

“Life has every right and predation has none” An interview with Raoul Vaneigem¹

Your friend Noël Godin² has recently confided in us that he only believes “in insurrection, alcoholic excess and fucking.” Do these options suit you, too?

That’s a good beginning. I would scorn any subversive movement that involved asceticism, self-sacrifice, or militancy. I also think that we have to go further. You’d have to be a priest to speak of love without fucking, but if fucking without love has the merit of satisfying a need, it is too often a form of predation or a variant of the hedonistic consumerism in which desire, by losing its authenticity, plunges us back into a world of falsification and profit that we no longer want. A passion that doesn’t refine itself becomes inverted into a death drive that is the reflex of predation and the engine powering survival and an economy founded on the exploitation of people by other people.

In the *Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations*,³ you write: “Surviving has until now prevented us from living.” Would your assessment be even gloomier today?

An assessment serves to evaluate the adversary, not to become resigned to it, whatever its apparent power. For decades, people imagined a Soviet army capable of swooping down on Europe and invading it. But people saw very quickly that this Red Army was eaten away on the inside and inoperable, but its image suited the Western democracies. Exaggerating the danger allowed them to hide their corruption and their own deterioration. The immense Stalinist empire crumbled into dust in several weeks, revealing what it had long been: a scattering of mafia bureaucracies. Today, it is the empire of the multinationals that is imploding right in front of our eyes, and the majority continues to lament this rather than put into place a society in which solidarity and the common good are restored. It’s a question of breaking with a system that destroys us and building collectives and an environment in which it is possible for us to begin to live.

The 1960s were years in which there was an upsurge of life, of militant enthusiasm, of excess on the part of a generation that thought it could appropriate the world. The new century seems much more dismal, grey and empty in comparison. What would you say to a young idealist to raise his or her morale?

That the commercial world is cracking on all sides, that it is in the process of collapsing, dragging down with it all those who are attached to it, even those fighting against it. I’d say that,

¹ Raoul Vaneigem, “*La vie a tous les droits, la prédation n’en a aucun*,” published 14 October 2008 by *Article11*: <http://www.article11.info/?Raoul-Vaneigem-Ici-les-citoyens>. Translated by NOT BORED! 26 June 2021. All footnotes by the translator.

² Noël Godin is the pseudonym of Jean-Pierre Bouyxou (born 1945), a Belgian anarchist and humorist.

³ Published in 1967, often translated as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

instead of endlessly repeating the same desperate critiques, it is time to lay down the bases of a new society, to build self-management by seizing hold of alternative forms of energy and putting them at the service of collectives that refuse to explain themselves to the managers of the global bankruptcy or the crooks whose power has no other support than the passivity and resignation of the masses. That what we must rediscover is our inventiveness, our awareness of our creative wealth.

In *Entre le deuil du monde et la joie de vivre*,⁴ you cite the liberating experience of the Spanish Civil War. You were in Oaxaca in November 2006.⁵ Was that also one the moments of grace and life?

Despite the deadly repression, the acts of violence and the torture, the resistance in Oaxaca hasn't stopped. The fire is alive under the ashes. The movement of the barricaders, the libertarians and the indigenous communities freed itself from the Leftist garbage – Leninist-Trotskyite-Maoists – who tried to recuperate it. Things are clear now, and when the battle begins again, it will be fearless and without ambiguity. On the other hand, in Europe, where people are no longer shot, what dominates is fear and voluntary servitude. The financial system is collapsing and the people are still ready to pay their taxes in order to bail out the coffers emptied by the crooks that they made heads of state. Here, unlike Oaxaca, the citizens elect the butchers who lead them to the slaughterhouse.

In the same spirit, what do you think of the texts by Hakim Bey,⁶ the idea that freedom can only be found in “temporary autonomous zones” created for a time on the Internet, during demonstrations or illegal celebrations? That the free person of today is an occasional pirate, emerging when the occasion presents itself?

I have never confused revolt with revolution and, even less, emancipation with predation. Letting off steam is a tribute to repression. A riot is a release; revolt is always recuperable. But self-managing collectives are not. We are neither pirates, outsiders, nor marginals; we are at the center of a unified society to be created and, whether we want to or not, we must learn to oppose a direct democracy to the parliamentary, crony-ridden and corrupt democracy that is collapsing along with the financial powers that both support and devour it.

Reading your most recent work, we understand that the solution can't be global, but found in each individual. Isn't this a deceptive elitism, on the grounds that people are more often disappointing than inspiring?

⁴ Raoul Vaneigem, *Entre le deuil du monde et la joie de vivre* (éditions Verticales, 2008); not yet translated into English.

⁵ Vaneigem has written three essays on the uprising in Oaxaca: “Appeal from a partisan of individual and collective autonomy” (2 November 2006): <http://www.notbored.org/oaxaca.pdf>; “Long Live Oaxaca!” (28 November 2006): <http://www.notbored.org/Que-vive-Oaxaca.pdf>; and “Long live the Commune!” (6 December 2007): <http://www.notbored.org/commune.pdf>.

⁶ Hakim Bey is the pseudonym of Peter Lamborn Wilson (born 1945), an American writer and poet. He is best known for his book *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (Autonomedia, 1991).

Which people? The social climbers, the men of power, the authoritarian cretins? Assuredly so. But those who want to live humanely do not constitute an elite, they are not exceptions. Certainly the news outlets do not speak of it; the spectacle ignores it; but there's another world than that of advertizing and journalistic propaganda, right? Collectives are forming everywhere. What's being sketched out here, sometimes with mistakes and confusion, is a way of life that is truly human, a total break with the world of commerce. A re-reading of my most recent book will confirm it for you: for me, the solution can only be global and local, collective and individual. The happiness of one person is linked to the happiness of everyone. Despair is the best weapon of our oppressors.

You write: “I do not predict an sudden relaxation of the living being, which has been constricted for too long; I bet upon a secretly prepared due date; in advance, I sharpen the awareness that, despite interminable lethargic regressions, will imprint its human meaning upon it.” Does this mean that we will have to suffer in silence for even longer?

The desire for another life is already that life. Surviving is suffering in silence. But trying to live as happily as possible is the surest way to go beyond survival. It isn't a question of consuming the happiness of the supermarket, but creating, for oneself and for everyone, a space and a time that is free from the grasp of the commodity. Happiness is a struggle to be waged, not a commodity [*une denrée*] to be consumed.

Never join in, never give up, just live with your head held high and your heart in peace – is that the only slogan?

To provide slogans is to attach little importance to the autonomy and intelligence of individuals. What I desire is an awareness of our own capacities and the will to bet upon what is alive and human within us.

Has situationism ever been more relevant than it is today?

By way of a response, I communicate to you the text of a short leaflet that was drafted during the commemorations you are aware of.⁷

Clarification

The silence that, for almost 40 years, kept the Situationist International ostracized has been succeeded by the din of its high-society recuperation [*sa récupération mondaine*]. Situationism now triumphs. It has a market, fashions, sycophants and denigrators. Its history is exhibited everywhere, in the amphitheatres of culture, like a lifeless body, but, in a stinging reversal, cadavers are the ones who are examining and contemplating it.

From the beginning, the situationists warned against situationism – an ideology, a spectacular category, a lie about the living torn away from its

⁷ The 40th anniversary of the May-June 1968 uprising in France.

radicalism. With the result that situationism has succeeded in being everywhere in the spectacle, while the situationists themselves are not in it at all. It is still clandestinely that the sum of the thinking brought to light by the situationists begins to make its way through and touch people's minds by gradually breaking apart the dominant obscurantism.

What is the state of the world? The philosophy of business and short-term profits is nihilism. The old form of capitalism no longer undertakes anything; in fact, it sacrifices to stock-market speculation the very industries and public services that, just yesterday, it was proud to promote. The fetishism of money establishes, not just complicity, but a communion of spirit between the idiot who attacks poor people or burns down a school or a library and the wheeler-dealer brute who increases his or her profits by destroying the public good. The less useful the work, the greater the number of accomplices [*affidés*]. Corrupt democracies are obsessed with oriental despotism, which plugs its cracks with the fear of women and the terror felt by the patriarchy in dire straits. Under the ecumenical pressure of the commodity, the various religions are emptied of their dogmatic substance and, with their convulsions, give a rhythm to a dance of death that is re-orchestrated everywhere to galvanize the adepts of death. There are no longer any ideas or beliefs that haven't been denuded of meaning, eviscerated and reduced to the state of symbolic carrion; so easily do the crowds – galvanized by hatred, despair, ultimate predation, the frenetic search for a slave's job on the labor market – rally around them. . . . But what if, nevertheless, the will to live suddenly swept away the ruins in which non-existence bitterly vegetates?

Not a challenge, but a wager, Situationist thought proclaims: this is the end of the exploitation of nature; the end of work, exchange, appropriation, separation from oneself, self-sacrifice, feelings of guilt, the renunciation of happiness, the fetishism of money, power, hierarchical authority, the contempt for and fear of women, the subornation of children, intellectual ancestries, military and police despotism, religion, ideology, and repression and its deadly releases!

Life has every right and predation has none.