

***COMMUNISM KNOWS
NO MONSTER***

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***FOR A WORLD
WITHOUT
MORAL ORDER***

GILLES DAUVÉ

his warehouse are straight. Still, the day before, there it was. But who left it? The two rock musicians who live there and seem to have a steady stream of girlfriends? One of the married guys who works for him? One of the men from the carpentry shop on the ground floor? The UPS man? His landlord? The array of sexual rites and participants in New York is infinite. Anyone, for any number of reasons, might have deposited the flyer in his box. Whoever left it, however, had torn off a corner, including the mailing address for the T-shirt company but leaving the phone order number.

Just as I've begun to ponder the ubiquitous ordinariness of perverse porn in America, Gene draws me back from bondage boys to New Guinea. "I don't know why anybody should get so upset about them," he tells me. "These people – the Sambians – they aren't homosexual. It doesn't have anything to do with being gay."

"No, not gay," I say. "But they are homosexual, at least for a while. They have sex with other men. They even say they all came to love it. They say swallowing semen was just like their elders told them it was, 'sweet as mother's milk' and just as essential to growing up strong. Like Wonder bread. They even talk about feeling genuine affection for their first partners, even romantic attachment."

"Not really, they're not really homosexual," Gene insists. "It's just some sort of rite of passage, and anyway, I gotta get to work."

Of course, our experience of homosexuality and the Sambian's is utterly different. However much we and the Sambian men may celebrate and even ritualize the primal experience of cocksucking, however much we may both experience the act as a profound form of male bonding and solidarity, we cannot assume that homosexuality has the same meaning for each of us. Indeed, most students of sex and culture argue that ritualized, tribal homosexuality (or for that matter even sexual attitudes at the time of the American Revolution) bear little resemblance to urban sexual life of the last hundred years. With rare exceptions gay communities, gay families, gay churches, gay psychologists, gay reporters, and gay politicians did not exist before this century. The psychological and social meaning attached to these gay phenomena did not exist: *we*, as individuals whose imaginations and opportunities are shaped by this gay terrain, did not exist.

From *A Queer Geography* by Frank Browning, pp. 15-18. Frank Browning is also the co-author of *An American Way of Crime*.

SEXUAL IDENTITY?

A while later, toward the end of breakfast, I bring up a conversation from the previous evening, about mating and pederastic sex rites in an obscure New Guinea tribe called the Sambia people. Gene has come to tolerate my periodic, arcane obsessions. This time, however, he is genuinely puzzled over my prolonged curiosity about these more or less Stone Age people and their relation to the topic of this new book, which is about the way Western gay men locate a sense of place in the world. Yet after years of sorting through tracts and tomes on modern sexual identity, I find these premodern people on the other side of the earth endlessly fascinating, for without exception all the Sambia males enjoy at least a decade of exclusive childhood and adolescent homosexuality, after which they embark upon a lifetime of heterosexuality. Sexuality – homosexuality – occupies a radically different place in their lives than it does anywhere in the modern gay rights movement.

Among the ritual burdens of modern, egalitarian mateship is an expectation that each partner will listen to the other's professional obsessions, anxieties, and frustrations – his about suppliers, customers, and taxes, mine about characters, stories, and deadlines. On this topic Gene offers a warning: I had best be careful in writing about such things as young boys being snatched away from their mothers and forced into years of group fellatio. Child abuse, according to the dicta of American gay respectability, is child abuse, whether it takes place in New Guinea or New Rochelle, and it is not a topic the sages and activists of the gay movement care to talk about.

Duly noted. But, I say to Gene – who is finishing his coffee, anxious to get to his shop – it's not just the child sex that seems so upsetting about the Sambian sexual/homosexual system. It's the entire Sambian organization of sex and sexual identification that makes my gay friends fidget. What most distresses them is the extent to which Sambian sexual behavior seems so circumstantial, so lacking in what we call sexual identity. From age seven or eight, according to anthropologist Gilbert Herdt, every Sambian boy is instructed to "eat the penis" and swallow the semen of an older male. Ideally he should ingest semen every day. That is how the Sambians believe they build up their maleness, discover their masculinity. Then, once the child has reached puberty, he undergoes another ritual initiation, is called a "bachelor" and then finds younger boys to fellate him. All this continues until eventually he becomes an adult, marries, and with the birth of his first child turns to conventional heterosexuality.

To the leading authors and strategists of the American gay movement, sexuality – sexual *orientation* – is an identity, something sure, certain, reliable, around which life and literature can be forged, through which rites and rituals are being invented. To the Sambian, whom you have sex with is secondary to the rigid demands of existing tradition, ritual, and collective Sambian identity. For a while you are strictly "homosexual." For a brief period you may be "bisexual" in that you can be fellated by either a man or a woman. But by adulthood, you become operationally and happily heterosexual. To a population of middle-class Americans who have argued that sexuality, and particularly homosexuality, is basis enough to build community and cultural identity, the Sambians seem to turn the world on its head.

By now Gene has turned on the dishwasher, wrapped a scarf around his neck, and pulled on his red "Eli Cutter" cap, ready to get on with the practical matters of his workday. He is patient, but he has scant time to spend palavering over the sexual behavior of South Pacific warrior tribes. He interrupts my perambulations about the atavistic homosexual rites. Some unknown person slipped the flyer into the mailbox the day before at his shop. (His shop is in an industrial warehouse underneath the Brooklyn Bridge, the sort of neighborhood where wise people carry steel pipes for protection after dark.)

The flyer offers T-shirts, silkscreened with a dozen S&M bondage shots of superpumped muscle toughs in a variety of aroused poses. Bondage not being one of Gene's erotic fantasies, he proposes that it might be more appropriate to my inquiries. He is, however, puzzled that the flyer should have appeared, without an envelope, in his shop mailbox since, so far as he knows, the other occupants in

CONTENTS

1.	A Note About the Translation Michael Katims, 1998	4
2.	Moral Disorder Preface to the Swedish Translation, June 2003	5
3.	For A World Without Moral Order 1983	8
4.	Postscript November 1998	20
5.	Sexual Identity From <i>A Queer Geography</i> by Frank Browning	22

A NOTE ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

French is the language of diplomacy because it is the language of abstraction. Its grammatical constructions, its vocabulary and word forms often seem rigid and meatless to the English speaker. While English is supple enough to allow for the invention of words in a given context in the interest of exactitude, the accumulation and juxtaposition of these inventions leaves the English reader feeling desperate. He will much more easily pardon a slight inaccuracy if it means he will get a familiar word in a familiar form instead of stretched to the limit of its correctness. Example: When, in this article, the authors speak of the joys of the past as being *illusionnant* in character, the translator is sorely tempted to write “illusory,” knowing full well that the joys in question are source or cause of illusion and that the authors never question their reality as joys. Knowing that the authors had the word *illusoire* at their disposal and would presumably have used it if that’s what they meant, the conscientious translator goes looking for another solution. After having rejected “delusional,” “hallucinatory,” and other such inexact or otherwise connoted substitutes, he begins to wonder why the English language doesn’t have the word “illusioning”, especially since it possesses the apparent opposite “disillusioning”.

Well, like all translators explanatory notes of introduction, this is not much more than a note of apology. The original article is no doubt intended for a reader who is familiar with a certain current of thought, but even a naive French reader would not be left with the impression of a vast mechanical system of warring abstractions, like the coded account of a high-level chess match. If, at times, in his fastidious search for equivalence, the translator leaves the reader with such an impression, let the latter know that the former is sorry.

One final example should suffice: The article is called *Pour un monde sans morale*, and not *Pour un monde sans moralité*. The difference is very clear to a Frenchman, and extremely difficult to render in English. First of all, “*Ne me faites pas la morale*” is correctly translated as “Don’t lecture me” in most anecdotal contexts, and the word *morale* has nothing whatever of the academic aspect of a “morality.” But most importantly, *morale* means neither “moral” (a particular character of being right or good) nor morality (conformity to the rules of right conduct.) As I believe the authors intended it, *morale* is the rules themselves made “science,” defined in absolute terms and imposed by society upon each and every member. In other words, in a world without *morale*, one could still be moral but no single morality would be the imposed social norm, just as no particular activity would be considered intrinsically “wrong”.

Splitting hairs? Perhaps, but the subjects discussed in the article give rise to enough misunderstandings as it is and the translator feels duty-bound not to make matters worse.

On another score altogether, be it stated that the use of “politically correct” language in translating this article would be particularly absurd since – and even a cursory reading should make this obvious – the article itself is anything but “politically correct.” The translator shall not be limited in translating *l’homme*, *les hommes*, *l’humanité*, and *l’espèce humaine* to a mere “people,” nor in his use of the word “he” when speaking of “the individual.” It seems to me the authors would agree that a singular pronoun is not necessarily excluding, sexist in nature, that buying into a system whereby certain words become “bad” or “offensive” is one form of *linguistic* impoverishment, and that *mankind*, *man*, *humanity*, *the human species* and *people* are not quite all the same thing.

Michael Katims

(gay culture). While language does express social relationships, it is the latter that must be changed. And in the twilight of the 20th century, words are more easily modified than things.

“Be a nice girl and go make some coffee.” Is the sexism in the *girl*? Does this mean that a man who says, “Girl, I love you. How about I make us some coffee?” loves and/or respects his partner any less than if he’d said *woman*? In reality, where intimate relations are concerned, intentions are rarely ambiguous. It is in the sphere of formality – polite terms, official appellations, workplace jargon – that there is a whole universe to be revolutionized if not abolished, and here lingual feminism aims merely to euphemize, desexualize, neutralize. What is gained by replacing *girl* with *person*? More or less what was gained in substituting *Ministry of Defense* for *War Office*, and soon thereafter giving up on the word altogether and saying only “M.O.D.” The acronym reigns, painless and incomprehensible to outsiders. Generalist language is a thing of the past.

By the way, what does *communist* express? Should the word be changed because for decades it served the inversion of a reality founded on the defeat of the workers’ movement? Or would it be better to give new life to the thing and thereby to the word? We, men and women who are not misogynous, feel no urgency to prove our femininophilia through appropriate language. Let’s let those sitting chair get excited about whether to say *chairperson* or *chairwoman*.

Whether Antonin Artaud gets *thrown into the nuthouse*, *institutionalized*, or worse, *certified*, the matter at hand is the psychiatric treatment of a human and social problem – should the asylum be a closed building or chemical restraints.

The enemy is what makes passive, what divides. Good fences make good neighbors. Autonomy is a fenced-in, private space within which I believe I am free to do what I mustn’t do outside it. From a state, feminism makes a border. “Hands off!” Whether intentionally or not, this contributes to individual parcelling, which requires a superior authority with the power to guarantee the rights of each (child, parent, man, woman, the old, the young, the gay, the consumer, the worker, the ill, the pedestrian, member of a minority, etc.) with respect to the others. For each right may be declared absolute, it is always relative with respect to others. “Absolutes are not cumulable,” as Jean Genet said it. And what redefines and referees the adding up of these relativities if not the power of the state? Privatization of life goes hand in hand with ever increasing judges and psychologists.

Humanity shall not liberate itself by slicing itself up, like liberated territories with poles to mark their borders. Revolution means going beyond all borders. It means superceding womanhood as well as manhood. Individuals getting private control over their lives, even over something as vital as their own bodies, is not a solution in itself. The only true solution is to create with others (of both sexes) relationships of a different nature, where one no longer fears nor risks domination. The point is not for women to be free of men, but free with them. The goal is not for each person to declare his independence, but that each may stop fearfully refusing to be dependent, interdependent. Liberty is a relationship.

One shortcoming of “For a World Without Moral Order” is probably that it doesn’t stress enough just how much usage and customs of a future world would surprise, even shock this one. Many dilemmas, fears and terrors, perennial or recent, would disappear. Others would resurge. This is not any more about getting to paradise than it is about soothing barbarity.

Criticizing moral order is not a way of saying “Everyone do what he wants and thanks to human goodness all will turn out for the best.” The problem is not how to avoid conflict and norms, but to change the presently fallacious relationship to those norms. There is no other logic, no other meaning and so no other guarantee of my actions than my relationship with my fellow man. The goal – and the whole problem – would be, will be one day to live a norm not separate from my and from our actions.

POSTSCRIPT

To translate a text is enough to measure, word by word, both its breadth and its limitations – in the case of this article, its Franco-centrism. The disappearance of “public living places,” for example, is different in France and in Anglo-Saxon countries. The degradation of the Dublin or London pub can’t be compared to the losses sustained by the Parisian bistro over forty years. As for the United States, luncheonettes, candy stores and diners don’t constitute poles of sociability resembling the French café. And even on the continent, while Paris sells her soul to Big Mac, Rome holds the line. The tendency to mercantilization of daily life is universal; it isn’t uniform.

The evolution of mores is probably no faster but certainly more readily perceived in a place where modernity is the oil floating upon an old Catholic vinegar. When the current occupant of the White House is in danger of blowing his job over a blowjob, it’s not because ethical values weigh more heavily in Washington than in Paris, but because the French do not traditionally accord the *hoi polloi* a say in matters of morality and public confession is not common practice. But in sniggering over the hypocrisy and archaism at work over the pond, the Parisian forgets that the Clinton scandals illustrate the pervasive triviality of TV democracy, a democratic moral order that modern Europeans, be they left or free market, are intent on imitating.

“For a World Without Moral Order” was written in 1983, during the backwash of the subversive wave of the sixties and seventies. Since then, things have only gotten worse. “Just try being openly pedophile”, we wrote. Sadly prophetic. Any form of child-adult love is instantaneously identified as child abuse, whether in its least “offensive” forms or its most atrocious – rape and murder. Parental love would be the only exception to this rule, but, alas, let us not forget that statistics cruelly demonstrate that a child is most at risk of sexual molestation inside that bastion of security known as “the family.” By the same logic, every heterosexual male ought to shake in his boots at the thought of Jack the Ripper, since this would be the ultimate result of all male-female attraction. (The dark cloud of this logic, indeed, seems to loom over current intersexual relations in whole sections of the U.S., to such a degree as to desexualize man-woman relationships.)

Over the course of the last fifteen years, capitalist society has become more visibly itself, answering social struggles and human demands with an array of monsters fresh off its assembly line. Consumer society gets rid of cars only by designating pedestrian areas which die every evening at closing time. Modern urban development can only accommodate motorist, cyclist, jogger, rollerblader, etc. by assigning each his own lane. Mores, unfortunately, adhere to the same each-his-own-lane model. The revolt against an all-too-real white male domination gave rise to the universally derided and almost universally practiced Political Correctness. Unable to change reality, it settles for euphemizing and separating realities, only changing the language.

Fifteen years of ever more crippling separation, invariably painted in the pleasing pastels of liberation. What is *gay*? A man who only goes out with men, convinced he will never feel the attraction of the opposite sex? How should he know? How can he exclude the possibility of being overwhelmed by the desire for and of a woman?

Gay fiction? Why not rearrange the bookstores along the lines of department store clothing (as is practically the case already in certain U.S. bookstores)? Put Virginia Woolf in Women’s, Shakespeare in Men’s (although the sonnets...) Lord Byron in the “Physically Challenged, Diet Addicted” section and any writer over sixty-five will see new works displayed in Senior fiction.

Granted, thanks to this gay-ity, the gay man feels safe from all-too-real discrimination. Different clubs, different neighborhoods, different literature, and last but not least a different vocabulary. How sad that, in order to escape age-old repression, millions could imagine nothing better than making up a category even narrower than the family, and founded only on the choice of sexual object: penis vs. vagina. Act is made into identity, definition into destiny, and sexual preference into a world vision

MORAL DISORDER

So far, this text and a couple of others on similar issues¹ have only managed to arouse the interest of a handful. If we’d explained man-woman or child-adult relationships *only* through the class struggle framework, and interpreted them as products of capitalist evolution, and if we’d related paedophilia, for instance, to capital’s *real* (as opposed to *formal*) domination, no doubt we’d have reached a world readership of, say, 500...

Part of the difficulty is that we deliver no message or guidelines regarding affective or sexual relations. We say the only “revolutionary” attitude is not to suggest a solution, but to put forward a critique of the question. In the same way, if we wrote on urban planning, no-one would expect our essay to describe what sort of dwellings people would live in after a communist revolution. We can only explain the causes of present habitats, and their inadequacy for human needs. What we don’t know is how these needs would change through a revolutionary process, let alone what they’d be in a future world.

What we’re targeting is “morality” as a set of rules made common wisdom, close to science in a way, defined in absolute terms and imposed by society upon each and every member. What we hope for is a world where one could and would still be moral but no single morality would be the imposed social norm, just as no particular activity, providing it that does not harm anyone, would be regarded intrinsically “wrong”.

Communism Knows No Monster

This sentence was printed on the back cover of the 1998 British edition. Many radicals have trouble understanding this. Some *do* believe in the existence of monsters, in the forms of capitalist bloodsuckers or sadistic fascists, or even of decadent bourgeois perverts. Most radicals, however, will rather interpret our sentence in the sense that revolution would eliminate nearly all possibility of social (mainly sexual and criminal) aggressiveness and destruction, and would probably rule out the possibility of self-destruction as well: who would wish to commit suicide in a free happy world? In plain words, people would surely be so in harmony with themselves that they’d never feel the need to dominate or abuse or inflict pain upon themselves or upon others.

We’d rather argue that, should abuse occur, the perpetrator would not be ostracized by his fellow human beings. They would not reject the social violator in order to reassure themselves of their humanity by comparing themselves to a non-human human, to a monster. They would be able to recognize what they have in common with him, and to realize that they could have done what he did. And this, we believe, is a much better way of reducing abuse to its lowest possible minimum than any search for normality.

Let’s take the case of the infamous Gilles de Rais (1404-1440), a Marshal of France and once a brother in arms of Joan of Arc. He had dozens (some say, hundreds) of kids brought to his castle, and sexually abused and murdered them, until he was finally arrested, tried and sentenced to death. On the day of the public execution, he repented, showed every sign of contrition, and moved the crowd to tears. According to historians, both sides (the assassin and the audience) shared truly genuine emotions. The murderer was thus reintegrated into society. In the Middle Ages, a common devotion and vision of the world held people together and made it near impossible for anyone present to think that Gilles de Rais was faking. There was a tiny minority of non-believers in Europe, but “atheism” did not exist socially. A common belief in a transcendent being (God) was the condition for the social reintegration of the deviant (who still had to be put to death for society to find peace with itself again). Also, at the time, such acts could only be committed by a man who stood by birth above others: Gilles de Rais was one of Brittany’s largest landowners, not a XXIst century serial killer. Now the days of mass religious communion are gone. A future human society would unify people from the inside reality of their lives,

thanks to something experienced between themselves in *this* world and recognized as such, without the need for an outside unifier.

PC and all the Rest of It

When we wrote this text, we'd never heard the phrase *Political Correctness*. In 1983, to us, the initials "P.C." only meant "Parti Communiste" (the official Stalinist party in France) and possibly "Personal Computer". Today's Political Correctness is more than yet another odd variety of American fads like organic food, surgical strikes and outdoor air-conditioning. It is one of the forms taken by the management of the current moral disorder (reactionary politics is another form). The boundaries between Law and transgression are now blurred. Social mediation (patriarchy, sex roles, school, union, party, old style work discipline and top-down values in general) came under attack in the 60s and 70s. They have gone under, without being replaced by any stable alternative standards, let alone by relationships we'd regard as human. Present society holds together as much through anomie and moral crossdressing as it previously did through rigidly set behaviour patterns.

Let's just take a look at family values. In the past, smacking kids was OK. Sometimes (as in England) school was granted some parental power, and the teacher was legally allowed to perform corporal punishment within certain limits. Now fixed roles have been shattered, not so much by our liberation endeavours as by the capitalist recuperation of our failure to liberate ourselves, and there's nothing left but individuals unsure of their part. "Discipline" is not natural any more. So parental attitudes have to be defined and ruled by law, and smacking is banned. Social workers, lawyers and experts walk in. Today's Gilles de Rais are not assisted by priests but by an array of psychologists.

Political Correctness and the current reactionary backlash (the Moral Majority lobby that is supposed to be pulling the strings in the Bush administration) are US born twins.² The country that goes to the extreme commodifying of everything, be it man, woman, child, pet, nature, etc. is also the country that cares the most about safeguarding what it consumes. Those that created the huge Chicago slaughterhouses that so impressed European visitors in the 1930s, are the keenest animal rights' defenders. National parks are what's left of the Wild West after it's been emptied of the Indians, plundered and tamed.

We'll limit ourselves to human beings here. Women and children are subjected to an odd mixture of promotion and protection. Our society is tough, but it praises the weak, or those it calls weak, or those it creates as weak, because it is able to prey and grow on them while pretending to help. The modern State is a benevolent dictator. It would love to treat us all like children. Being treated like a kid through protective-repressive laws is what lies ahead of every citizen, for his own good, needless to say.

We need hardly emphasize that our opposition to both "rightwing" patriarchal and "leftwing" soft moralizing has nothing to do with opting for Political **I**ncorrectness. The current righteous drive breeds its opposite: conservative politicians (and some artists) proclaim themselves Politically Incorrect. Just because multi-ethnic multiculturalism is trendy, it does not make mono-ethnic culture any more palatable than it used to be in 1950. It is pointless to take the exact opposite of what society offers or imposes as a role model or a desirable lifestyle at any given time. Provocation is not another word for subversion. Conformism is never a critique of marketable anti-conformism.

Social Regression

As early as 1835, the French historian and acute observer Tocqueville, who'd travelled in America, wrote that in the United States, as long as individuals act as responsible citizens (ie., as long as they obey the State laws), they're free to differ culturally and act accordingly in public. For instance, the expression of various religious mutually tolerating rites is accepted. So is atheism, as long as it just stands like another creed among many. Instead of building itself against particular identities, as it did in France, American citizenship grew with them. We are now witnessing the Americanization of the

profanation – calling on it to exclude it and, at the same time, strengthening itself. Crime is punished, but it fascinates.

These three rides out of the ordinary run of days will not be any more made general than they are abolished by communism. Any life (be it collective or individual) supposes borders. But communism will be amoral insofar as it will no longer need fixed norms, exterior to social life. Ways of life and models for behavior will circulate, not without clashes and violence. They will be transmitted, transformed and produced at the same time as social relationships. As absolute separation between the inside and the beyond, the sacred will fade away. In this way, religion will no longer have its place, neither those of olden times nor those modern religions who have no gods but only devils to be cast out of the social midst. The liberty of man, his ability to modify his own nature, project himself beyond himself. Up until now, moral order, all moral orders – and all the more insidiously when they are not presented as such – makes these beyonds into human-crushing entities. Communism won't level the "magic mountain." It will do what's necessary so as not to be dominated by it. It will create and multiply distant horizons, and the pleasure of losing oneself in them, but also the ability to foster new ones, which subverts the "natural" submission to any world order whatsoever.

recognize in the desires and acts of others, as many possible shapes of his own desires and humane existence. “The human being is the true “being-together” “ (Marx). The term “being-in-its-totality,” or collective being, express our movement even better than the word “communism” which is primarily associated with collectivizing things. Marx’ statement is worth developing extensively, and we will come back to it at another time. For now, suffice it to notice the critique of bourgeois humanism contained in the statement. While, thanks to the mediation of culture, the Montaigne-type honest man can be every man, the communist man knows from practice that he can only exist as he is because all others exist as they are.

This does not in any way mean that no desire must be repressed. Repression and sublimation keep one from plunging into a refusal of otherness. But communism is a society with no guarantee but the free interplay of passions and needs, while capitalist society is crazy for insurance and would like to provide a guarantee against every happenstance of life, including death. All possible risks and dangers should be “covered by insurance,” except “in case of absolute necessity” – war and revolution – and even then... The only event capitalism cannot insure against is its own disappearance.

When one sets about a global critique of the world, remaining on a purely theoretical level is unacceptable. There are periods when subversive activity is *almost* entirely reduced to the writing of papers and exchanges between individuals. Our discomfort is deployed in this “almost”. To continue having a lucid view of the world, one must be possessed of a tension it is not easy to maintain, as it implies refusal, a tending to the fringes, and profound sterility. This refusal, this tendency to the fringes and this sterility contribute as much to maintaining passion as it does to hardening it into misanthropic bitterness or intellectual mania. No act spun by social life is considered self-evident by one who refuses capital’s organization of the world. Not even manifestations of biological givens are exempt from his torment! Signing on to procreation seems suspect to him – how can one want to spawn in such a world, as long as one can’t make out the possibility of transforming it any time soon?

Nevertheless, outside of a few simple principles – not to participate in the machinery of mystification or repression (neither cop nor star), not to pursue a career – one can’t claim to precisely and permanently define the forms for refusal. For radical critique, there is no decent behavior. There is only some things more indecent than others and certain behaviors that mock theory. Thinking of oneself as revolutionary in a non-revolutionary period... What counts is less the result of this contradiction – unavoidably fragmented and crippling – than the contradiction itself, the tension of refusal.

What good is criticizing the sordidness of mores if it must remain? Our way of being only makes sense with respect to communism. In answer to Cioran’s quote which opened this section, it must be said that the truly unbearable sweat and disasters are those which don’t belong to us, which this world foists upon us. The only excuse we find for time’s killing us is history’s promise to avenge us. The meaning of our way of being is the possibility that *social connection is guaranteed only by itself*, and that it works!

If the social crisis worsens, there will be less and less room for half-way choices. Calling for “a little less police” will become less and less feasible. The choice will more and more be between what exists and no police at all. That is when humanity will have to show whether or not it loves freedom.

Love. Ecstasy. Crime. Three historical products through which humanity has lived out, still lives out its emotional practices and relationships. Love: consequence of indifference and generalized selfishness, seeking refuge in a few beings who have the advantage of chance and necessity. It is the impossible love for mankind which finds a poor excuse for an outlet in a handful of individuals. Ecstasy: a brief escape from the profane, the banal and into the sacred; fleeing and immediately captured and boxed in by religion. Crime: the only way out when the norm can no longer be respected or gotten around.

Love, sacredness and crime are ways to give meaning to the present in escaping it. Positive or negative, the three include both pull and repulse, in a relationship of attraction and rejection with respect to one another. Love is glorified but mistrusted. The sacred is by nature threatened with

capitalist developed world, that is, at least in Western Europe and Japan.

What is now known as the gay community is the result of a social movement that was forced backwards. To just take the example of New York, an open and active male homosexual culture existed around 1900, with a strong working class element, and mixed with “hetero” and Black areas, bars and music. It was repressed in the 1920s and 30s. The well-known “Stonewall riot” (June 27, 1969) against police harassment and beatings was not a purely homosexual event. True, the cops’ conscious hatred was directed against homosexuals, but the cause of the event and the people’s response went beyond the sex issue or boundary. “Irrational, spontaneous, hectic, born out of lumpenproletarian rage” (B.Benderson), the riot joined transvestites, prostitutes and homeless teenagers in a revolt that was more social than sexually-oriented, at a time of deep unrest across the US and in the world. It’s the failure of those social forces to fuse into revolutionary action that brought back separation between categories, and gave birth to the “Gay Power” slogan, alongside “Black Power” and a host of others. Logically, the gays later turned into an inward-looking community of their own, defining themselves by what supposedly differentiates them from other people, not by what they have in common with others. The vast crowds that now march and have fun in the totally innocuous and highly commercial Gay Pride parade on June 27 do not realize they are dancing on past social defeats.

What is *gay*? A man who only goes out with men, convinced he will never feel the attraction of the opposite sex? How should he know? How can he exclude the possibility of being overwhelmed by the desire for and of a woman? Isn’t it part of the essence of desire to come without warning? (Faced with a declared definitive heterosexual male, the gay will always suspect, and not without reason, that this too-sure-of-himself person is shielding himself from the possibility of his being attracted to another man...)

Granted, thanks to this gay-ity, the gay man feels safe from discrimination. (As long as he stays within his own quarters, that is: even in San Francisco, a man-man couple can walk hand in hand in Castro, but risks being jeered at one mile away.) Different clubs, different neighbourhoods, different literature, and last but not least a different vocabulary. Indeed, quite a few gay writers would classify this text as “homophobic”, since we refuse the notion of a gay identity.³

How sad that, in order to escape age-old repression, and in the hope of going beyond patriarchy, millions could imagine nothing better than making up a category even narrower than the family, and founded only on the choice of sexual object: penis vs vagina. Act is made into identity, definition into destiny, and sexual preference into a world vision – gay culture.⁴

Notes

1. “For a World without Moral Order” was first published in French in *La Banquise* #1, 1983, and then in English (translated by M. William) for the American magazine *Anarchy*, Fall 1993, and again in pamphlet form in Britain in 1998 (translated by Michael Katims). The other texts we refer to are “Alice in Monsterland”, (available at the *Troploin* website, <http://troploin0.free.fr/>) and an article on justice, “Pour un monde sans innocents”, in *La Banquise* #4 1986, so far only available in French.
2. *Communicating Vessels* made the following remark on that passage: “...even right-wingers sometimes use political correctness to their advantage. This administration, in advocating for potential intervention in Liberia, for instance, in my opinion, made use of the fact that Condoleeza Rice is black. She was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying something to the effect of how American slaves founded the state of Liberia...Politics makes no pretensions regarding who, and what, will be utilized to secure the continuation of its existence. Because this administration is clearly racist, does not mean that it will not use anti-racism as a defense mechanism...” Quite right. (September 2003 note)
3. On the notion of sexual identity, see “Sexual Identity?” in this pamphlet.
4. For another stimulating book, by another homosexual yet non “P.C.” writer, read Bruce Benderson, *Towards a New Degeneracy*, Edgewise Press, 1997

FOR A WORLD WITHOUT MORAL ORDER

The present article is an introduction to a critique of social mores, a contribution to the necessary task of revolutionary anthropology. The communist movement possesses a dimension both of class and of humanity. Although the central role of the proletarian worker is at the foundation of that movement, and although that movement works toward human community, it is *neither* a form of workerism *nor* of humanism. For the time being, reformism lives off separation by the accumulation of demands in parallel spheres, never calling the spheres themselves into question. One measure of the potency of any communist movement is (or should be) its capacity to recognize, and in practice to go beyond the gap or contradiction between the dimensions of class and of community.

This gap and this contradiction flourish in the ambiguities of our emotions and make a critique of social mores an especially delicate matter.

What follows is not an article about “sexuality”, which, like economy or work, is an historical and cultural product. Like work and economy, sexuality was born as a specific sphere of human activity under nineteenth-century capitalism, when it was honed down and theorized (*discovered*), then made banal by the capitalism of the twentieth century. Within the totality of a communist existence, it can be superseded.

For the same reasons, this is not a “critique of daily life”, which would apply to that social space *excluded by work* and in competition with it. “Mores”, on the contrary, include the entire range of human relationships in their emotional aspects. They are no stranger to material production. (Bourgeois family values, for example, cannot be dissociated from the work ethic.)

Since capitalism, in its own way, sums up the human past which produced it, there is no revolutionary critique without a critique of social mores and ways of life preceding capitalism, and *the way they have been absorbed by it*.

LOVE – ECSTASY – CRIME

Love

If one can believe Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts*, “the most natural relationship between man and man is the relationship between man and woman.” This formula may be understood and applied inasmuch as we keep in mind that the history of man is that of his emancipation from nature by the creation of the economic sphere. The idea of man being anti-nature, completely external to nature, is clearly an aberration. Man’s nature is at once a pure biological given – we are primates – and his activity as man modifying the pure biological given of himself and outside himself.

Man is not outside natural conditions, since he is part of them. But he wants to understand them and he has begun playing with them. One can debate the mechanisms which brought this about (the extent to which it resulted from difficulties of survival, especially in temperate regions, etc.) but one thing is certain: by transforming his environment and then, in turn, being transformed by it, man has placed himself in a position radically different from any other known state of matter. Once unburdened of metaphysical presuppositions, this ability to play somewhat with the laws of matter is precisely what constitutes human freedom. Stripped of this freedom – since it went to feed economy – as he produced it, man must now reconquer it without deluding himself about what freedom is. It is neither the freedom of unfettered and ever-surging desire, nor the freedom to follow (who could decipher?) Mother Nature’s commandments. Full rein must also be given to this freedom to play with the laws of matter – whether one is talking about changing the course of a river or the sexual use of an orifice not naturally “intended” for the purpose. Finally, it must be understood that risk is the only guarantee of freedom.

Since human freedom must be given full rein, a critique of human mores must not hold up one

The rules that human beings would give themselves (in ways we cannot predict) in communism would flow from communist sociality. They will not constitute a moral order insofar as they will claim no illusory universality in time and space. The rules of the game will include the possibility of playing with the rules of the game.

“Revolt is a form of optimism which is hardly less repugnant than the usual kind. For revolt to be possible, it has to suppose the possibility of an opportune reaction. In other words, that there is a preferable order of things toward which we must strive. Revolt, considered as an end in itself, is optimistic as well – it goes on the premise that change, disorder is satisfying. I can’t believe that anything is satisfying.

...

Question: ‘In your opinion, is suicide only a lesser evil?’

“Exactly, a lesser evil hardly better than having a profession or a moral code.” (Jacques Rigaut, testimony in the “Barrès Affair,” 1921, *Ecrits*)

An entire body of nihilist literature has developed the “dish breaker’s” point of view, that of one who resists all social attachment and who, as a compulsory corollary, has a taste for death. But the nihilist thinkers’ lovely music never kept most of them from fading into the hubbub of daily life to a respectable age. This incoherency supports the idea that the pure refractor is only a literary myth. As for the rare individuals who, like Rigaut, chose the last resort of suicide, like Genet, who tasted true debasement, they lived out this myth like a passion. But if true and intransigent mystics have existed, that doesn’t prove the existence of God. These “refractors” are fodder for an elitism which is false right from the get-go. The worst of it is not that they believe they are superior, but that they think themselves *different* from the rest of humanity. They position themselves as observers of a world from which they are separate – but participation is prerequisite to understanding. Being on the outside, they would have it, is lucidity. But, as Bataille explains, they fall into the worst of traps:

“...I have never seen existence with the absent-minded contempt of the man *alone*.” (*Œuvres*)

“It is human tumult, with the stink and vulgarity of all its needs, big and small, with its strident disgust for the police that represses it – it is the frenzied activity of all men (excepting that police and the friends of that police) and this activity alone, which shapes the revolutionary mentality in opposition to the bourgeois mentality.”

The myth of the refractor has at times cluttered revolutionary theory – witness the Situationists’ fascination with outlaws in general and Lacenaire in particular, epitomized by Debord’s last appalling film. But if this myth must be criticized, it is also because it is the flipside of class society’s production of fascinating monsters, and so tends to validate it.

Upon this sea of zombies in which we swim, sometimes a shiver of passion goes, when citizens are served a radically foreign being, something which looks like a man, but whose real humanity is entirely denied. For the Nazi, it is the Jew. For the anti-fascist, the Nazi. For the mass of our contemporaries, it is the terrorist, the gangster, the killer of children. When the time comes to track these monsters down and determine their punishment, at last passions splash back to the surface and imagination, which we thought extinguished, takes off at a gallop. One can only regret that this type of imagination and its fine-tuning is precisely what is attributed to that other guaranteed-inhuman monster – the Nazi executioner.

Never could everyone be forced to respect a law in contradiction with the way relationships really work. Never could murder be prevented where there is a reason to kill. Never could theft be prevented where there were inequalities and where commerce is based on theft. So an example is made, by focusing on one particular case. Even more than that, we exorcize that part of us which would have wanted to be the executioner of those defenseless bodies or the rapist-murderer of those children. The share of envy in the hateful cries of the crowd no longer needs to be demonstrated. It is clear even to the stubbornly myopic eyes of the journalist.

Communism, on the contrary, *is a society without monsters*, because each person will finally

The issue is not pertinent only for a distant future. It is on the agenda at times of social unrest. Consider the looters and thieves of nineteenth-century riots, consider the moral order reproduced in them by these riots. In the same way, during the early part of the Russian revolution, a “Bolshevik marriage code” (the title alone speaks volumes) was juxtaposed with a powerful movement of transformation of social mores. From any more or less revolutionary period will spring gangs half way between social subversion and delinquency, temporary inequalities, hoarders, profiteers, but especially, a whole range of uncertain conduct which one would be hard-pressed to characterize as “revolutionary,” or “for survival” or “counter-revolutionary,” etc. Ongoing communization will resolve this, but only over one, two, perhaps several generations. Between now and then, we must prepare ourselves – not for a “return to order” which will be one of the key slogans of all anti-revolutionaries, but by developing what makes the originality of a communist movement – essentially, it doesn’t repress, it *subverts*.

This means, first of all, that it uses only the amount of violence strictly necessary to obtain its goals, not out of moralism or non-violence, but because superfluous violence always becomes autonomous, becomes its own end. It also means that one’s weapon is first and foremost the transformation of social relationships and of production of living conditions. Spontaneous looting will no longer be a massive change of ownership, a mere juxtaposition of private appropriations, if a community of struggle is formed between looters and producers. Only on this condition can looting be the starting point for social reappropriation of riches and use of those riches in a context broader than plain and simple consuming. (Consuming, per se, is not to be denounced, since social life is not only productive activity. It is also consumption and consummation. If poor people wanted first to taste a few pleasures, who but the priests would hold it against them?) As for the hoarders, if violent measures are sometimes necessary, it will be to recuperate goods not for punishment. In any case, it is only by spreading the reign of freeness that they can be rendered completely harmless. What good is hoarding if money is only paper, if you can no longer sell what you hoard?

The more a revolution is radicalized the less it needs to be repressive. We make no bones about stating this especially since, for communism, human life in the sense of biological survival is not the supreme good. It is capitalism which offers this monstrous sucker deal: Be assured of maximal survival in exchange for maximal submission to economy. Yet isn’t a world where one has to hide in order to choose the hour of one’s death a terribly depreciated world indeed?

In communism, one doesn’t start from values set by a common accord but from the real relations in which one lives. Any group practices, refuses, allows for, imposes certain acts and not others. Before we have values, and *in order* to have them, there are things one does and doesn’t do, imposes and forbids.

In a contradictory class society, the forbidden is cast in stone and, at the same time, made to be moved around and violated. The taboos of primitive societies and, to some degree, those of traditional societies do not constitute a moral order as such. Values and taboos are constantly reproduced by every act in social life. As work and private life opposed one another more and more radically, the issue of social mores came to the fore, then, in 19th-century Europe with what the bourgeoisie called “dangerous classes,” became acute. On the one hand the worker must be considered free to go to work (in order to justify the capitalist’s freedom to refuse him work) and, on the other, moral order had to keep him mechanically sound by telling him that it isn’t good to get drunk and that work is his dignity. Moral order only exists because there are mores, i.e., a domain which society theoretically leaves up to the individual but which it constantly legislates *from the outside*.

Law, first religious and then state law, supposes its scoffing. That is the difference with communism, where there is no need for intangible law which everyone knows will not be respected. No absolutes, unless perhaps the primacy of the species, which is not to say its survival. No falsely universal rules. Like law, like ideology all moral orders rationalize after the fact. They always take themselves for, and purport to be the foundation of social life, but without foundation themselves, based only on God, nature, logic, social welfare... ie, a foundation which doesn’t exist since it can’t be called into question.

practice or another as a symbol of impoverishment. It has been written that in the modern world freedom, as pertains to social mores, is limited to masturbatory activity (alone or with one or more partners). To limit oneself to this given is to misunderstand the essence of sexual impoverishment. Must we belabor the point? There are solitary jerk-offs infinitely less sordid and impoverished than many gropes in the dark. Reading a good adventure novel can be much more exciting than a group tour. The real impoverishment is living in a world where adventure only exists in books. Whatever one person daydreams about another, whether or not he acts on it, it is not disgusting. The disgusting part is all the conditions that must be fulfilled for one person to *meet* another. When, in the personal ads, a bearded man invites the old lady and her dog who live upstairs from him over for a good time, it is neither the beard nor old age, nor bestiality we find disgusting. What is really repulsive is that, by the publishing of the ad in *Liberation*, the bearded man’s desire has become a sales pitch for a particularly nauseating ideological commodity.

Alone in one’s room drafting a theoretical article, inasmuch as that article provides some handle on social reality, one is less isolated from his fellow man than riding the subway or at work. The essence of sexual sordidness and impoverishment does not reside within one or another sexual activity, although the predominance of one activity may be symptomatic of that impoverishment. It is rather to be found in the fact that, whether alone, with one other person or ten other people, the individual is irremediably separated from humanity by relationships of competition, fatigue and boredom. Fatigue provoked by work, boredom with roles, boredom also with sexuality as a separate activity.

Sexual impoverishment is first and foremost social constraints – the constraints of wage-labor and its morbid litany of psychological and physiological hardships – which operate on a sphere presented by mainstream culture and its counter-culture flipside as one of the last frontiers in the world where adventure is still possible. Sexual impoverishment is also, to the extent that capitalist and Judeo-Christian society imposes itself upon him, man’s profound helplessness before what western civilization has made of sexuality.

From Stoicism, dominant worldview of the Roman Empire, Christianity adopted the two-fold idea that, on the one hand, sexuality is the basis of all pleasure and, on the other hand, it can and must be controlled. Eastern cultures, by an open affirmation of sexuality (and not only in the bedroom) tend toward a pan-sexualism whereby sex must, of course, be controlled but by the same token as everything else – it occupies no special place. Western culture doesn’t mistreat sexuality by forgetting about it, but by thinking of nothing else. Everything is made sexual. Judeo-Christian society’s fascination with and organization of sex is by far more terrible than its repression and suppression of sex. Western culture has made sex into not only the hidden truth of normal consciousness, but of madness (hysteria) as well. At the outset of moral crisis, Freud discovers that sexuality is the great secret of the whole world and of every civilization.

Sexual impoverishment is a seesaw struggle between two moral orders, the traditional and the modern, which more or less reside together within our contemporary brains and glands. On the one hand, one suffers from the constraints of the old moral order and work, which prevents one from attaining the historical ideal of sexual and amorous fulfillment. On the other hand, the more one liberates oneself of these constraints (or imagines one does) the more that ideal seems hollow and unsatisfying.

A tendency and its *spectacular* representation, taken together, do not constitute a totality. While a relative liberalization of mores characterizes our era, the traditional moral order has not disappeared. Just try being openly pedophile. The traditional order still functions and will, for a good portion of the population in industrialized nations, go on functioning for a long time. In many parts of the world (Islam, Eastern bloc countries), it is still dominant and harmful. Even in France, its representatives (priests of Rome and Moscow) are far from inactive. The weight of the suffering caused by their misdeeds is great enough that we will not be forbidden to denounce them in the name of the fact that it is capital which undermines the foundation of traditional moral order. It isn’t true that any revolt against this order tends toward neo-reformism. Revolt can also be the cry of the oppressed creature,

containing the seed of an infinite variety of sexual and sensual practices repressed for thousands of years by oppressive societies.

It should be clear by now that we are not opposed to “perversions.” We’re not even opposed to life-long heterosexual monogamy. Nevertheless, when litterateurs and artists (the surrealists for example) hold out *l’amour fou* (“mad” love) to us as the sum of desirable, we are obliged to recognize that they are buying into the modern west’s great reductive myth. This myth is meant to provide an extra helping of soul to couples, isolated atoms which make up the best foundation for the capitalist economy. Among the riches which would be reaped by a humanity rid of capital are the unlimited variations of a perverse and polymorphous sexuality and sensuality. Only when those practices are allowed to flourish will “love”, such as André Breton or Jacqueline Suzanne sing its praises, be exposed for what it is – a transitional cultural construction.

Traditional moral order is oppressive and as such it deserves to be criticized and fought against. But if it is in crisis, it isn’t because our ancestors had less taste for freedom than our contemporaries. Rather, it is because bourgeois moral rules are revealing their inability to adapt to modern conditions of production and circulation of commodities.

Bourgeois moral order, which took on its full scope during the nineteenth century and was handed down through religion or lay education, was born out of the need for an ideological extension of industrial capitalist domination at a period when capital was not yet totally dominant. Moral rules for sex, family and work went hand-in-hand. Bourgeois and petit-bourgeois values served as a platform for capital – property as the fruit of labor and savings, work as terribly hard but necessary, family life. In the first half of the twentieth century, capital came to occupy the entire social space. It became indispensable and unavoidable. Wage labor was the only activity possible since there wasn’t any other. That is how, even as it is foisted upon all of us, wage labor can have the appearance of non-constraint, a guarantee of liberty. Since everything is a commodity each moral rule winds up obsolete. We own property *before* saving, thanks to credit. One works because it is practical, not out of a sense of duty. The extended family gives way to the nuclear family, which in turn is upset by constraints of money and work. Schools and media vie with parents for authority, influence and upbringing. Everything that *The Communist Manifesto* foretold has been accomplished by capitalism. As public places where working class people live out their lives become more and more scarce, replaced by consumer centers (discos, malls) which don’t have the same emotional character, too much is being asked of the family precisely when it has the least to offer.

Underlying the crisis in bourgeois moral values there is a deeper crisis of capitalist morality. It’s hard to establish “mores”, to find ways of relating and behaving with one another which go beyond a bankrupt bourgeois morality. What morality does modern capitalism provide for people? Its submission of everyone and everything, its omnipresence theoretically make prior support systems superfluous. Fortunately, this doesn’t work. There is not now and never will be a wholly, purely, uniquely capitalist society. For one thing, capital creates nothing out of nothing. It transforms beings and relationships born outside of it (urban migrants, *petits-bourgeois déclassés*, immigrants) and something always remains of former social relations, at least in the form of nostalgia. In addition, the actual workings of capital are anything but harmonious – it can’t keep its promise of a Madison Avenue dream world and this provokes a reaction, a falling back on traditional values which are largely outmoded, like the family. Which explains the phenomenon that people keep getting married while one out of every three or four marriages ends in divorce. Finally, because it has to direct, constrain, and bully wage laborers, capital must constantly reintroduce the prop values of authority and obedience that its present phase makes obsolete. The result is the constant use of old ideology in conjunction with new (participation, etc.)

Our era is that of the coexistence of moral orders, of proliferation of social codes and not their abolition. Guilt (the incessant fear of violating a taboo) is juxtaposed with angst (the feeling that one lacks guideposts for the “choices” to be made). Neuroses and hysteria, the historical maladies of a

wouldn’t torture another would be that he doesn’t feel the need to. But what if he does feel it? What if he finds torturing fun? Rid of such old models like “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth,” “a pound of flesh,” and the like, a woman whose lover has just been murdered, a man whose beloved has just been tortured, would, in spite of their sorrow, find it perfectly stupid to kill someone else or lock him away, as fantasy compensation for the lost they have endured – perhaps... What if a desire for revenge won out? What if the other person keeps on killing?

In the workers’ movement, the anarchists are probably among the few who have concretely addressed the question of a stateless society. Bakunin’s answer is not very convincing:

“Complete abolition of all degrading and cruel sentences, of corporal punishment and the death penalty as established and executed by law. Abolition of all indefinite or too-lengthy sentences which leave no possibility of rehabilitation – as crime must be considered a disease...”

Sounds like the Socialist Party line before they got to power, but what follows is more interesting:

“Any individual condemned by any society whatsoever, whether local, provincial or national, shall retain his right to refuse to submit to the sentence pronounced against him by declaring that he no longer wants to be part of that society. In that case, however, the society will in turn retain the right to eject the individual and declare him outside its guarantee and protection. The individual would thus be thrown back to the natural law of eye-for-an-eye, at least in the territory occupied by that society, and could be fleeced, mistreated, even killed without the society stepping in. Everyone else could cast off the refractor, like you would a harmful beast, although never could he be forced into servitude or enslaved.” (Bakunin, *La Liberté*)

The primitives shall not go unremembered in this solution. The individual who has transgressed a taboo is never again taken seriously. They laugh every time he opens his mouth, or he has to flee into the jungle, or he becomes invisible, etc. In any case, he is cast out of the community and therefore bound for an early death.

If it’s a question of tearing down the prisons in order to build them back up again, a bit less harsh and better ventilated, then count us out. We shall always side with the refractor. What, after all, is a “too lengthy” sentence? One needn’t have wasted away in prison to know that time spent there is always too lengthy. However, if this is about replacing prison by an even more radical alienation, count us out all the same. As for treating crime as a disease, it’s an open invitation to a society under the absolute control of psychiatric argument and medication.

“Curiously, the basest of bandits can seem like a real nice guy the instant one stops taking things so seriously (and an adult not too prematurely old can rival the worst class cut-up in this domain). Is the social order at the mercy of a belly laugh? ... Life is not all one big laugh, say teachers and mothers, and not without a note of hilarious earnestness. It’s news to the children... Nevertheless I imagine that in the poor mind darkened by this training a shining paradise is born in the crash of broken dishes... unbridled fun makes use of all the world’s products, every ruined object is there to be smashed like a toy.” (Bataille, *Les Pieds Nickelés*)

So what do we do with dish breakers? It is impossible, today, to answer this question and, even in a stateless society it isn’t sure a satisfactory answer can be found. The guy who won’t play along, who breaks the dishes, who’s ready to run the risk of pain and even death, simply for the fun of breaking off social ties. That is the risk, the probably unsurpassable risk run by a society which refuses to cast anyone, no matter how asocial, out of humanity’s midst. The damage done to the society would always be inferior to the damage done by making the asocial person into a monster. Communism must not lose its *raison d’être* to save a few lives, no matter how “innocent” they may be. To date, let’s admit, the mediations conceived to avoid or buffer conflict and maintain society’s internal order have caused oppression and human loss infinitely greater than those it was supposed to prevent or limit. In communism, no substitute state or “non-state” which would remain a state.

“The repression of antisocial reaction is as fanciful as it is objectionable on principle.” (“Letter to the Insane Asylum Head Doctors,” *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 3, April 15, 1925)

Crime

“History makes no sense – and it’s a good thing it doesn’t. Would we torment ourselves for a happy outcome, for a final celebration paid for wholly by our sweat and our disasters? For future idiots leaping about on our ashes? The vision of a paradisiacal culmination surpasses the absurdity of hope’s worst wanderings. The only excuse one can find for Time is that we find some moments more enjoyable than others, accidents without consequence, in an intolerable monotony of perplexities.” (E.M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*)

Communism is not a paradisiacal culmination.

First of all, identifying communism as a paradise means one can accept *anything* in the meanwhile. In the case of a social revolution, one accepts that society is not changed from top to bottom – a stateless society, without prisons – fine, later... when men are perfect. In the meantime, everything can be justified. Worker state, people’s prisons, etc. – since communism is only good for a humanity of gods.

Next, there is a soothing vision of a desirable society which is a turnoff to desiring it. Every community, regardless of its size, requires that its members renounce a part of themselves. And, if one defines “positive desires” as those which, if realized, would not compromise the liberty of others, every community forces each member to leave certain of these unsatisfied. The reason is simple: these desires are not necessarily shared by the other member or members. What makes this situation tolerable is the certainty that anyone who feels that these renouncements threaten the very integrity of his being would still have the possibility of leaving. Leaving would not be painless, but isn’t the risk of pain and death indispensable to the full measure of a meaningful life?

That humanity, playing with matter, risks self-annihilation and with it annihilation of all life on the planet, is not what bothers us. What is unbearable is that humanity does this in utter thoughtlessness and practically in spite of itself, because it has created capital and capital has imposed its own inhuman laws upon it. It is nevertheless true that once man begins modifying his environment, he does so at the risk of destroying it and himself along with it, and that this risk would probably subsist in no matter what social organization. One could even conceive of a humanity which, after first struggling with, then taming and loving the universe, would decide to disappear, to reintegrate nature in the form of dust. In any case, there is no humanity without risk, because there is no humanity without others. The play of human passions also bears this out.

It is relatively easy to imagine that a world less severe would give women and men (men, who since the bourgeois revolution have been condemned to wear only work clothes!) a chance to be more attractive, to be at once simpler and more refined in their seduction. At the same time, however, one can’t help yawning at the idea of a world where everyone would be attractive to everyone else, where one fucks like one shakes hands, without any implied commitment. (Liberalization of mores, make no mistake, promises just such a world.) Realistically then, Jenny will still like Karl more than she likes Friedrich. But one would have to believe in miracles to believe that never a Friedrich would desire a Jenny who doesn’t desire him. Communism does not in any way guarantee the reconciliation of all desires, and the tragedy of non-requited desire seems unsurpassable, the price to pay if seduction is to remain an enthralling game – not for any “no-pain-no-gain” old-fogey principle but because desire includes otherness and therefore its possible negation. There is no human or social game without stakes and without risk! That is the only norm which seems unsurpassable – unless our ape imaginations, still paying tithe to the old world, cannot fathom man.

What makes Fourier less boring than most of the other utopians is that, besides a very poetic and very extensive polling of possibles, his system allows for the necessity of conflict. We know that practically all of the accidents considered crimes by the old world are only sudden changes of ownership (theft), accidents of competition (the murder of a bank teller), or products of the impoverishment of social mores. But in a stateless society it is not unimaginable that the exacerbation of passions may lead one man to inflict suffering upon or kill another. In such a world, the only guarantee that one man

bygone era, are replaced by narcissism and schizophrenia.

What guides our contemporaries’ behavior is less and less a whole set of commandments passed along by the paterfamilias or the priest and which cannot be called into question, but rather a sort of utilitarian moral order for individual fulfilment, aided by a fetishization of the body and a frenzied psychologizing in which interpretation-mania takes the place of confession and examination of conscience.

Ahead of his time, de Sade simply foretold ours – one of the disappearance of any moral guarantee, before man becomes himself. Sooner or later one experiences the same intolerable boredom in reading the marquis’ monotonous catalogue, as when reading the personal ads with their infinite repetition of the forms of a pleasure without communication. Sadeian desire aims to completely reify other people, to make them into a clay out of which he can cut his fantasies. Annihilating otherness, refusing to be dependant on someone else’s desires is a morbid attitude – it means the repetition of the same thing, and death. But, while the Sadeian hero needs to smash social restraints, modern man and his logic of individual fulfillment becomes his own fantasy clay. Rather than getting carried away by his desires, he “realizes his fantasies.” At least he tries to, as one goes “jogging,” instead of running for pleasure or because one has to be somewhere in a hurry. Modern man doesn’t lose himself in his partner – he operates and develops his capacity for carnal pleasure, his aptitude for orgasm. Whipless tamer of his own body, he tells it, “Come!” or “Come harder!” or “Run!” or “Dance!”

For modern man, the obligation to work is replaced by the obligation to successful leisure time, sexual constraints by the difficulty in asserting a sexual identity. Narcissistic culture goes hand in hand with a new function for religion: instead of evoking transcendence, it smoothes, in part, the way through critical periods in life – adolescence, marriage and death. Indeed, to become modern religion isn’t enough – he also needs the help of the family! Here’s how a psychologist (C. Lasch, *Le Monde*, April 12, 1981) talks: “Not an over-present family, as in the nineteenth century, but an over-absent one. It is defined not by the work ethic or sexual constraint but by ethics of survival and sexual promiscuity.”

In the midst of the moral crisis facing western society, man is less equipped than ever to resolve “the issue of sex.” It is precisely when this issue is addressed in all its naked glory that one has the best chance of understanding that it is, in fact, a non-issue.

Sex, brow-beaten for two thousand years, only emerges to become a commodity, the victim of an all-consuming commodification – sending modern man, all the more lost, into a panic. In a world of commodities, the unbridled pursuit of sensuality (such as in *La Grande Abbuffata*, [Blow-Out] 1973) sets the individual even farther apart from humanity, from his partners, from himself. Once the idea of sex as alienating and deadly reemerges, in the end, we fall back on Christianity.

The work of a Georges Bataille (1897-1962), for example, is revealing of this evolution in western society since 1900. Running counter to the history of civilization, Bataille starts from sexuality and works back to religion. From the work of fiction *Story of the Eye* (1928) until the end of his life, Bataille spent all his time exploring what was implicit in *the eye*. He crosses paths with the revolutionary movement and rapidly and easily moves away from it – especially since this movement practically disappeared. Nevertheless, he had time, in the late thirties, to take up positions with respect to antifascism and the threat of war, the lucidity of which is in sharp contrast with the verbiage produced by the vast majority of the extreme left. This explains the ambiguity of his work. It can be used as an illustration of the religious dead-ends where the experience of unbridled sexuality pushed to the extreme inevitably leads:

“A brothel is my true church, the only one unsoothing enough.” (*Le Coupable*, published in 1944.)

Although here, as in most of his work, he settled for going to the opposite extremes of accepted values, honing down a new version of Satanism, he did also write some lines revealing great intuition about essential aspects of communism: “taking perversion and crime not as exclusive values but as things to be integrated into human totality.” (April 4, 1936.)

Ecstasy

Through the cultural constructions to which they have given birth (love as in Ancient Greece, courtly love, systems of kinship, the bourgeois contract, etc.) our emotional and sexual lives have always been at once source and object of passion and conflict, as well as crossroads with another cultural sphere – the sacred. In trance, in ecstasy, in the feeling of communion with nature, human aspiration to go beyond the limits of the individual is expressed in the form of paroxysm. Diverted toward the cosmos or divinity, this aspiration to become one with the species has until now worn the prestigious rags of the sacred. Religion in general, and monotheism in particular, have set narrow limits around the sacred, assigning it a guiding role while distancing it from human life. While in primitive societies the sacred is inseparable from daily life, statist societies, on the contrary, have made it more and more specialized. Capitalist society has not liquidated the sacred, but repressed it. Multiple residual and ersatz manifestations of the sacred continue to encumber social life. Faced with a world where old religious artefacts and mercantile banalization coexist, the communist critique is two-pronged – it must desacralize, i.e., smoke all the old taboos out of their hiding places, and it must prepare to supercede the sacred where capitalism has only degraded it.

Desacralization then, of areas where old goblins have gone to hide – like the pubis, for example. Against penis worship, against the penis' conquering imperialism, feminists have found nothing better than the fetishization of the vagina. Backed up with piles of literature and pathos, they have made it the seat of their difference, the dark fold wherein their very being is to be found. Rape then becomes the crime of crimes, an ontological assault. As if a penis penetrating a woman by violence were more disgusting than forcing a woman into wage slavery by economic pressure. True, in the first case the guilty party is easily found – he is an individual – whereas in the latter case the guilty party is a social relationship. It's easier to exorcize one's fears by making rape into blasphemy, an intrusion into the holiest of holies. As if being manipulated by advertising, constantly physically abused at work, numbered and filed by government agencies were less profoundly violent in their assault on a person than imposed intercourse.

Ultimately, what makes the Somalian rip out his wife's clitoris and what drives the feminists flows from a common conception – for both, it is conceivable that human individuality may constitute the object of ownership. The Somalian, convinced that his wife is part of his livestock, feels duty-bound to protect her from feminine desire, a dangerous parasite for the economy of the flock. But, in so doing, he truncates, impoverishes his own pleasure, his own desire. The woman's clitoris is the symbolic target of all human desire, regardless of gender. This mutilated woman *has been amputated from all of humanity*. The feminist who cries out that her body belongs to herself would like to keep her desire for herself. But when she desires, she enters into a community where appropriation dissolves.

The claim "My body is my own" would give substance to the 1789 "Rights of Man." Hasn't it been repeated often enough that these rights merely apply to an abstract man and that, ultimately, the bourgeois individual (in contemporary terms, "white, male, over 21 and bourgeois") is their sole benefactor! Neoreformists claim they close this loophole by gathering up real substance and giving it to this hitherto abstract "man." In sum, the "real rights" of "real man." But "real man" is none other than woman, Jew, Corsican, homosexual, Vietnamese, etc. "My body is my own" toes the line of a bourgeois revolution forever being completed, perfected by asking democracy to have content instead of only form. In the name of the cause, they critique the effects.

Demanding ownership of one's individual body is a renewal of the bourgeois demand for the right to own property. To escape the secular oppression of women, once (and still, in other forms) treated by their husbands as property, the feminist has found nothing better than the broadening of the right to own property. May the woman own property as well, thus she'll be protected – and good fences make good neighbors! In this pitiful demand, we see the reflection of the "security" media and political parties would at all costs share among our contemporaries. The demand is born of an outlook stopped up on the inside, whereby private appropriation is the only means imaginable to be master of a thing

(in this case, one's body.) Our bodies belong to those who love us, not by virtue of any legally guaranteed "right," but because we live and move, flesh and feeling, only as a function of them. And, inasmuch as we can love the human species, our body belongs to it.

Even as it desacralizes, the communist critique must denounce the capitalist utopia of a world where one could no longer love to death, where everything flattened out, everything would be of equal value and exchangeable. Practicing sports, fucking, working would all take place in the same quantified time, sliced like a salami – industrial time. Sexologists would be on hand to fix any faltering libido, psychotherapists would rid us of any suffering of the psyche, and the police, with the support of chemistry, would prevent any stepping out of line. In such a world, no sphere of human activity – which because it could become the object of a game in which the stakes are the whole of life – would give another rhythm to time.

The ahistoric illusion which is the foundation of mystical practices is dangerous. By definition, only that part of these practices which isn't really theirs is of interest to us – that which can be communicated. One doesn't step outside of history, but history, whether it be that of the individual or that of the species, isn't the pure linear movement which capitalism works to produce and works at making people believe it produces. History includes apogees which go beyond and outside of the present, orgasms which are a losing of oneself in the other, in sociality and in the species.

"Christianity gave substance to the sacred but the nature of the sacred (...) is perhaps the most elusive thing that happens between people. The sacred is nothing but a privileged moment of communal oneness, the convulsive communication of what we ordinarily stifle." (G. Bataille, *The Sacred*)

This moment of "communal oneness" can be found today at a concert, in the panic gaining a crowd and, in its most degraded form, in great swells of patriotism and other sporadic outbursts of the *union sacree*. Manipulate it, and you can do any dirty deed. One may presume that in a modern war, unlike what happens in backward capitalist nations such as Iran, only a minority would actually participate. The rest would only *watch*. But nothing is for certain – the manipulation of the sacred may have some good days left in it, because the sacred, to date, has been the only powerful moments offered as manifestation of man's irrepressible need for togetherness.

As much as they have furnished a more or less imaginary niche outside of class struggle, mystical practices have been known to cement revolts. This is demonstrated, for example, by the role of the Taoist trance in the resistance of central power in imperial China, voodoo in slave uprisings, or millenarian prophecy. Although contemporary mystical pursuits play a counter-revolutionary role because they are merely one of many ways the bourgeois individual turns inward, the fact remains that mercantile banalization of every aspect of life tends to empty existence of its passion. The world we live in asks us to love only a jumbled bunch of individual inadequacies. Compared to traditional societies, this world has lost an essential dimension of human experience – the powerful moments of oneness with nature. We are condemned to watch pagan festivals on TV.

But it would be ridiculous for us to advocate a return to the past, to its joys which, history has taught us, are repetitive, cause of illusion, and short-sighted in character. When capital tends to impose its exclusive reign, looking elsewhere than revolution for "communal oneness" and "convulsive communication" becomes purely reactionary. That capital has made everything banal gives us the chance to liberate ourselves from that specialized sphere known as "sexuality." We want a world where being carried away, out of oneself, exists as a possibility in all human activities – a world which holds out the species to love, and individuals whose inadequacies will be those of the species and no longer those of the world. The stakes of the game today, what is worth risking death, what could give another rhythm to time is the content of life in its entirety.