almost totally externally imposed by capitalists (computer games, obsessive consumption, “walkmans”...), the original forms of culture have disappeared or only persist as quaint relics, like peasant dances that no longer exist except in folk dancing groups, and the basic attitudes towards marriage and the home have been shattered. As for the sentiments that accompany illness, old age, birth and death, they are the targets of a forced renovation thanks to frozen embryos, the massive dissemination of psychotropic drugs, and even adult education courses for learning how to cope with retirement.⁹²

musical bands, reading old-fashioned magazines, and entertainment organized among friends like darts and dominoes. Nor have the fundamental activities associated with marriage and home life disappeared ... tolerance ... the importance that is conceded to human relations ... the old scepticism and non-conformity ... their immense open-mindedness ... the popular mocking attitude towards the most ridiculous products of advertising or propaganda ... the do-it-yourself attitude ... the importance of backyard gardening ... the interest in birds and animals ... bicycle trips”. Richard Hoggart, *La culture du pauvre*, Éditions de Minuit, 1970 [see note 87 above].

⁹⁰ “But I know, since I see it and experience it, some of the characteristics of this new power that does not even have a face, for example ... its decision to transform peasants and sub-proletarians into *petit bourgeoisie* and, above all, what one may call its cosmic passion to pursue ‘Development’ to its logical conclusion: produce and consume. The robotic visage of this still-vacant face of the new Power lays claim to ‘modern’ traits due to its tolerance and its self-sufficient hedonist ideology, but it also displays ferocious and fundamentally repressive traits: for its tolerance is false and, in reality, there has never been a human being who has been compelled to be as normal and as conformist as the consumer. As for its hedonism, it obviously conceals a decision to arrange everything in advance with a cruelty that is unprecedented in history. This new Power, which still represents no one and which is the result of a ‘mutation’ of the ruling class is, in reality—if we want to remain faithful to the old terminology—a total form of fascism.” Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits corsaires*, Flammarion, 1976.

⁹¹ *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 2, February 1985, p. 36.

⁹² “Inform, take away the drama: that is the purpose of the adult education courses for retirement.” *Courrier des cadres*, November 25, 1994.

More recently, the development of a more varied kind of consumption is beginning to palliate the leveling effects of mass consumption and the obvious frustrations that it engenders, while simultaneously still allowing the exploitation of a saturated market by introducing a touch of arbitrariness for what were previously drastically standardized consumers; from now on, each person is considered as a complete individual, even as a conscious being who must be seduced with dialogue, whose narcissism must be flattered, who must be enclosed and sheltered in the labyrinth of *his desires*, in the limitless particularities of a blind race to distinguish himself that allows him to assert himself today not only by consuming more than the others, but also by consuming *in a different way*. This is why every business must adapt to the *strategies of differentiation* that can be fostered among their customers. After *individualized work-shifts*, the *staggering of vacation days*, and the multiplication of television channels that have contributed to the division, the dispersal and the atomization of the masses of consumers, now we have the reign of *choice*, of the *qualitative*, and of *relational marketing*,⁹³ of *passion*, of *non-conformism*, of ridiculous affectations. One must be liberated, a rebel, a new and discriminating citizen-consumer, but it is the commodity that is the object of this attempt to instill new life, for it must be the sovereign mediation of human relations, now more than ever.

For Gilles Lipovetsky, with whom we are far from totally agreeing with everything he says, “this hedonist society only superficially engenders tolerance and indulgence; in reality, anxiety, uncertainty and frustration have never registered so many advances on so many fronts”.⁹⁴ The rapidly changing objects and scenery always generate an anxious frustration that powerfully contributes to reinforcing the demand for government aid, for compensatory satisfactions and for palliative consumption that require vast mobilizations of effort to produce on a massive scale to maintain the stupor that is required for the consumer, who finds a market of ready-made sensations, images and concepts, of feelings and affects that the market psychologists have crafted expressly for the purpose of selling to him, even subjecting the imagination to this treatment and educating subjectivities that are eager for these prefabricated stimulants that tranquilize by means of buying and spectacles. Who can be surprised that France today leads the world in the consumption of psychotropic drugs? “When the consumers consume, they do so to find peace”, we read in magazine marketed to advertising executives.

This problematic of needs, in which the workers movement has so profoundly gone astray, manipulated by advertising slogans, with their ideology of pleasure and desire, and with an endless series of messages telling the worker to *just be yourself, live and let live, to each his own, be positive*, all accompanied by a

⁹³ “The consumer of the 1970s has seized power. After having analyzed the changes that have taken place over the last twenty years—from the ‘supermarket of happiness’ of the 1970s to the ‘cocooning’ (in English in the original, meaning a retreat into private life) of the 1980s—the author addresses the fractured nature of the 1990s. The retreat to private life is now taking the form of a fortress in which the individual withdraws and organizes his consumption. Mature, discriminating, mistrustful, he decides, he demands, he boycotts. He lays claim to an active role in the polity: consumption is transformed into the act of a citizen. He wants to be heard, understood, taken into account, he seeks to render his consumption moral. To respond to the new trends, the author proposes, by way of relational marketing, an eminently operational management plan. This involves establishing a relation that is above all individualized thanks to a differentiated and personalized focus that recognizes a total market in each consumer.” *Abordez le millénaire dans des bonnes conditions. Le marketing relationnel—a la découverte du conso-acteur*, catalog of Éditions d’Organisation, October 1996.

⁹⁴ Gilles Lipovetsky, *L’ère du vide, essai sur l’individualisme contemporain*, Folio, essays, 1989.

vast auxiliary force of images and arguments that are simultaneously anxiety-producing and indulgent— isn't this the most effective means to implement a plan that consists, no longer in improving, but in transforming man? And this man who accepts himself as he is, without seeking to better himself or improve himself in any way—is he not truly a new man?

Managing dissent

In the early 1970s, before he “left this world”, Jacques Camatte claimed in the journal *Invariance* that Marxism had made the universalization of capitalist production possible, playing the same role that Christianity played in the Roman Empire, that “capital has incorporated the contradiction that once opposed it to wage labor”,⁹⁵ and that the struggles waged on the basis of the old workers movement only served to liquidate the remnants of a world whose death sentence had already been pronounced. Stressing the fact that “the proletariat has never really proposed to create a society that is antagonistic to capital”,⁹⁶ the editors of *Invariance* advanced the hypothesis that the movements of the proletariat only helped to regenerate capital, “just like the peasant revolts in the Asiatic mode of production”,⁹⁷ as if every revolutionary wave forces capitalism to advance, and to proceed from one stage of development to another; and they predicted the *irresistible exhaustion of the revolutionary phenomenon in the West*, since the development of the productive forces has ended up decomposing and cannibalizing humanity and the proletariat itself, whose movement of negation has now come to an end.

Indeed, almost two centuries of constant struggle have not sufficed to forge a conscious class. And contrary to the hopes that so many of us nurtured, the mixture of the peoples of the world has not had major emancipatory effects. The peoples, having lost some of their illusions, have nonetheless failed to acquire the consciousness of a new world that must be constructed. The second proletarian assault on class society, announced by Debord in the *Situationist International* and *The Society of the Spectacle*, has been transformed into an economic crisis, thanks to which the class was defeated without offering a real fight, which allowed the bourgeoisie to take all aspects of life under its control and to place the core of production under the aegis of the anarchic fluctuations of business decisions. Along with the magnificent defeats full of lessons and the destiny of an ineluctable accession to consciousness, engendered by a providential crisis whose first signs are always on the horizon, although waiting in expectation of the great day currently only gives rise to laughter, we must also take the very famous idea of the *school of struggle*, according to which the consciousness of the proletarians will be augmented with each day of struggle until they clearly see the road of their emancipation, and stash it in the attic of dead ideas. This postulate can no longer be accepted today, even though the memory of its struggles is still anchored, fortunately, in the proletariat, despite all the efforts undertaken to make it acknowledge that its past is the same as everyone else's past.

We must recognize that the working class is currently paying the price of its defeats, of all its defeats, and it is a very high price. Conquered on the economic terrain, but also on every front of its cultural domain, eroded by unemployment, permanently on the defensive for several decades, constantly driven from pillar to post by the compulsory acceleration of change, the working class must pass under the Caudine yokes of

⁹⁵ *Invariance*, Series III, No. 1, p. 91, from a letter written in 1971.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Series III, No. 4, p. 5, from a letter written in 1973.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Series III, No. 4.

a unilateral mass communication that constantly demeans and scorns it, broadcast to instill it with a sense of shame for itself and its condition.

Although its numerical importance has been relatively diminished, although its fight has lost much of its evocative symbolic power and the dynamic of class struggles seems insufficient, in our view, to generate, on its own, a movement of social transformation that would be capable of really confronting the demands of our time, and although we must recognize the paralysis, which we hope is only temporary, of a class that is bound to its own needs and which for now hardly seems to want to detach itself from them, we certainly do not indulge in these admissions with the frivolous attitude of those who only just recently proclaimed the historical end of the working class and told it how it can free itself from the dreadful fate that has been imposed on it, nor with the cynicism of those who, not so long ago, manipulated the young working class rebels to send them off to war, to prison or to poverty, and who today, with their smug stupidity, want to make them accept their fate, just as in other times they would have dismissed a bad servant, simply because the working class has not fulfilled the role that, by their mediation, history has assigned to it.

We do not forget that the workers movement has counted among its ranks the best men and women of the proletariat who, despite their faults and shortcomings, participated in the most noble battles of their time. And if the dynamic of these struggles seems to us to be insufficient to generate on its own a movement of social transformation that would be capable of really confronting the demands of our time, it is no less certain that that these class struggles will in the future undergo new developments that will merit all our attention; that the working class, through its struggles, always serves as the motor force of the development of the capitalist form that in turn alters it in such a way that the conditions of its own struggle are totally transformed, and that we will always be on its side, although with open eyes; that nothing, in short, “relieves us of the need to gather, from the mystical and political heritage of proletarian messianism, both all the elements we need to found a more realistic ideology as well as all the moral values that messianism exalted”⁹⁸.

Arguments for those who still support the class struggle

“You must pay attention, a collective will can prevent individual reclassifications.”
Max Mata, Director of Human Resources of the Moulinex corporation

“‘To keep the hierarchy as fully informed as possible concerning the social climate of society’, that is how Jean-Yves Mareau, the director of the social observatory of the SNCF, defines his mission.”

“Social Communication: A Difficult Art”, Le Monde Initiatives, January 29, 1997

In their various attempts to explain the *crisis of Taylorism*—which dominated the attention of a whole generation of labor relations specialists—the mercenary human sciences, whose practitioners are supposed to produce useful results for the employers who pay them, modestly evoked a trend of refusal brought about by the rising cultural level of the youth, or the lack of adaptation of this type of organization to the limited mass production needed to satisfy the new consumer.

⁹⁸ André Prudhommeaux, 1934. Quoted in *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin, 1918/1919*, Spartacus, 1972.

In *Modernisation, mode d'emploi*,⁹⁹ however, Antoine Riboud, CEO of the BSN group¹⁰⁰ and reputed left-wing employer, who is only responsible to his shareholders, did not beat around the bush when he said: “Repetitive tasks and difficult working conditions provide arguments for those who support the class struggle.”

In fact, throughout the 1970s, in France as well as in almost all developed countries, the thirst for freedom aroused by May '68 and the strong desire for liberation from the constraints of the *old world* gave rise to the rejection of all factory discipline, eroding the advances in productivity attained during the previous decade. The wage struggle became more intense, and often took the form of radical protest on the shop-floor itself, and new, more uncontrollable social forces that frequently extended beyond the framework of the traditional, wage- and working conditions-oriented trade unionism joined the struggle. The new working class generation, the product of the Gaullist policy of industrial modernization and decentralization, relatively unfamiliar with professional-occupational ideologies and lacking any expectations of upward mobility, would pose new problems for the employers by rediscovering old practices from the origins of the workers movement: *grèves bouchon*,¹⁰¹ absenteeism and voluntary rotation of positions, occupations, sabotage, hostage-taking.¹⁰² And as a labor relations specialist explained later, “it took the whole period of the 1970s for the employers, the trade unions and the State to become aware of this phenomenon, which was used by the wage workers to challenge the industrial order, and which undermined the effectiveness of the instruments of social regulation that assure the attainment of the enterprises' economic objectives”.¹⁰³

The unexplored dimension

In a text written in 1994,¹⁰⁴ an outstanding exponent of “participatory management” lamented the lack of civic responsibility on the part of the employers and predicted a crisis of the enterprise that would at the same time be a real crisis of society: financial logic undermines industrial rationality, the globalization of the economy disarticulates the development plan, the “France system” is threatened with a loss of internal cohesion and society is collapsing in an epoch of real social regression. On the pretext of productivity, efficiency and strictness, authoritarianism and arbitrariness are gaining ground. “À la carte” layoffs, social “dumping” and the arrogance of the directors of the enterprises are helping to create a real divorce between the enterprise and public opinion; the exclusion of millions of wage workers is becoming a real problem for society, social apathy and insecurity are haunting the enterprise, along with legal abstractions devoid of meaning, governed by the most brutal constraints, accompanied by frivolity, seduction and psycho-affective manipulation.

⁹⁹ Antoine Riboud, *Modernisation, mode de emploi. Rapport au Premier Ministre*, 10/18, 1987.

¹⁰⁰ BSN, a French conglomerate that manufactures yogurt and other foods. Riboud was a left-wing employer, closely associated with the socialist administration. (Note of the Spanish Editor.)

¹⁰¹ *Grèves bouchon* (literally, cork strikes). A strike engaged in by a minority of workers who can stop a whole assembly line because of their strategic location on the line. (Note of the Spanish editor.)

¹⁰² Baudoin et Michèle Collin, *Le contournement des forteresses ouvrières*, Librairie des Méridiens, 1983.

¹⁰³ J. Brunel et al., *Le triangle de l'entreprise*, Glysi, 1985. Quoted by Philippe Bernoux in *L'entreprise, une affaire de société*, edited by Reanud Sansaulieu, Presse de Sciences Politiques, 1990.

¹⁰⁴ Bernard Galambaud, *Une nouvelle configuration humaine de l'entreprise, le social désesparé*, ESF, 1994.

Antoine Riboud explains that “productive activity on the part of the workers is only effective and profitable if it takes full advantage of all productive potential and for this it needs all the potential of the workers: their resolve, their imagination, their autonomy, their responsibility, and their adaptability”. These characteristics are entirely inconsistent with the industrial ethic that has prevailed until now, as illustrated by the message conveyed by Charles Taylor to his workers: “You are not here to think.” That is, for some time now the enterprise has not been content with the grudging participation of the workers, and the traditional forms of the scientific organization of labor, which are only useful for the exhaustion of the physical and nervous powers of the workers and are opposed by their insubordination and the limits of the division of labor, must be superseded now that what is needed is the *exploitation of man in his totality*. This is why the *New Policy on Industrial Relations*, informed by mercenary sociology, has explored, documented and taken possession of an inopportunistly overlooked dimension, that of the imagination, the inventiveness and the willing cooperation of labor.

The formation of discussion groups or *quality circles* has made it possible to bypass the trade unions, providing more accurate knowledge of the process of production and inculcating the technical training in the worker that serves the technical order. The sociologist Jean Gautrat therefore explains how the freedom of speech granted in the Auroux legislation of 1981,¹⁰⁵ far from encouraging the expression of subversive demands for higher wages and better working conditions, has to the contrary made possible the creation of consensus, “more tightly fastening the hierarchical bonds between the rank and file and their managers by fostering debates on topics related to their productive activity”, enhancing the power of the managers, “not as representatives of power, but as representatives of technical competence... Technical culture is invading the enterprise and society” and “we are witnessing the emergence of a new agent of change, the technician/morale-booster manager whose role is to introduce the operator to the universe of technology by way of democratic procedures of encouragement, creating community spaces where cooperation is facilitated and where his intelligence can be integrated ... a gradually introduced democracy grows by leaving no opportunities at the present time for other forces (which, for the time being, do not exist) that would challenge the technical logic of the enterprise”.¹⁰⁶

According to the Centre Technique Internationale de l’Hygiène Propreté, an employers’ association devoted to promoting technological innovation in the healthcare sector,¹⁰⁷ “seldom do technical discussions give rise to polemics. To the contrary, technology is generally a source of positive communication”.

Mobilizing bodies and souls for the new battles of innovation, “total quality”,¹⁰⁸ and *just-in-time* production, *community enterprise*, *participatory management* and *the managerial model of persuasion* and

¹⁰⁵ *Lois Auroux*, named for the Minister of Labor in the first socialist government. A set of laws that confer relative provisions to workers’ expression in the workplace and which take into consideration new rights for the enterprise committee. Welcomed as a major advance, they actually allow for the suppression of conflicts and make the workers collaborate in their own exploitation by requiring that they express their views on working conditions and the production process. In this sense, they are a milestone with respect to encouraging and establishing a legal framework for the new participatory methods of personnel management. (Note of the Spanish editor.)

¹⁰⁶ *L’entreprise, une affaire de société*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ Fédération des Entreprises de Propreté.

*mobilization through culture*¹⁰⁹ are oriented toward “federating the behavior of the wage workers, mobilizing their energy for a common project, integrating their attitudes within a system of values” in order to “create a situation where the goals of the enterprise become the common task to be carried out, and the spirit of cooperation and commitment prevail”.¹¹⁰ Their purpose is to immunize the world of labor by placing constraints on the workers in such a way that they do not take any action that is not oriented towards competing with one another in the production of profits, implying a veritable symbolic annihilation of the working class. The dream of the pacified workplace currently utilizes, in a different way, the powerful weapons of corporativism and profit-sharing. Because progress with regard to technological innovation has always served to disrupt the relation of forces to the detriment of the wage workers, the most elaborate project to put an end to class conflict once and for all is henceforth based on the formidable progress attained by science and technology. The constant technological innovation deliberately utilized to continually revolutionize labor relations and the process of production has become the supreme weapon for the preservation of order in the factory and in society. “The introduction of new technologies implies a powerful personal investment of the wage workers in their labor”, as Antoine Riboud explains. “We must mobilize the worker for the economic battle.... We must organize for permanent innovation.... Technological change has no importance in and of itself; it has importance as a moment: *the moment when everything can change, and not just technology*”.¹¹¹

The employers have come to understand that accelerated change in the enterprise, apparently generated in the past by growth and the opening up of new markets, can be controlled to create consensus and motivation,¹¹² so that henceforth a relation of force that would be favorable to the worker can never crystallize in the now-transparent workshops and offices, in order to prohibit the constitution in the enterprise of a collective that is conscious of having interests that are in conflict with those of the management. Whereas Riboud, an employer himself, thinks that it is necessary to consider social questions in association with technical questions, Renaud Sainsaulieu, the mercenary sociologist of change, thinks that it is necessary to consider cultural questions in association with organizational questions and create everywhere “the social and cultural dynamic of the relations of production ... necessary for upholding the constraints of permanent change”, so that his ideal enterprise, “capable of undergoing changes that it controls itself”, imposes itself as the unsurpassable horizon of human association; overlooking the fact, perhaps, that sometimes people get together for other ends than the accumulation of monetary signs.

¹⁰⁸ “Total quality demands a commitment on the part of the management and the hierarchy, everyone’s support and rational planning, and implies everyone’s participation at every level”, as a manual for managers explains.

¹⁰⁹ *L’entreprise, une affaire de société*, edited by Renaud Sainsaulieu, Presse de Sciences Politiques, 1990.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Galambaud, *Une nouvelle configuration humaine de l’entreprise, le social désemparé*, ESF, 1994.

¹¹¹ The italics are the authors’. (Spanish translator’s note.)

¹¹² According to Riboud, “the importance of obtaining consensus can never be emphasized enough”, and the information that “is a factor of organization of the mechanisms of command and representation of the wage workers” allows for “the facilitation of the knowledge of the functional mechanisms of restrictions and the outlook for the enterprise” so that “they feel more concerned, the wage workers become more like active agents and seek on their own initiative to improve the efficiency of their labor, the optimal function of the machinery on the shop floor, and therefore of the enterprise”. Thus, “the motivation of the men is the condition *sine qua non* for efficiency and profitability”.

The implications of this new model extend far beyond the world of production, if we are to believe the sociologist Eugène Enriquez, for whom, provided that “it is at the same time a community ... that is, a place where conflicts concerning fundamental questions never take place, and the conflicts that do take place are reasonable, the enterprise produces, constructs, and transforms society and necessarily introduces new models, not only of production and of *consumption*, but also of the *elaboration of thought and of the treatment of emotions*”.¹¹³

Men made for the enterprise

If the enterprise of the past was made of men, the men of our time are made for the enterprise. This is why historically-constituted professional or occupational communities have had to disappear, for they were all-too-prone to develop counter-powers, they were too opaque to the planners of the “social observatories”, they were undoubtedly even too human, and irreducible, for the new enterprise. And a whole model of labor relations has been destroyed on the threshold of a new world in which the workers are only supposed to maintain functional relations among themselves that have been programmed by the managers and which only inspire them with the life of things that is instilled in them by capital, so that they can be reorganized, dispersed or relocated according to the pink slip and the movements of capital.

Christian Marazzi¹¹⁴ calls attention to the *rebirth of slavery* that is being superimposed upon the shackles of *post-Fordism* and is spreading everywhere for the purpose of allowing the *lean and mean enterprise* to survive in saturated markets where all economy of scale is from now on barred. In this minimalist and transitional organization where only what has already been sold is produced, which constantly adapts to the changing demands of the consumer, continually surveying even the smallest desires that inspire the latter, *communication* has become a total productive factor. And on the *talking chain*, where it is customer demand that drives the process from the bottom up, it is jobs that are displayed in the shop window and the worker, flexible and polyvalent, must learn to communicate in such a way that “all the circulating information can be grasped at the right time”. Now the worker can express himself, whereas not so long ago he was forbidden to speak, and he must speak under the penalty of being dismissed, but he must only speak the techno-commercial language that the cheerleaders of human resources inculcate in him, which must contribute to the efficiency of production.

This is why “most of the technological and organizational innovations that are currently being implemented are accompanied by economic and commercial training given to all the agents of production. As valid in the East as in the West, this expansion of the economic consciousness of the producers opens up a new era in the life of the enterprises, entailing extremes of social fragmentation and inequality among the different agents of production who are currently perceived as counter-productive”.

The policy of training, recycling and reinsertion

If capital is currently unable to avoid the tendency to expel labor power en masse from the production process this is undoubtedly because the advantages that are thus obtained in terms of the relations of force are too necessary to renounce. For it is not clear how the policies of wage cuts and subjection to the

¹¹³ Eugène Enriquez, *op. cit.* The italics are the authors'. (Spanish translator's note.)

¹¹⁴ Christian Marazzi, *La place des chaussettes (le tournant linguistique de l'économie et ses conséquences politiques)*, l'Éclat, 1997.

enterprise can be implemented without the threat of unemployment that is suspended over the heads of the wage workers. And it is easy to understand why the politicians are so unconcerned with resolving this problem, insofar as they are aware of the immense advantages that accrue to the employers, and in the meanwhile, we are beginning to hear from authorized spokespersons who are predicting a return to full employment within the next twenty years due to the simple fact of demographic trends and a hypothetical resumption of growth, albeit moderate growth.¹¹⁵

On the pretext of adaptation to the new technologies, but above all with the excuse of the struggle against exclusion, for the alleged purpose of social reinsertion, there are many people who have to be reeducated and retrained, since unemployment has thrown whole sectors of the working class into a vast process of retraining and adaptation to the totally unprecedented conditions of their new jobs, a process that is still underway, because job openings must undergo constant restructuring in response to the constantly changing demands of the employers. The decomposition of working class culture, and the destruction of the sites of collective memory that made its transmission possible, now accompany the entry of the workers into the mechanism of continuous training whose explicit or implicit values are devoted to accelerating this process of defeat and have become a formidable instrument of selection, surveillance and control.¹¹⁶

In 1996, in its guide to “courses for reinsertion into the workforce and job training”, the Department of Labor Management, of the Paris Occupational and Job Training Center, candidly explains that the privileged candidates for the least secure and most fragmented jobs are unfortunately the least prepared to deal with the constraints of these positions, and that the training institutions financed by State subsidies must incorporate training in how to live on part-time and temporary jobs in the programs of their courses.¹¹⁷ The prolix André Gorz, who still believes in “the liberating potentials of technological change”, invites the working class (along with all other retrograde forces) to remedy its backwardness in relation to “the evolution of attitudes”, that is, to adopt without delay the lifestyle and the aspirations of the “insubordinate, the revolutionaries and resisters, the obscure heroes of the world of part-time and temporary employment” who are currently emancipating themselves and who “preserve the maximum

¹¹⁵ Jean Boissannat, “La fin du chômage en l’an 2000”, *Le Monde*, March 4, 1999.

¹¹⁶ In his book, *Études et expérimentations en formation continue*, Claude Dubar claims that “the task of the training program in the enterprise increasingly consists in breaking down the old identities and rebuilding, in turn, new identities, the foundations of a new social sense of belonging”. And we could provide many quotations of this type, which reveal the extravagant pretensions of these people.

¹¹⁷ “The constraint of flexibility now primarily affects all sectors, the enterprises are tending to generalize a type of employment policy that gives rise to an increase in part-time jobs, short-term contract employment, fragmented jobs, and a large variety of occupational regulations. What is obvious with regard to these kinds of jobs is the fact that, often, except for executives, those who are least prepared to efficiently deal with all the constraints that these positions entail, and who are least capable of dealing with the precarious conditions that they imply, are the people who must resort to such employment. The training institutions must take this reality into account and prepare the job-seekers for positively dealing with these constraints that arise from the transformation of productive organizations and human resource departments into organizations in which the positive rights of labor and of social protection are still insufficient. This applies, in particular, to assistance for job-seekers who face the greatest difficulties in integrating in their training for professional reinsertion with special training for flexibility and constant professional adaptation....”

amount of time to cultivate the favorite activities of their tribe” as well as “their abnormality, their desire, their deviance, and their unpredictability”.¹¹⁸

After a period of *adjustment* during which workers learn to deal with the fate of their old jobs and of everything that disappeared along with them (status, pride, a feeling of belonging, a regular wage...), and then different periods of training courses largely consisting in learning how to present oneself, they will be allowed to develop a rational and managerial relation to their time, their bodies, and their environments, and learn to behave like service providers, constituting their *networks*, managing their *portfolios*, preparing themselves in advance, even before they are hired, for their eventual dismissal, in order to become more familiar with the conditions of their new *insertion* and to become more amenable to the new demands of the employers.

The most efficient candidates work constantly on their own reinsertion against the increasingly more powerful centripetal forces that combine to eject them from the workforce, and they maintain themselves in *a state of readiness to be contracted*. For the others, they have to be available for any use, regardless of its nature, at any price, and to be at the disposal of all employers, as Marx had foreseen.¹¹⁹ These are the characteristics that they want to impress upon the surplus human resource, which must furthermore learn to *sell itself*, according to the horrible expression that is currently such a widespread cliché. With enough *sessions*, each *job-seeker* will therefore learn how to compete with the other job-seekers by displaying the advantages of his personal aptitude to be employed, and will have to rid himself of all the superfluous traits of his character, and learn to *communicate* in the impoverished language imposed by power, reconstruct a personality and a *look* and prove his ability to work immediately in the uninterrupted production of appearances. We therefore witness the rise of a veritable Brownian motion of hundreds of thousands of unemployed people who have been trained in the marketing of their own persons, bumping into one enterprise after another, each looking out for himself and in competition with everyone else, and everywhere encountering *those who have been excluded and are on the road to reinsertion* who have learned to live and to present themselves in the language that has been taught to them by psychologists and social workers.

Ideally, the new man must “be strong enough to exist outside of a permanent framework and must be able to deal with the constant management of uncertainty”,¹²⁰ accustoming himself to employment that has exploded into “islands of labor with variable borders”,¹²¹ floating in a more or less virtual or diffuse *entity of labor*, evolving in an environment in perpetual change, in “a polycellular structure”,¹²² or even a *matrix*, “an essentially self-organized entrepreneurial grouping” in which “one does not perform a job because the employer has requested or ordered you to do so, but because you agree that it should be done right”¹²³ (which, we can all agree, is the wet dream of every manager).¹²⁴ His remuneration, calculated according to

¹¹⁸ André Gorz, *Misère du présent, richesse du possible*, Galilée, 1997.

¹¹⁹ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*.

¹²⁰ *Le Monde Initiatives*, March 1995, “Les métamorphoses du travail”.

¹²¹ P. Bardelli, *Le modèle de production flexible*, PUF, 1997.

¹²² Hugues de Juvenel, “Vers de nouvelles formes d’emploi”, *Le Monde Initiatives*, June 26, 1996.

¹²³ Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants d’Entreprise, *L’entreprise au XXI siècle*, Flammarion, 1996.

¹²⁴ Philippe Hosti, the “young human resources director” of a Moulinex factory, “thinks the personnel at his factory are very decent. Each day they produce four thousand eight hundred deep fryers, a good quota of

the objectives fulfilled, will undoubtedly be equally virtual, unless he is a member of the élite that is “permanently connected to the circuits of information transmitted from all over the planet”,¹²⁵ an élite that is still capable of arousing fascination—much more, in any case, than the decomposed party of social revolution.

Now that the borders of the enterprise have been abolished, it has likewise been decreed that there are no longer any limits to our availability for work, thus “putting an end to the compartmentalization of our lives: labor on the one side, private life on the other”¹²⁶ (which, in a completely contrary sense, was one of the aspirations of May ’68), so that all of our time and every dimension of our lives must coincide with the production of profit. And potentially infinite domains are opened up to the principle of exploitation that was in the past sequestered in the economic sphere, which is now democratized and extended to all human relations, since each person must be the entrepreneur of his own person, the manager of his professional resources, the promoter of his mercantile passions; everyone is called upon to rationally exploit their *resources*, their relations, their environment. Thus, “what matters now is social qualification, the quality of the connections that we are capable of developing with others, the capacity for autonomy, for taking risks, for investing desire in our work. All of this enhances our qualifications and is productive of wealth”, as Henry Vaquin, of the Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants, explains.¹²⁷

At the same time that the worker is instructed on the subject of tolerance, the bourgeoisie, sufficiently sure of itself, also seeks to recognize this world as the fruit of its own labors, to compel the worker to collaborate more diligently for its perfection, contributing all its grey matter, its inventiveness, its imagination, and not only its skill, its physical force and its practical intelligence, to force the worker to look at the world, in brief, with sober eyes, *not in order to plunge it into disorder* (haven’t all the attempts of that kind failed?), *but to permanently accommodate himself to it*. Everyone agrees: we have to “create the foundation for a caring society”,¹²⁸ for a social change that will see the old working class in part separated from the function of production (which is diminishing in importance in the enterprise and in society) and reduced in numbers so that the workers will become supernumerary figures, expropriated of all legitimacy, struck down by symbolic annihilation and presently posing more problems as consumers than as producers.

The Italian revolutionary Giorgio Cesarano pointed out in 1974 that “only by increasing the production of immaterial goods can capital hope to escape unscathed from the resource crisis—the limited nature of

yield/quality. He would never say that the factory is going to shut down. Anti-depressants play a role, as Françoise, one of the workers at the factory, points out”, quoted in *Le Monde Initiatives*....

¹²⁵ Jacques Attali, *Dictionnaire du XXI siècle*, Fayard, 1998.

¹²⁶ “... On the other hand, labor is abandoning those places that were once devoted to it, factories, offices, warehouses and stores, in order to penetrate those places that were ‘outside the workplace’—in the author’s words. Thanks to the telephone, the personal computer, the modem, the mobile phone, the Internet, neither the street, nor the beach, nor the restaurant, nor the hotel room, nor the car, nor the home, nor the conjugal bed escape being workplaces....” From a review of a book by Charles Goldfinger, by Philippe Simonnot, *Le Monde*, September 18, 1998.

¹²⁷ Henry Vaquin, *Construire le travail de demain, 5 tabous au coeur de l’actualité*, Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants d’Entreprise, Éditions de l’Organisation, Collection “L’entreprise citoyenne”, 1995.

¹²⁸ Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, Putnam Publishing Group, 1995.

energy resources and the saturation of the planet by wastes— ... it is the reversal of the current trend that enters into play in the conjunctural crises”, and the enterprise at end of this century, which is endeavoring to economize on natural resources and to be respectful of the environment, is devoted to the production and manipulation of information. Of course, although there are some workers employed in the demolition of factories where at one time workers who were paid four times as much were employed,¹²⁹ and remediation projects, like all efforts devoted to cleaning up the disorders produced by the normal functioning of society (removal of asbestos and decommissioning nuclear power plants, for example), are becoming very promising markets. But the new, so-called *job-creating*, activities¹³⁰ basically involve taking care of and watching over human beings by way of all kinds of *personal services*, for wherever sociability has been dissolved by urbanism, television and the personal automobile, commodity relations have been installed; in the fields of social control, security and surveillance, as if it was not enough to propagate extremely dangerous technologies, everything is oriented towards the creation of irresponsible beings who only see other people as competitors, enemies or pests; in the fields of communication and information, since everything would go to hell if there were not numerous professionals permanently devoted to weaving the web of illusion and consensus by means of images, noise, and all kinds of stimulants that are alternately shocking, seductive or tranquilizing, the whole show would come to a grinding halt if *the qualified personnel of the spectacle, always ready to erect the walls of isolation*,¹³¹ did not keep the information highways permanently open.

The jobs of the future will therefore be jobs whose purpose will be maintaining order or social regulation, and soon enough half the population can be employed in watching, caring for, guiding, training and informing the other half. The production of consent and consensus, and therefore the production of social order: such appears to be the goal of this organization of the third millennium, the goal that justifies all the others, the one that gives “meaning” to its wage workers. For *meaning* sells and arouses support, reinforces motivation, stimulates investment. Upon the ruins of sociabilities that have been persecuted everywhere, and in order to build on the ashes of class consciousness, it is necessary to respond to the need of the wage workers “to exist in a universe of labor whose meaning has changed”, as Bernard Lairre, president of a certain Association Nationale des Directeurs et Cadres de la Fonction Personnel.¹³² “In the face of uncertainty, leaders must speak up”, Michel Antoine, director of social relations for IBM, also says. “We must provide meaning. To announce, for example, that our priority in 1997 is to increase sales in France”.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ See, for example the article by Bruno Perret, the director of l’Insee [National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies], in *Libération*, August 4, 1997.

¹³¹ P. Beaufile and P. Locuratolo, *Apologie de Jacques Bonhomme*, Paris, 1975.

¹³² For Bernard Lairre, president of ANDCP (National Association of Personnel Directors and Executives), “when enterprises are functionally chaotic, capital often changes hands, there is no question of developing the feeling of belonging to a permanent and stable structure in the wage force.... Instead, it is a question of responding to its need to exist in a universe of work that is charged with meaning; of uniting the dispersed members of an economically precarious collectivity, one that has been shattered, around some great unifying symbols that are evocative of the culture of their trade, of the characteristics of their economic activity.... For specialists in construction, you should touch the core of construction workers, for the specialists in energy you should make them feel valuable by way of their contribution to economic activity”. *Le Monde Initiatives*, January 29, 1999, “To Speak Despite the Uncertainty of the Future—It Is Hard to Mobilize Personnel for an Unpredictable Future”.

But the most difficult problems posed by the management of human resources are far from being resolved, although the formidable shift in the relations of force imposed by mass unemployment allows various responses. How is it possible for a job that is much more restrictive to be performed more autonomously? How should we go about effectively regulating the cultural training in the enterprise of those who are in competition with one another, without harming the objectives of the organization? How can we obtain from the wage workers subjected to the most precarious situation the same degree of involvement with and commitment to the enterprise and its project as is characteristic of those who have provisionally entered the circle of its full-time *collaborators*? How can we guarantee the loyalty of a workforce that has been lacerated and often demoralized by layoffs? How can we maintain such an unfair social peace while avoiding deadly anomie and uncontrollable outbursts of rage? How can we prevent the deterioration of an increasingly larger number of “long-term” unemployed persons, excluded not just from the labor force but also from consumption? The game is far from over, as long as the greater autonomy conferred or imposed upon the wage labor force is accompanied by more drastic restrictions with respect to its *results*, and as long as, despite the *change of civilization*, Taylorism has not disappeared;¹³³ to the contrary, it has been introduced into spheres that had up until recently been exempt from its purview: skilled work, office jobs, including those involving hiring, services, teaching, job training, etc. Thus, as Guillaume Durand reveals in a recent work devoted to the most recent developments in the organization of labor,¹³⁴ generalized information, *just-in-time production*, and the international imposition of *quality norms* impose an unprecedented Taylorization on all the activities of the enterprise and its organization as a whole.

From now on, “a housekeeper must clean a hotel room in twelve minutes in accordance with a plan of fifty four operations”,¹³⁵ and in “Formula 1” hotels, which are the fast-food versions of the hotel industry, manufactured in a factory before being assembled at their building sites, “by means of successive improvements, the time devoted to each room has fallen from ten to six minutes”.¹³⁶

Awkward and urgent problems that reality will force us to confront sooner or later

The comfortable theory of alienation

¹³³ “One minute and twenty three seconds. That is the how much time passes between the arrival and the departure of a Scenic at one station on the assembly line. During this period of time, an operative is only really ‘engaged’ for between 84% and 86% of the time. That is, he is only really effectively working for 63 out of 73 seconds. In the language of Renault, those ten remaining seconds represent a ‘PE’, a ‘loss of engagement’. To reduce the ‘PE’ is to increase production. Last Monday, for the fourth time since September, the ‘PE’ fell by three seconds. This represents ten extra vehicles per day. In three weeks, it should fall by five seconds. From now to the end of March, it will exceed one minute and ten seconds. Therefore, the ‘PE’ will approach 0%. Seventy seconds without down time.” *L’hebdo de l’actualité sociale*, January 1997.

¹³⁴ Guillaume Durand, *L’entreprise efficace à l’heure de Swatch et de MacDonald, la seconde vie due taylorisme*, Syros, alternatives économiques, 1998.

¹³⁵ *Le Monde*.

¹³⁶ *Courrier des Cadres*.

“We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a new Community in his waistcoat pocket.”

Letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Thomas Carlyle, October 30, 1840. Quoted by André Reszler, *Mythes politiques modernes*

“So great is the fear people have, even among the most conventional, for things they have never seen, thoughts they have never thought, and institutions they never experienced before.”

Hannah Arendt, *Le système totalitaire*

“He told us that when he was young, during the great depression, people used to read because they had nothing better to do, because it was not expensive and it was warm in the libraries, and that people continued to talk about what they had read on the sidewalks, after the libraries closed; he thought that this would go on forever, but it did not.”

“Saul Bellow et la mort”, *Le Monde*, 1997

Karl Liebknecht, blinded by the mystical aura of the end times, proclaimed in his last known work, in January 1919, shortly before he was struck down by the bullets of his assassins: “For the primitive, elemental forces of the social revolution, whose irresistible growth constitutes the vital law of social development, defeat signifies: stimulus. And from defeat to defeat, its road leads to victory.”¹³⁷

With a martyr’s romanticism,¹³⁸ *the comfortable theory of alienation* allows a good number of revolutionaries to justify the disappointments that history has inflicted on them. Thus, the proletariat is always on the road to *disalienation*, and, just as for Catholics the sinner is on the road to redemption, the language of revolution is necessarily the language of the proletariat, and the absolutions with which its poor avatars are gratified have served for centuries as the cornerstone of a self-interested and repetitive militantism, revitalized during the last few decades with the apology for dialogue and listening, where we find the naive and smug priests of every denomination.

¹³⁷ Along the same lines, Rosa Luxemburg wrote: “What does the entire history of socialism and of all modern revolutions show us? The first spark of class struggle in Europe, the revolt of the silk weavers in Lyon in 1831, ended with a heavy defeat; the Chartist movement in Britain ended in defeat; the uprising of the Parisian proletariat in the June days of 1848 ended with a crushing defeat; and the Paris commune ended with a terrible defeat. The whole road of socialism—so far as revolutionary struggles are concerned—is paved with nothing but thunderous defeats. Yet, at the same time, history marches inexorably, step by step, toward final victory! Where would we be today *without* those ‘defeats’, from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism? Today, as we advance into the final battle of the proletarian class war, we stand on the foundation of those very defeats; and we cannot do without *any* of them, because each one contributes to our strength and understanding.” “Order Reigns in Berlin”, January 14, 1919; republished in 1972 by Éditions Spartacus in *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin 1918-1919*.

¹³⁸ Even today, the revolutionaries who are held in the highest esteem are the ones who sacrificed themselves, and this is one of the reasons for the unexpected success of Ken Loach’s beautiful film, “Land and Freedom”, as well as the recurrent fascination with Che, alternating between conformist complacency and a real nostalgia for the greatness of his fate.

If the proletarians love sports, video games or the company they work for more than they love the revolution, it is because they are alienated, because they do not know what they are doing, because they do not know the real reasons for their actions, “the world that is already present in their actions”.¹³⁹ If they march in vast numbers to celebrate France’s World Cup victory, to attend the funeral of Princess Diana or to protest against political corruption, it is because they are protesting in a confused way against capitalist globalization, as a leftist newspaper suggests.¹⁴⁰ And, just as for Cardinal Lustiger young people are searching for God without knowing it, in the language of the situationists, if the proletariat has not attained *the consciousness of its revolutionary mission*, this is because *it has not yet experienced the totality of its misery*, if the workers *persist in their non-existence* this is because *they do not know how to communicate the truth of their acts*. We could provide examples of such statements *ad nauseum*.

However, as some anarchists proved at the end of the 19th century, this world of injustice cannot endure without the passivity, the consent or the active participation of a significant proportion of its victims. And this participation is currently more conscious than ever. The generalization of secondary education—despite its defects—the abundance of information, the widely disseminated images from all over the world, the accumulated results of the social sciences made available to everyone who wants to set aside the time and make the effort to educate themselves, prevent us from blaming ignorance to justify the passivity of the populations in Europe and the other developed countries.

Contrary to the selfish demagogy that made such continuous progress during the whole 20th century and which discredited and slandered what it called *educationism*, some revolutionaries did not hesitate to demand of the working class that it should rise to the occasion of the mission that had been assigned to it to take into its hands the fate of all of society. Political clubs, workers schools, fraternal societies, trade unions, cultural centers and production cooperatives were supposed to contribute to this goal. However, why go to so much trouble if the laws of historical materialism have condemned the bourgeoisie, if the working class as a whole must inherit power like a ripe fruit, if the proletariat is only waiting for a providential upheaval to cast aside the mask of its alienation and reveal its true nature as free and sovereign humanity, if the new society must ineluctably be born? Why go to so much trouble, if one can participate in

¹³⁹ “Our era sees it developing, and will see this tendency spread to all the institutions and aspects of the prevailing way of life.... Many people have a vague feeling that we are experiencing the end of a world, although they do not know what is coming; the movement did not have the power to make its content visible and to affirm its perspectives. The revolution was still concealed behind capitalism. Those who are less and less willing to support capitalist barbarism must discover what it is that they aspire to: the world that is the bearer of revolt, the world that is coming....” *King Kong International*, 1976.

¹⁴⁰ “In a period in which the perspective of a radical transformation of society is receding, in which the models that have so long served to structure progressive thought have collapsed, the traditional left has prosaically adapted itself to managing a society that is increasingly less egalitarian, in which political representation is undergoing a profound crisis, events as different as the World Cup in France, the death of a princess in conflict with the British Crown, and even the corruption of a regime revealed by pedophile criminality in Belgium, can become the pretexts for mass demonstrations.... And if, during the course of one week, it is by way of football that they manifest an immense popular euphoria, it is because the history of this sport coincides with another history by way of which the proletariat affirms itself as a class since the end of the last century.... the event makes one think of an act of resistance that is deaf to the globalization of the financial markets, characterized as intangible and outside the reach of the people.” *Rouge*, the newspaper of the Communist League, July 16, 1998.

the revolution to satisfy one's ambitions and continue to be a tyrannical husband, a bad father, an execrable neighbor and mentally lazy, if one no longer considers it an honor to be admitted to a proletarian party that does not demand any self-improvement, not even a little?

In view of the hostility with which proletarians have so often greeted the vanguards that tried to bring them consciousness and the means for their emancipation, we might ask ourselves whether proletarians do not harbor some kind of obscure resentment against those who propose that they embrace a freedom and a responsibility that many of them have absolutely no desire to assume; we might ask ourselves whether now is the time to reconsider the high esteem in which the masses have been held by the revolutionaries of the past, whether proletarians will always have to accept the responsibility that revolutionaries wanted to foist upon them, and to what extent we should just accept the fact of their sovereign irresponsibility, so cleverly exploited by manipulators of every stripe, including those of the extreme left and even the anarchists, an irresponsibility that is largely satisfied by mass consumption.

Instead of tirelessly reconstructing reality in order to make it correspond to our desires, as noble as they may be, perhaps it would be better for anyone who claims to be a revolutionary to ask himself each morning, without beating around the bush: what can I *really* undertake with the first person I come across? With whom, in brief, am I eager to take risks, to live or to die, to construct or to share the world?

What value can we grant to the articles of faith of socialism, directly descended as they are from the “noble savage” of the Enlightenment (and still present in the spirit of May), which assume the innocence of the human being, perverted by society, and the desire for freedom that is expressed by each and every person if only he is given the opportunity to do so? What “remains humanly valid in the hope that we, with Liebknecht and Luxemburg, placed in the Proletarian Revolution ... what faith can the workers have in the collective responsibility of their own class?”, as Prudhommeaux asked in 1948, in *La tragédie de Spartacus*.¹⁴¹ What will replace the lure of personal gain and the taste for success, potent foundations of the current order of things which cannot suddenly disappear, as if by a miracle? What will replace money, the essential power over life? For as detestable as the passions that it inspires are, it is, nonetheless, the way we live and die, it calls the tune in Calcutta as on Wall Street, and for the greater part of humanity, it is *the only thing that really exists*, and is often as strong as the gods, since all human passions are in thrall to it. The game of winning or losing, which has ruled the world for millennia—does it still exist solely because men are always prisoners of the passional forces that this power harbors and which, every time it is manifested in their lives, subjects them to the heavy burden of contingent history, by way of which chance affirms itself like an order that liberates man from the weight of free will that the progress of the human species imposes on him and which the triumphant revolution will impose on him with even greater force? Will it be necessary to commit ourselves to building life itself? Otherwise, why work for the revolution?

There are many difficult questions that we must urgently face; but it is precisely because they are painful that it is necessary to plumb their depths more thoroughly. To paraphrase the anarchist Gustav Landauer, we are convinced that now or at any other time anyone who wants to carry out a radical transformation will not find, at first, anything to transform other than what he has right before him. And the easy answers, of the *we'll see when the time comes*, or *the revolution will provide the solution* variety, will be of very little help.

¹⁴¹ André Prudhommeaux, “La tragédie de Spartacus”, in *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin, 1918-1919*; republished by Éditions Spartacus in 1972.

For a conclusion without an end

“On the paths where I shed my blood, new truths will someday be discovered.”

Antonin Artaud

“We must really get to work, really understand that reorientation will not fall from the sky, which implies, within favorable changing conditions, a double shedding: the shedding of the domination of a single kind of thinking under its circular aspects, and the shedding of the routines of thought inherited from the past, transformed due to the lack of a new task into variants of that same kind of circular thinking.”

André Prudhommeaux

Capitalism seems to us to be ineluctably condemned because it cannot resolve any of the crucial problems of humanity, because now it even threatens the survival of the species, but also because, for two centuries, all the best and most noble traits that humanity possesses have risen up against it.

Although we do not hesitate to question the legacy of the revolutionary movements of the last two centuries, and although the means that up until now have been chosen to bring about a better society must be questioned, as well as the central role acquired by violence as the main instrument of social transformation, taking into account the monstrous detours that history has shown us and the extraordinary development of the means of destruction concentrated in the hands of our enemies,¹⁴² there is nothing that can convince us to cast aside all hope, nothing inclines us to renounce the hopes that people have placed at all times in revolutions, nothing diminishes, in our view, the dramatic and awe-inspiring dimension of life and death of the revolutionaries, the heroism of the Communards, the appeal that roused the Spartacists, the living legend of the Iron Column.

Nothing allows us to reconcile ourselves with a universe in which the virtual image will soon permit the reconstruction of all thought by reserving historical truth to an elite, and will make the photographic ingenuity of Stalin's police look like child's play, where the ghost of the power that characterizes the society of development without any principle has been transformed into the demiurgic madness of the entrepreneurs who are now working on the modification of man to adapt him to spongiform encephalopathy, to the glass and plastic leprosy that is spreading over the whole urban territory, and to the morbid environment *that is nothing but the projection of their renunciations*.

It is obvious that this world needs a new civilizing phenomenon, like the one that might have been represented by Christianity during the fall of the Roman Empire, a revolution of the spirit and of sensibilities, a program of ontological reconquest, as much as it needs an overturn of the mode of production. And today, more than ever before, we cannot renounce the promise of a new human beginning.

¹⁴² Like tactical nuclear weapons, for example.

There can be no doubt that the least that someone can do who desires a new humanity, is to combat falsification, the false questioning that intervenes everywhere, and this is the most difficult task, because the conformism that reigns in all domains undoubtedly has never been so strong. To combat passivity and laziness, and “lead (society) to the threshold of this fundamental questioning that presides over the birth of a utopia”,¹⁴³ which alone will make it possible for us to overcome the fear of the unknown nourished by the stage-management of every kind of barbarism that develops when social frameworks collapse,¹⁴⁴ *we will have to find another understanding*; a daunting task that challenges the misery of our time. Aware of the fact that the best solutions devised by the revolutionaries of the past for the problems they faced are not much help, the challenge *to dare to speak of the real* and to learn to pose questions for the *present* constantly plagues us, beginning with addressing the present reality rather than a fantasy reality that would allow us to find the signs and the codes to decipher what is new about the everyday brutality that is wearing us down. We must, in brief, break with technical language and thought, just as we must break with theoretical arrogance and reappropriate the passionate and humanistic content of the revolutions of every era.

Just as the century of the Enlightenment issued the call to put an end to the superstitions that kept man firmly bound in his chains, our century must equip itself against economics, which is the art of mystifying the relations between social classes as well as man’s relation with nature, and with his own unknown nature; it must put an end to the contemporary business enterprise, along with the private ownership of the means of production of life and the circulation of capital that is devastating the planet! There will be no happy ending as long as the classes that, in the present as in the past, are in a position to turn everything to their advantage, have not been expropriated of the extravagant power that they possess to mobilize all resources for their profit, as long as the *big corporations* that have divided the world among themselves have not been neutralized in their capacity to inflict harm, along with all the predators and even the racketeers of the schoolyard.

But knowing that “man without restrictions is a spiritual vision”, as Norbert Elias wrote,¹⁴⁵ and that “a society without explicit institutions of power is an absurdity to which even Marx succumbed, along with anarchism”,¹⁴⁶ we must ask ourselves the question, without beating around the bush, concerning the foundations of a new legitimacy of power and legal rights, as André Prudhommeaux desired, who wrote in 1947: “Must we not, starting right now, come to an agreement about the ethical foundations of sociability and of libertarian society, and formulate the essential norms of a common law that will serve as the basis for human relations, when that living law replaces the arbitrary and basically corrupt mechanism of the oppressive laws of the State that work in favor of the privileged? Shouldn’t we specify in writing, after extensive investigation, the principles of this legislation of self-government, of the code of honor and equity, of the justice that has no penal sanction under State prosecution, but in conscience, and what we

¹⁴³ Thierry Paquot, *Utopie, l’idéal piégé*, Hatier, 1996.

¹⁴⁴ This was quite clearly recognized by Simone Weil, who wrote: “Any present evil is always less evil than the possible evils that can accompany a miscalculated action. In general, our current blindness does not permit us any other choice than the one between capitalism and hazardous adventure.”

¹⁴⁵ Norbert Elias, *La civilisation des mœurs* (1939), republished by Calmann-Levy, Coll. Agora, 1976.

¹⁴⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, *La montée de l’insignifiance*, Seuil, 1998.

think should be proposed? (...) *We must not hesitate then, in facing the awkward and urgent problems that reality will force us to confront sooner or later....*”¹⁴⁷

What is our answer? Where do we start? What is our legacy? What has been left to us by the revolutions and the vanguard movements of this century [the 20th century]? What can we choose to adopt from all these previous attempts?

The surrealists practiced automatic writing, the interrogation of dreams, the affirmation of a new way of existing in the world, and random provocations. The situationists have bequeathed to us their psychogeographical wanderings, and their unitary urbanism, and they also had the merit of trying to explore new domains in that very dangerous sector—like everything that is radically subjective—of everyday life, although the results failed to measure up to their expectations.

These pioneers, by taking social critique farther than anyone ever took it before, were also prodigious in their strident declarations concerning their unrealizable, and for that very reason so very seductive, programs, and their limitless pretensions and provocations that were as easy to indulge in as they were useless. Having acquired all the prestige of radical purity, which they turned into a formidable weapon, they failed to remain sober during the bacchanals of self-satisfaction that were so characteristic of the narcissistic frenzy at the end of the 20th century; and not all of their feats were performed tactfully or with aplomb. We need only recall all the exclusions carried out by the surrealists against those who, during the 1920s, expressed certain objections to the requirement that they must rally to the banner of the communist party,¹⁴⁸ and the edict that they were not supposed to welcome any proletarian revolution unless it was in the guise of the Leninist revolution of October; or the murderous language that the situationists directed at their excluded members....

Nor did they hesitate to disregard certain fundamental questions that, because they were not addressed, did not pose the risk of isolating them or making them look ridiculous. Thus, the question posed by Artaud—“I have always thought that a movement as independent as surrealism should not justify itself with the procedures of ordinary logic.”¹⁴⁹ And as the American situationist, Ken Knabb, wrote: “Issues deserving examination and debate are ignored because they have been monopolized by religion or happen to be couched in partially religious terms....”¹⁵⁰

These avant-gardes, with their very entertaining boasts, have hardly allowed any progress at all to be made in this respect, and we will have to start all over again where Prudhommeaux left off.

¹⁴⁷ André Prudhommeaux, “La loi, le contrat et la coutume, vers une charte des usages?”, *L’effort libertaire*, republished by Spartacus, 1978.

¹⁴⁸ One of whom was undoubtedly Artaud.

¹⁴⁹ Antonin Artaud, *À la grande nuit ou le grand bluff surréaliste*.

¹⁵⁰ “When religion is treated by the situationists, it is usually brought in only in its most superficial, spectacular aspects, as a straw man to be contemptuously refuted by those incapable of refuting anything else.... Issues deserving examination and debate are ignored because they have been monopolized by religion or happen to be couched in partially religious terms. Some may sense the inadequacy of such a dismissal, but are not sure how else to operate on such a taboo terrain and so they too say nothing or fall back on banalities.” Ken Knabb, *The Realization and Suppression of Religion*, Berkeley, 1977.

Even today, multiple approaches are possible. . . . We could, just for the hell of it, play at being an avant-garde, and issue strident proclamations, and immediately get ourselves mixed up in winning converts, declaring breaks, issuing declarations and ordering exclusions. We could, since it is easy nowadays, and poses no risk, argue on behalf of dropping out of society or write apologies for criminality, which no longer shocks the bourgeoisie, but rather amuses them and is even useful for them. For, all-too-often, avant-gardes were fascinated by destruction and the macabre, extolling everything that stood opposed to the famous “bourgeois values”, with the participation of a certain kind of anti-art that allowed numerous idiots to proudly wallow in their ignorance and their inability to serve as an example, thus leaving the field open to a majestic *I don't know*, to a gutter nihilism all dressed up in all the manifestations of unconsciousness, prudently fostered by a power that has learned a thing or two since it banned *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which it can and must leave alone. And this negation succumbed to the most stupid hysteria, which everywhere accompanies general decomposition under the amused glance of those who benefit from it.¹⁵¹

It is, by the way, no minor task to attempt to restore strength and meaning to something that has always been the hallmark of the honor of the human being. And what else resides in this will to create the new man, but that immense desire to restore him to his rightful place in the world, with all his dignity, his honor in living with the inevitable reminder of death?

We know how hostile towards us these times are.

So that no one can say that we deceived them, we are fully aware that we lack the practical experience of one or more revolutions to write better and with more precision.

And our era obstructs us with its obdurate conformism, armed with morbid economic and ideological pressures, backed up by the parties of the old world.

This world where confusionism sweeps all before it!

Where falsehood has acquired the flavor of truth!

Where, with each passing day, imbecility mockingly jeers at intelligence.

Where everyone can disappear in the midst of human indifference, surrounded by dead objects!

But there are still numerous women whose faces can move us. A dawn that no one owns, and vital risks far more fascinating than the ones mandated by the economists. . . .

We will never give up.

François Lonchamp and Alain Tizon

¹⁵¹ “The equation that holds that all voluptuousness is to be found in evil (Baudelaire) could serve as the motto of all the world’s executioners”, as Jean Malaquais said in 1941, in *Le journal d’un météque*.

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