

“To live and do away with the scorn for life” by Raoul Vaneigem¹

The parodic return to the past.

A crime against humanity is the founding act of an economic system that exploits human beings and nature. The millenary and bloody course of our history confirms it.

After reaching its heights with Nazism and Stalinism, barbarism returned to its frilly democratic adornments. In our days, it stagnates and, ebbing like backwash in a dead-end past, it repeats itself in parodic forms.

It is this caricatural rehashing that the managers of the present are working to stage. We see them beneficently inviting us to the spectacle of a universal dilapidation in which healthcare gulags, foreign wars, killings of old and “useless” people, the destruction of species, the suffocation of minds, the militarized time of curfews, the manufacturing of ignorance, and exhortations to self-sacrifice, Puritanism, the denunciation of others and feelings of guilty shame are all mixed together.

The incompetence of these official scriptwriters in no way diminishes the crowd’s attraction to the contemplative curse of the disaster. On the contrary! Millions of human beings docilely retreat to the corners in which they curl up until they become mere shadows of themselves.

The managers of profit making have arrived at these results, to which only absolute reification could have laid claim: they have made us so afraid of death that we renounce life.

The propagation of a carceral mentality.

In the name of the lie that propaganda calls truth, political and police-related treatments are allowed to substitute themselves for the healthcare treatments that require the simple care for the common good. No one is fooled by this sleight of hand: the rulers hide and thus support the ruination of the public hospitals to which greed enjoins them to resort.

Anger and indignation have not altered the governmental pressure that experiments with the degree of abjection that the servility of the population can reach without breaking. The wretches in power simply laugh at the diatribes against them by corporations and unions. Aren’t insults and execration a way of recognizing them, if not showing them allegiance?

¹ Raoul Vaneigem, “*Vivre et en finir avec le mépris de la vie*,” dated 21 April 2021 and published by La Voie du Jaguar on 4 May 2021: <https://www.lavoiedujaguar.net/Vivre-et-en-finir-avec-le-mepri-de-la-vie>. Translated by NOT BORED! 15 May 2021. All footnotes by the translator.

While analysts and sociologists debate about capitalism, the Ubuesque mafias of profit making and their governmental henchmen [*palotins*]² pursue the profitable murder of the living with complete legal impunity. Waiting for the next alert about the epidemic, the appetizers of hedonism are served to those who have taken the risk of getting vaccinated with products whose sole proven effectiveness lies in higher stock-market quotes and competitive advantages. Let us praise the citizens who have courageously entered into the palisades of well-proven detergents, where one white washes whiter than the others. It is true that not being afraid doesn't have the same meaning if people allow themselves to be exposed to lethal radiation and poison for the duration of their incarceration. Or if, on the contrary, they rebel against such harmful substances, remove them and disregard or overrule the decrees that legalize them.

The thought of power is dead thought; it flies at the level of graves. Its rotting-flesh smell is the smell of money. It will suffocate us as long as we fight it in its cemeteries instead of building places for living and taking up therein a guerrilla battle with weapons that do not kill – and so, as a result, our enemies don't know their scope.

How can we tolerate any longer the fear of dying from a virus,³ which prevents us from living?

With its highs and lows, doesn't everyday life demonstrate that nothing restores health better than celebration and pleasure? The pleasure of the body that is attentive to flavors, caresses and warm and welcoming ambiances stimulates the body's immunological defenses. It protects against the cries of alarm that pain and suffering push to the point of emergency, when it is too late, when the damage is already done. You don't have to be a great genius to realize this.

Never before has crime against the living been glorified with such cynicism, with such jeering stupidity. Everything has been and is still carried out the wrong way (backwards). Like the famous debt, which is both bottomless and pointless [*sans raison*], the chasm of the pandemic swallows everything that comes within its reach. The ravages caused by climatic degradation, the deadly effects of pollution and poisoned foodstuffs, cancers, heart attacks, suicidal aggression, mental troubles – *down you go, presto!*

The truth of the dominant economic system is the lie that makes an upside-down world the norm and reality. Masks⁴ conceal smiles, stifle speech and stun children who are confronted with a familiar person who becomes foreign to them.

The curse of work has become a horror; teachers are too preoccupied with safety gestures to enrich their knowledge and that of others. Our societies are slowly becoming gangrenous by the normalization of obsessive behavior, just like the aggressive anxiety that seizes hold of the inhabitants of a besieged city. Terrified retreat, mistrust and paranoia then invent internal enemies that must be hunted down.

² Cf. Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi* (1896).

³ Cf. Raoul Vaneigem, "Coronavirus" (17 March 2020):
<http://www.notbored.org/coronavirus.pdf>.

⁴ Presumably the masks worn to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

To be precise, the principle enemy is clearly identified: it is life and its insolent freedom.

We have certainly been long acquainted with the practices of the social jungle, since we have been confined there since our birth. Nevertheless, the worst eras of obscurantism and absolute despotism have kept a window open on another reality. No matter how illusory, the principle of hope galvanizes the vague hopes of revolt.

The life imprisonment to which the glaciation of profit condemns us has foreseen the need for bars that imprison our dreams. Pip-squeak environmentalists: have you thought of this paradigm?

The great reversal.

Deprived of the right to life that the very privilege of the human species has made inalienable, we have no other choice but to restore it and assure it a sovereignty to which we have never ceased to aspire.

For thousands of years, the principle “nothing is true, everything is permitted” has responded to the prime preoccupation of hierarchical power: favoring a chaos in which the call to Order justifies and maintains⁵ its authority.

There’s nothing like the specters of anarchy, of non-power, of havoc,⁶ to protect us from the hoodlums by pushing us into the security arms of the hoodlum-State.

And yet, reversed and grasped in the perspective of life, that same slogan marks a radically different determination. It expresses a will to return everything to the basics, to reinvent everything, to rebuild everything, by disencumbering ourselves from a world frozen by the glaciation of profit.

No magic wand will break the chains that our slavery has forged, but I would quite like it if we included in the excessive weight that we attribute to them the [false] beliefs – transmitted and maintained⁷ from generation to generation – that they are indisputable, that no effort can break them.

A real bewitching effect gives credence to the fable of the natural powerlessness of women and men. Right from the start, it thwarts emancipatory initiatives that define history. As a result, for centuries, the victories of freedom have celebrated their defeats and the worship of victims has honored the vocation of self-sacrifice and withers our societies by militarizing them.

Breaking the spell doesn’t mean resorting to the Leninist “What is to be done?” nor does it proceed from an insurrectionary challenge. What accounts for the coherence and paradoxical

⁵ I have interpreted *affermir* (to lease) as a typo and that *affirmer* was intended.

⁶ Vaneigem has rendered *chienlit* as *chie-en-lit*, which means “shit in the bed.” Cf. infamous speech by French President Charles de Gaulle on 19 May 1968 in which he proclaimed “*La réforme oui, la chienlit non!*”

⁷ Once again, I have interpreted *affermir* (to lease) as a typo and that *affirmer* was intended.

rationality of this universal bewitchment? The management of beings and circumstances, which power has long attributed to supernatural intervention. The fable of a celestial mandate delivered by the gods⁸ attributes the redoubtable traits of an extraterrestrial being hurling thunderbolts and spells down at mere mortals to someone who is merely a tyrannical and cunning brute.

The decapitation of God and Louis XVI, the last monarch of divine right, ended – not power – but the fear of being seized by it for the slightest hint of protest.

Though it remained deadly, governmental authority lost what little presence remained to it, so overwhelming was the ridiculousness of its incontinences. There was also the revolt of the women who, with their inexorable fingers, punctured the “evil eye” that the patriarchy persisted on shining on them.

What promises *a contrario* to come from such dilapidation isn’t any less obvious. An irresistible movement towards the tipping point is breaking out everywhere in the world. It has its own rhythm and conditions. The rebirth of the living marks the first steps of the human being on a terrain from which he has been dispossessed. This renewal has nothing to do with prophets, people like Cassandra or soothsayers. Challenges do not bother it; resistance is enough.

Apocalyptic capitalism and anti-capitalist catastrophism constitute the two opposing poles from which will spring, like an electric arc, a dazzling return to life.

Underneath the resignation of millions of people condemned to repression and boredom (that great dissolver of energy) an insurrectionary force is accumulating; in the incalculable time of a flash of lightening, it will sweep away all of our little corporate, political, competitive and sectarian battles.

A revolution – latent, divided, fragmented, broken up – confusedly seeks the junction point where, in a communal rage, the individual and the collective will recover their lucidity and unity.

During the time of Goebbels, the heavy clumsiness of the lie and its credibility had the weight of a truth to which nationalist doctrine and the dynamism of capitalism gave an illusory coherence.

What about today? The dynamism of the captain of industry – whom the financial and speculative focalization of capitalism has left behind – no longer nourishes the least hope for social improvement. The multinationals nip protectionist, nationalist and pro-sovereignty policies in the bud.

The confirmed bankruptcy of the great scientific truths that have been corrupted by profit making has involved in the debacle the idea of progress, long perceived as beneficial due to the comfort that it procures for survival.

The inheritors of the experts who swore that the cloud from Chernobyl had avoided the beautiful sky of France irremediably discredited the milieu of scientists in general and medicine in

⁸ cf. “the Divine Right of Kings.”

particular. I do not know if healthcare self-defense⁹ will go as far as assisted self-medication but it isn't in doubt that the relations between patients and caregivers will take a turn that is less mechanical, less commercial, more human, more emotional.

Unlike the opinion polls, the statistical barometers and the other dispensaries of prefabricated opinions, innovation and inventiveness give themselves free rein, exploring new territories, haphazardly trying out aberrations and creations of genius. Sensitive intelligence will select, refine and recognize its own as it puts them to use by reaping the gifts that nature bestows without reserve or discernment. Sensitive intelligence is the new rationality.

Betting on individual and collective autonomy.

Yes, I have confidence in the sensitive intelligence that was hidden and discredited by intellectual intelligence for so long. As the progressive crumbling of the hierarchical pyramid shows, the intellectual has never been more than the instrument of the upper classes, the spirit of the master reigning over the body and the lower parts of society.

His function as leader extends to the critical corrosion with which he infests the old world for which he works. The contempt with which he, from the beginning, in France, has heaped upon this movement of “uneducated and uncontrollable oafs” that the Yellow Vests are supposed to remain reveals the malaise that gnaws at him. While a part of the *homo intellectualensis* tried to make up for his initial blunder and be forgiven for it by waving the moth-eaten flag of the “convergence of struggles,” the part of the consciousness that is awakening reveals in him, as in each one of us, the drama of thought separated from life, of the abstraction that exiles us from our living substance. Because intellectualism is a flaw as common to all of us as the division of labor and the invariable status of exploited and exploiter.

When I appeal for the return of the living, for the unity of the world and me, it is this part of consciousness that I invoke because it participates in the process of becoming human and it has always been the light that guides us.

Human consciousness is the foundation of the universal thought that is the best shared and the most suppressed reality in our history. That which strikes it with prohibitions disintegrates and that which sets it alight – illuminates it, in every sense of the word – is hardly more than a spark, but it doesn't go out. From now on, why not bet on the fire that gleams at the heart of our desires?

The rebirth of the earth and the body are part of my dreams. I claim the right to subjective madness. I authorize myself to want to carry out its plans; so many games of the possible and the impossible multiply in and around us.

⁹ Raoul Vaneigem, “We Decree the Self-Defense of Our Health” (17 May 2020): <http://www.notbored.org/self-defense.pdf>.

I agree that the militants of hope and despair are well founded when they accuse many of my ideas of being mere optimism, pipe dreams and fantasy; these ideas might help nourish them if they are not consumed as purely intellectual snacks.

The awakening of the living is a threat to the little marquis of ideology. Swift kicks to the ass of power hit them where they live.

Life is a celebration; let's celebrate life.

I am inclined to think that an awakened consciousness more easily disturbs the world than a surge of easily led enthusiasm. Radicalism is an attractive radiation; it is a shortcut that cuts off the ordinary routes of laborious reflection.

To create my happiness by supporting the happiness of others better fits my will to live than the lamentations of critique-critique,¹⁰ whose walls seal in or, at least, darken our horizons.

I have outbreaks of impatience in which I want to cry out: "Let go of everything! Sweep the sycophants of money down the drain! Cut loose the moorings of the old world; seize hold of the only freedom that makes us human: the freedom to live!"

I am not unaware that having recourse to slogans and oburgations gives more importance to the concrete screed of inertia than to the awareness that will, in due time, fissure and break it up. But no one and nothing will prevent me from rejoicing in the idea that I'm not alone in calling for a festive tornado that will relieve us (as from a bad case of diarrhea) of the living dead who govern us. The return of the joy of living doesn't care about vengeance, the settling of accounts or popular tribunals. The respiration of individuals and collectives takes no notice of corporate, unionized, political, administrative and sectarian structures; it blows away progressivism and conservatism, those dramatizations of the egalitarianism of the cemetery, which is henceforth the fate of totalitarian democracies. It opens to the individualist, embittered by egotistical calculations, the path of an autonomy that, because it allows him to discover that he is a unique and incomparable individual, offers the best guarantee of becoming an entirely human being.

The individual takes advice but refuses orders. Learning to correct his mistakes frees him from reproaches. Autonomy inscribes itself in the *dolce stil nuovo*¹¹ dedicated to supplanting the reign of the inhuman.

Let that which rots rot and prepare for the harvest. Such is the alchemical principle that presides over the transmutation of market society into a living society. Isn't it the aspiration to live by surpassing survival that everywhere sets in motion the insurrection of everyday life? There's a poetic power there that no power can put an end to, neither by force nor by trickery. If consciousness is slow to recognize something as obvious as this, it is because we are accustomed to seeing everything through the small end of the telescope; we interpret our daily struggles in

¹⁰ The critique of critique.

¹¹ Italian for "sweet new style." Cf. the Italian poetry devoted to love, circa the 13th and 14th centuries.

terms of defeats and victories without understanding that it is the ring in the nose that leads us to the slaughterhouse.

Wandering between decline and renewal, we have acquired the right to evade and leave behind the dance of death, of which we know all the steps, to explore a life that, alas, we have only known through furtive pleasures.

The new innocence of rediscovered life is neither a beatitude nor an Edenic state. The harmonization of the living ensemble requires constant effort. It is up to us to attempt the adventure and to dance on the graves of the builders of cemeteries.