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For a World Without Morality
early-mid 1980s

Translated from “La Banquise” #1 by Michael William. Translator’s note: the following text first appeared in the theoretical anti-state communist journal “La Banquise”, which was published in the early to mid-1980s. Copies of “La Banquise” and “Le Brise-Glace” (mid to late 1980s) are still available by writing to Mordicus, a more recent journal in which some former “La Banquise” and “Le Brise-Glace” members are participating. Write to: Mordicus, B.P. 11, 75622 Paris Cedex 13, France. Later published in “Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed” #38 — Fall ’93.

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viduals, for better or worse. Ecstasy: a voyage beyond the profane, the banal, and into the sacred; an escape which is immediately cut off and circumscribed by religion. Crime: the only way out when the norm can no longer be respected or circumvented.

Love, the sacred and crime are ways to escape the present and to give it meaning. Positive or negative: each of them include attraction and rejection and enter into a relationship of attraction and rejection with respect to each other. Love is put on a pedestal but people mistrust it. The sacred inherently contains the threat of being profaned; it evokes profanation in order to exclude it and in so doing reinforces itself. Though punished, crime fascinates.

These three means of going beyond daily life are neither generalized nor abolished by communism. All life (collective or individual) implies boundaries. But communism will be amoral in the sense that there will be no fixed norms which are external to social life. Not without clashes or violence, ways of behaving will circulate, and will be transmitted, transformed and produced along with social relationships. As an absolute separation between an interior and an exterior the sacred will melt away. Thus there will be no more room for religion — those of yesteryear or modern religions which no longer recognize gods, just devils which are to be ejected from the social body. People's freedom, their capacity to modify nature, will project them outside themselves. Until now, morality — any morality — and, even more insidiously, those which do not present themselves as ones, turn these places beyond oneself into entities which crush people's being. Communism will not level the "magic mountain"; it will make it possible to avoid being dominated by it. It will create and multiply distant places and the pleasure of losing oneself in them, but also the capacity to create what is new, what subverts a "natural" submission to any type of worldly order.

someone have kids in such a world when there is not even a gleam of a possibility of transforming it?

However, beyond a few simple principles — no participating in attempts at mystification or repression (neither cops nor stars), and no careerism — there is no way that precise and definitive forms of refusal can be pinned down. There are no good social customs as far as a radical critique is concerned; there are just ones which are worse than others, and there is behaviour which turns theory into a mockery. To be a revolutionary in a non-revolutionary period… What counts is less the unavoidably fragmented and mutilating results of this contradiction than the contradiction itself and the tension of refusal.

Why criticize the misery of social customs if this misery will persist? Only in relation to communism does our behaviour make sense. For, with respect to the Cioran quote which opened this section, the response must be that the sweat and disasters which do not belong to us and that the world imposes are the ones that are really intolerable. When time is killing us, the only excuse at our disposal is that history will avenge us. The meaning of what we do is the possibility that *the 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 choices. Calling for "a few less cops" will become less feasible. More and more the choice will be between what exists and no cops at all. It is then that humanity will really have to demonstrate whether it loves freedom or not.

* * *

Love, ecstasy, crime: three historical products through which humanity has lived and lives its practical and emotional relations. Love: the consequence of indifference and generalized selfishness; taking refuge in a few people who, by chance or out of necessity, have been given a privileged role. Love is the impossible love of humanity which is fulfilled in a few indi-

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their own desires and being. “Human beings are the true being-in-its-totality of man” (Marx). The words being-in-its-totality, or collective being, expresses our movement even better than the word communism, which is primarily associated with collectivizing things. Marx’s sentence is worth developing extensively, and we will return to it. For now it will be sufficient to grasp the critique of bourgeois humanism contained in this sentence. Whereas the Montaigne-type honest individual can become everyone thanks to the mediation of culture, communists know from practice that they only exist as they are because everyone exists the way they do.

Which hardly signifies that no desire should be repressed. Repression and sublimation prevent people from sliding into a refusal of otherness. But communism is a society with no guarantee other than the free play of passions and needs, whereas capitalist society is gripped by a frantic need to guarantee against every mishap of life, including death. Every conceivable danger and risk, except “natural disasters” — war and revolution, etc. — must be “insured against.” The only thing which capitalism is unable to insure against is its own disappearance.

When one is after a critique of the totality of this world, there is no question of remaining at a level of pure theory. There are times when subversive activity is *almost* entirely reduced to writing texts and an exchange of viewpoints between individuals. It is this “almost” that bothers us: to continue to view the world lucidly you have to possess a tension which is hard to keep up because it implies a refusal, a certain marginalization, and a profound sterility. This refusal, marginalization and sterility contribute to maintaining passion just as much as they tend to congeal it into misanthropic mean-spiritedness or intellectual frenzy. Those who refuse a world organized by capital know that none of the acts of social life are unquestionable. Even the manifestations of biological givens do not escape their torment! To accept to procreate appears suspect: how can

At times this refractory people myth has encumbered revolutionary theory, as in the case of the Situationists' fascination with outlaws in general and Lacenaire in particular, a fascination which reached its high point with Debord's last appalling film.[5] But if this myth must be criticized, it is also because it simply represents the flipside of the coin and thus tends to assist class society's production of fascinating monsters.

At times a shudder of passion passes through the ocean of zombies we are swimming in. It is when citizens are served up a being which is completely foreign, a thing which looks like a person but to which any real humanity is denied. For the Nazi it is the Jew; for the antifascist, the Nazi. For today's crowds it is terrorists, criminals or child killers. When it is comes to tracking down these monsters and determining their punishment, passions surge again at last and imaginations that appeared dead race. Unfortunately, this type of imagination and its fine-tuning is precisely what is attributed to that other guaranteed-non-human monster: the Nazi executioner.

It has never been possible to force everyone to respect laws which are in contradiction with the way social relationships really work. Nor has it been possible to prevent murder when there have been reasons to kill. Nor to prevent theft when there have been inequalities and as long as commerce is based on theft. So an example is made by homing in on one case. And what is more: this exorcises the part of you which would like to execute the defenceless bodies or the child killer/raper too. The element of envy in the crowd's cries of hatred is obvious. Even to those who are naturally blind, like journalists.

Communism, on the contrary, *is a society without monsters*. Without monsters because everyone will finally recognize, in the desires and acts of others, the different possible shapes of

[5]Translator's note: *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*. A translation of the script recently became available from BM Signpost, London WC1N 3XX, England. Also see the review in this issue by John Zerzan.

This introduction to a critique of social customs is a contribution to a necessary revolutionary anthropology. The communist movement possesses a dimension which is both a class and human one. It is a movement which is based on the central role of workers without being a form of workerism, and *without* being a humanism it moves toward a human community. For now, reformism thrives on separation by piling up demands in parallel spheres without ever questioning these spheres themselves. One of the proofs of the potency of a communist movement will be its capacity to recognize, and in practice to supersede, this gap and contradiction between the dimensions of class and community.

It is this gap and contradiction which flourish in the ambiguities of emotional life, making the critique of morality more delicate than other critiques.

What follows is not a text about "sexuality," which is an historical and cultural product in the same sense as the economy and work. Along with work and the economy, "sexuality" came into being as a specialized sphere of human activity during 19th century capitalism, when it was finalized and theorized (discovered). It was then banalized by capitalism in the 20th and is something we can go beyond in a totally communist life.

For the same reasons, this text is not a "critique of daily life." Such a critique expresses only the social space which is *excluded from work* and is in competition with it. "Customs," on the contrary, include the entirety of human relations from a viewpoint of the sentiments. These customs do not exclude material production (the bourgeois morality of the family, for example, is indissociable from the work ethic).

Since in its own way capitalism sums up the human past which produced it, there can be no revolutionary critique without a critique of the customs and lifeways which preceded capitalism, and *the way they have been integrated by it.*

LOVE — ECSTASY — CRIME

Love

According to Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, "The most natural relationship between man and man is the relationship between man and woman." This formula is comprehensible and can be of use as long as we keep in mind that humanity's history is the history of its emancipation from nature through the creation of the economic sphere. The concept that humans are anti-nature, that they are completely external to nature, is clearly an aberration. Humanity's nature is at the same time a purely biological given (we are primates) and the activity, within and outside of themselves, of people modifying what is a purely natural given.

People are not external to natural conditions because they themselves are one of them. But they wish to understand these conditions and have begun to play with them. There is room for discussion about the mechanisms which have brought this about (the extent to which it resulted from difficulties of survival, especially in the temperate regions, etc.). But what is certain is that, by transforming their environment, and being transformed in turn by it, people find themselves in a situation which radically distinguishes them from other known states of matter. Stripped of all metaphysical presuppositions, this capacity to play to a certain extent with the rules of matter is in effect human freedom. This freedom, from which people have been dispossessed in the process of creating it (since it is what has nourished the economy), is the freedom that must be reconquered. But without entertaining any illusions about what it is: neither the freedom of expansive desires which do not run

> *(Jacques Rigaut, testimony in the "Barres Affair," Ecrits)*

An entire body of nihilist literature has set out the viewpoint of the "dishbreaker," of people who resist any social connection (with a death urge as a compulsory corollary). But the attractive music of the nihilist thinkers, has not prevented most of them from losing themselves in the hum of daily life until they reached a respectable old age. This incoherence supports the contention that these purely refractory people are just a literary myth. For the rare individuals who, like Rigaut, have chosen the last resort of suicide, or have really tasted misery like Genet, this myth was lived passionately. But the fact that sincere intransigent mystics have no doubt existed hardly proves the existence of god. These "refractory people" foster an elitism which is a false approach from the very start. The worst part is not that they believe that they are superior, but that they are *different* from the rest of humanity. They would like to think that they are observing a world from which they have distanced themselves. People, however, can only understand what they are participating in. When they believe that they are lucid because they are on the outside, they fall into the worst trap. In Bataille's words:

> "I have never been able to consider existence with the distracted scorn of a man who is alone." (*Oeuvres*, II, p. 274)
>
> "For it is the tumult of humanity, with all the vulgarity of people's big and little needs and their flagrant disgust with the police who hold them back — it is the activity of everyone (except the cops and the friends of the cops) which alone conditions revolutionary mental forms as opposed to bourgeois ones." (*Oeuvres*, II, p. 108–9)

society theoretically leaves up to individuals against whom it at the same time enacts legislation *from the outside*.

Religious law, and, later, the law of the state, have presupposed a separation. This is the difference compared to communism, where there will be no need for intangible laws that everyone knows will not be respected. There will be no absolutes, except, perhaps, the primacy of the species — which is not to say its survival. There will be no falsely universal rules. Like the law, every morality rationalizes ideology *after the fact*; they always wish and claim to be the basis of social life while at the same time wishing to be without a basis themselves since they are based only on God, nature, logic, or the good of society … That is, a basis which cannot be questioned because it does not exist. In a communist world, the rules which human beings will adopt, in ways we cannot predict, will flow from communist social bonds. They will not constitute a morality in the sense that they will claim no illusory universality in time and space. The rules of the game will include the possibility of playing with the rules.

> "Revolt is a form of optimism which is hardly less repugnant than the usual kind. In order to exist revolt implies that people must envisage an opportunity to react. In other words, that there is a preferable way of doing things which we must strive towards. When it is a goal, revolt is also optimistic; change and disorder are considered satisfactory. I am incapable of believing that there is something satisfactory.
>
> (…)
>
> Question — In your opinion, is suicide a last resort?
>
> — Precisely, and one which is hardly less antipathetic than a job skill or a morality."

into obstacles, nor the freedom to submit to the commands of Mother Nature (who could decipher them?). It also means giving full rein to our freedom to play with the laws of nature, a freedom which is as much one of re-routing the course of a body of water as it is one of making sexual use of an orifice which was not naturally "intended" for this use. It is a question of finally realizing that only risk guarantees freedom.

Because it must give human freedom full rein, the critique of human customs cannot single out one practice as opposed to another as a symbol of their misery. It is sometimes said that in today's world, the freedom to be found in people's lifestyles is simply a masturbatory activity (alone, two people, or more). To limit oneself to this given is to misapprehend the essence of sexual misery. Must the self-evident be belabored? There are solitary jerk-offs which are infinitely less miserable than many embraces. Reading a good adventure novel can be a lot more lively than organized excursions. What is miserable is to live in a world where the only adventures are in books. It is not the daydreams eventually followed by results which someone makes us experience that are disgusting. The disgusting part is the conditions which must be fulfilled in order to make it possible to meet the person. When we read a want ad in which a man with a beard invites the old woman and her dog who live upstairs over to have some fun, it is neither his beard, her age nor the zoophilia which disgust us. What is repugnant is that, by putting an ad in *Liberation* [a leftist daily], his desire becomes a means to market a particularly nauseating ideological commodity.

When someone is alone in a room writing a theoretical text, to the extent that the text provides insight into social reality, he or she is less isolated from people than at work or in the subway. Although the predominance of one of them may be symtomatic, it is not in one activity as opposed to another that the essence of sexual misery is to be found; it resides in the fact that, whether there are ten people, two, or if you are alone, in-

dividuals are irremediably separated from each other through relations of competition, exhaustion and boredom. Exhaustion from working; boredom with roles; the boredom of sexuality as a separate activity.

Sexual misery, in the first place, signifies social constraint (the constraints of wage-labor, and its cortege of psychological and physiological miseries; the constraints of social codes). These social constraints exert influence in a domain which is presented by the dominant culture and its dissident version as one of the last regions in the world where adventure remains possible. To the extent that capitalist Judeo-Christian civilization has been imposed upon people, sexual misery also signifies their profound disarray with respect to how the West has handled sexuality.

From Stoicism, the dominant outlook during the Roman Empire, Christianity adopted the double concept that: 1) sex is the basis of pleasure; 2) therefore it can and should be controlled. The Orient, for its part, through an open affirmation of sexuality (and not just the art of making love), tends towards a pansexualism where sexuality must of course be mastered but in the same sense as everything else; it is not given a privileged position. The West does not control sexuality by ignoring it but by thinking of nothing else. Everything is sexualized. The worst aspect is not that sex is repressed by Judeo-Christianity, but that Judeo-Christianity was dazzled by it. And not that Judeo-Christianity kept a lid ' on sexuality, but that it organized it. The West has made sexuality the hidden truth of the normal conscience. But of madness (hysteria) as well. Just as a crisis of morality was getting underway, Freud discovered that sexuality was the big secret of the world and of civilization as a whole.

Sexual misery comes from an interaction between two moral orders, the traditional and modern ones which cohabit, to a greater or lesser extent, in the minds and glands of our contemporaries. On the one hand we suffer from constraints of

reappropriate things, not to punish. In any case, only when a world without price tags begins to spread will the possibility of harm being done by hoarders be completely removed. If money is nothing more than pieces of paper, if what is hoarded can no longer be exchanged for money, what would be the point of hoarding?

The more a revolution radicalizes, the less it needs to be repressive. We are all the more willing to affirm this since human life, in the sense of biological survival, is not the supreme value for communism. It is capitalism which imposes the monstrous scam of an assurance of maximal survival in exchange for maximum submission to the economy. But isn't a world where you must hide to choose the hour when you die a world that is extremely *devalued*?

Communism does not use values people adopt as a starting point; it uses the real relations they are experiencing. Each group carries out, refuses, allows and imposes certain acts and not others. Before having values, and *in order* to have them, there are things which people do or don't do, which they impose or forbid.

In contradictory class societies what is forbidden is set in stone and simultaneously subject to be outmanoeuvred or violated. In primitive societies, and to a certain extent in traditional societies, what is forbidden does not constitute a morality as such. Values and taboos are constantly produced in every activity of social life. It is when work and private life became more and more radically opposed that the question of social customs imposed itself, becoming acute in 19th century Europe with the rise of what the bourgeoisie called the dangerous classes. It was necessary for workers to be said to be free to go to work (in order to justify the capitalists' freedom to refuse to provide it to them). At the same time morality had to be kept in good working order and people were told not to drink too much and that work equals dignity. There is morality only because there are social customs, that is, a domain which

during 19th century riots and the moral order which was reproduced in these riots. In the same sense, during the first years of the Russian revolution a "Bolshevik marriage code" whose title is an entire program in itself was juxtaposed onto a powerful movement which was transforming social customs. Any more or less revolutionary period will witness the appearance of groups which are halfway between social subversion and delinquency, as well as temporary inequalities, hoarders, profiteers, and above all, an entire spectrum of nebulous conduct which will be hard to label "revolutionary," "counterrevolutionary," "survival tactics," etc. Ongoing communization will resolve this, but in one or two generations, perhaps longer. Until then, measures must be taken — not in the sense of a "return to law and order," which will be one of the key slogans of the antirevolutionaries — but by developing what is original in a communist movement: for the most part it does not repress, *it subverts*.

This means, in the first place, that a communist movement uses only the amount of violence which is strictly necessary to reach its goals. Not out of moralism or non-violence, but because any superfluous violence becomes autonomous and an end in itself. Next, it signifies that a communist movement's weapons are above all the transformation of social relationships and the production of social conditions of existence. Spontaneous looting will cease to be a massive change of owners, a simple juxtaposition of private appropriations, if a community of struggle is formed between the looters and producers. Only on this condition can looting become a point of departure for a social reappropriation and use of riches in a perspective which is broader than one of simply consuming. (Which is not to be condemned in itself. Social life is not only productive activity but also consumption and consummation. And if the poor wish to offer themselves a few pleasures first, who but priests would think of holding it against them?) As for hoarders, if violent measures will be necessary at times it will be to

morality and work, which keep us from attaining the historical ideal of a sexual blossoming and of a blossoming of love. On the other, the more we free ourselves from these constraints (in our imaginations in any case), the more this ideal appears unsatisfactory and empty.

A tendency and its transformation into a spectacle should not be taken as a totality. If a relative liberalization has occurred during our era, the traditional order has far from disappeared. Just try being openly "pedophile." The traditional order functions and will long continue to function for a lot of people living in the industrialized countries. In many parts of the world it is still dominant and on the offensive (in the Islamic countries and in the Eastern Bloc). Its representatives, priests from Rome or Moscow, are far from inactive in France itself. The suffering caused by their misdeeds is still weighty enough that we should hardly be prevented from denouncing them with the claim that the underpinnings of traditional morality are being undermined by capital. Not every revolt against this order necessarily tends toward neo-reformism. Just as easily revolt can be the oppressed person's cry, a cry which contains the kernel of the infinite variety of possible sexual and sensual practices which have been repressed for millennia.

We are not, it should be clear, against "perversions." We do not even oppose lifelong heterosexual monogamy. But when *litterateurs* or artists (the surrealists for example) wish to impose *I'amourfou* ("mad love") as what is most desirable, it must be stated that this is a recycled version of the great modern Western reductionist myth. The object of this myth is to provide a spiritual bonus for couples — those isolated atoms which constitute the capitalist economy's best basis. Among the riches of a world free of capital will be the infinite variations of a perverse and polymorphous sexuality and sensuality. Only with the blossoming of these practices will the love

[1] Author's note: romantic stories.

praised by Andre Breton and Harlequin novels[1] appear for what it really is — a transitory cultural construction.

The traditional moral order is oppressive and merits being criticized and combatted as such. But if it finds itself in a state of crisis it is not because our contemporaries prize freedom more than our ancestors. It is because bourgeois morality has been unable to adapt to modern conditions of producing and circulating commodities.

The bourgeois morality conceived in its full scope during the 19th century and transmitted through religious channels and secular schools arose from a need for ideological conduits towards the domination of industrial capitalism at a time when capital was not yet entirely dominant. Sexual morality and the morality of work and of the family went hand in hand. Capital was based on bourgeois and petit bourgeois values: property as the fruit of work and saving; hard but necessary work; family life. In the first half of the 20th century capital reached a point where it occupied the entire social space, making itself indispensable and inevitable. Because there is nothing else, working for a salary becomes the only possible activity. Thus, even as it imposes itself on everyone, wage labor is able to present itself as a non-constraint and guarantee of freedom. Since everything becomes a commodity, each aspect of morality becomes outmoded. Through credit people gain access to property *before* saving. They work because it is practical, not out of a sense of duty. The extended family gives way to the nuclear family, which is itself thrown into disarray by the constraints of money and work. Schools and the media challenge parents with respect to authority, influence and education. Everything announced in the *Communist Manifesto* has been accomplished by capitalism. With the disappearance of community places to get together (cafés ...) and their replacement by places to consume which lack feeling (discos, malls), too much is asked of the family at a time when it has less than ever to offer.

becoming unglued? (...) Life is not a laughing matter, teachers and mothers affirm, not without the most hilarious gravity, to children who are astounded by the news. In the unfortunate mind clouded by this mysterious training, however, I can imagine a still-gleaming paradise which begins with a resounding crash of broken dishes. (...) Unimpeded fun has all the products of the world at its disposal; each object is to be tossed in the air and smashed like a plaything." (Georges Bataille, *Les Pieds Mickeies*)

What to do with the dish smashers? Today it is impossible to answer this question and it is not certain that there will be a satisfactory one even in a stateless society. That there will be people who refuse to play the game, who smash the dishes, who are prepared to risk suffering and even death for the simple pleasure of rupturing social bonds, such is the no doubt unavoidable risk any society will run if it refuses to expel anyone at all, however asocial they might be. The damage such a society undergoes will always be less than the damage it exposes itself to by turning asocial people into monsters. Communism must not lose its *raison d'etre* in order to save a few lives, however "innocent" they might be. Until now, the mediations conceived to avoid or soften conflicts or to maintain internal order in societies have caused oppression and human losses which are infinitely greater than those they were supposed to prevent or limit. In a communist world there will be no substitute state, no "non-state" which would still remain a state.

> "To repress anti-social reactions would be as unimaginable as it would be unacceptable on principle." ("Letter to the Insane Asylum Head Doctors," *La Revolution Surrealiste*, no. 3, 15 April 1925)

It is not only with respect to the distant future that this question is pertinent. It is also at stake during periods of social unrest. Consider the fate reserved for looters and thieves

sage which follows in the text is of more interest: "Any individual who is condemned by the laws of any society, commune, province or nation will retain the right to refuse to accept the sentence which has been imposed by declaring that he or she no longer wishes to be a member of the society in question. But in this case the society, in turn, will have the right to eject the person from its midst and to declare that society's protection is not guaranteed to the individual. Since the person is thrown back into a situation where the usual eye-for-an-eye laws are in place, at least in the territory occupied by the society, someone who refuses to submit can thus be pillaged, mistreated or even killed without the society becoming perturbed. Everyone can rid themselves of the individual as if he or she were a harmful beast. However, never must the person be forced into servitude or enslaved." (Bakunin, *La Liberté*, Pauvert)

This makes one think of the solution of primitive peoples: individuals who violate taboos are no longer taken seriously; they are laughed at every time they open their mouths. Or they are obliged to leave and go into the jungle. Or they become invisible, etc. Expelled from the community, in any case, that death will shortly occur is assured.

If it is a question of destroying prisons in order to rebuild ones which are a bit less harsh and better ventilated, count us out. We will always be on the side of those who are unwilling to submit. Because what is a sentence that is "too long"? It is hardly necessary to have wasted away in prison to know that, by definition, any time spent in one is too long. But don't count on us either if you want to replace prisons with an even more extreme distancing. As for treating crime like a sickness, this opens the door to a tranquilizer-ridden totalitarianism or to the discourse of psychiatrists.

"It is curious to state that one only has to *lighten up* (and in this sense someone not prematurely old cannot help but rival the most unruly child) in order to find the sleaziest thieves charming. Is the social order only a burst of laughter away from

More profoundly, beneath the crisis of bourgeois morality lies a crisis of what is known as capitalist morality. It becomes difficult to make "customs" permanent, to find ways of relating and behaviour which go beyond the bankruptcy of bourgeois morality. What morality, then, does modern capitalism offer? The submission of everyone and everything, since capital's omnipresence theoretically makes previous relay systems superfluous. Fortunately this doesn't work. There is no purely, wholly, uniquely capitalist society, and never will be. Capitalism, for one thing, does not create something from nothing; it transforms people and relationships which come into being outside it (peasants who come to the city; *petit-bourgeois déclassés*; immigrants). And something from the old sociability, at least in the form of nostalgia, always remains. As well, capital's functioning itself is not harmonious. The promises of the dreamworld of commercials are not kept, causing a reaction, a falling back upon traditional values like the family which on the whole are outmoded. Which results in the phenomenon of people continuing to marry although three out of four marriages end in a divorce. Because it is obliged to order about, push around and constrain wage workers, capital has to permanently re-introduce relay values of authority and obedience even though its present stage has made them obsolete. This is why the old ideology is constantly used in conjunction with the new one (participation, etc.).

Our era is one of a coexistence of moralities, of a proliferation of codes, not their disappearance. Guilt (being afraid of violating a taboo) is juxtaposed with anguish (a sense of a lack of guideposts with respect to "choices" to be made). Narcissism and schizophrenia, the maladies characteristic of our period, replace the neuroses and hysteria of the previous era.

What guides people's behaviour today is less and less an unquestionable ensemble of dictates which is transmitted by a father or a priest than a sort of utilitarian morality of personal improvement that utilizes a fetishization of the body and a fren-

zied psychologization of human relations. An obsession with interpretation replaces confessional rites and the examination of conscience.[2]

Ahead of his time, de Sade simply announced our own, one in which, *until* people become themselves, there is no moral *guarantee*. The intolerable boredom the reader of the Marquis' monotonous catalogue sooner or later experiences is recaptured when you read the want ads, where the traits of a communicationless pleasure are infinitely repeated. Sadeian desire aims to reify other people completely, to make them a soft dough which can be moulded by one's fantasies. This is a deadly attitude: to annihilate otherness, to refuse to be dependent on the desire of someone else, means repeating the same thing, and death. But whereas the Sadeian hero smashes social impediments, modern people, with their logic of individual self-improvement, have become their own fantasy dough-to-be-kneaded. They are not overcome by desires; they "achieve their fantasies." Or rather they attempt to, like they jog instead of running for the sake of it or because they have to get somewhere quickly. Today people do not lose themselves in other people; they activate and develop their capacity for pleasure, their ability to have orgasms. Insipid trainers of their own bodies, they tell them: "Come!", "Better than that!", "Run!", "Dance!", etc.

For people today, the need for work is replaced by the need to make leisure time a success. Sexual constraints are replaced by a difficulty in affirming a sexual identity. This narcissistic culture goes hand in hand with a change in the function of religion. Instead of invoking a transcendence, religion becomes a means of making it easier to handle life-crisis periods (adolescence, marriage, death). Also, not only religion is helping to keep people up-to-date: the family is invoked as well! "Not a

[2] Author's note: *Examen de conscience*: A Catholic religious rite imposed on believers from time to time, especially before confession.

ciple "anything obtained without effort is useless," but because desire includes otherness and thus its possible negation. No human and social games without stakes and risks! This is the unique and seemingly unavoidable norm. Unless, by remaining in hock to the old world, our monkey-like imagination makes us unable to understand human beings.

Aside from its very poetic and extensive list of possibilities, what makes Fourier's system less tedious than those of most other Utopians is that his system integrates the necessity of conflicts. We know that virtually all the accidents the old world considers crimes or offenses are just sudden changes of owners (theft), accidents due to competition (the murder of a bank teller), or products of the misery of human social customs. But in a stateless world it is not unimaginable that exacerbated passions could make someone kill someone else or make them suffer. In such a world the only guarantee that people would not torture other people would be that they feel no need to. But if someone needs to? If the person enjoys torturing? With the old eye-for-an-eye and blood price etc. representations swept away, a woman whose lover was just assassinated or a man whose lover had just been tortured would find it completely idiotic (in spite of their sorrow) to kill someone or to lock them up in order to compensate for the loss suffered in such a weird way. Perhaps … But if the desire for vengeance gets the upper hand? And if the other person continues to kill?

In the workers' movement the anarchists are undoubtedly among the few people who have concretely considered the problem of social life without the state. Bakunin's response is not really convincing: "The complete abolition of all degrading and cruel sentences, of corporal punishment and death sentences which have been blessed and carried out by the law. The abolition of all indefinite sentences or ones which are too long and leave no possibility for rehabilitation: crime must be considered a sickness, etc." You would think you were reading the Socialist Party program before they took power. But the pas-

situation tolerable is the certainty that there remains the possibility of withdrawing if someone finds that giving these things up threatens their personal integrity. This would not take place without suffering. But to feel fully alive, is not the *risk* of suffering and death indispensable?

The fact that humanity threatens to wipe itself out by playing with the laws of matter, and with it all life on the planet, is not what upsets us. What is intolerable is that humanity is doing so entirely unconsciously. And because it has created capital, which imposes its own inhumane laws, in spite of itself. It is true, though, that as soon as people began to alter their environment they risked destroying it and themselves with it, and that this risk will probably remain despite the forms of social organization in place. One could even conceive of a humanity which, having initially fought and then tamed and loved the universe, decides to disappear and to reintegrate into nature in the form of dust. There can be no humanity without risk in any case, because there can be no humanity without other people — which is also just as evident in the game of passions.

If we can easily imagine that a less harsh society would give women and men (men who have been condemned to wear only work clothes since the bourgeois revolution!) a chance to be more beautiful, to practice relations of seduction which are at the same time simpler and more refined, we are also unable to stifle a yawn when a world in which everyone pleases everyone else is evoked, one where making love is like shaking hands and does not imply any kind of involvement. This, however, is the world promised by the liberalization of customs.

So it would appear that Karl will continue to please Jenny more than Friedrich. But one would have to believe in miracles to imagine that if Friedrich desired Jenny, she would automatically desire him. Communism in no way guarantees that all desires will be complementary. And the very real tragedy of unshared desire would appear to be the unavoidable price to pay to keep the game of seduction exciting. Not because of the prin-

family which is omnipresent, as in the previous century, but one that is omni-absent. A family no longer defined by the work ethic or by sexual constraints, but by an ethic of survival and by sexual promiscuity," according to psychologist Christopher Lasch. (*Le Monde*, April 12, 1981).

In the midst of the crisis of morality that dominates Western society, people are more poorly equipped than ever to resolve the "question of sexuality." And it is precisely when this question is posed most directly that the chances of noticing that it is not a "question" are best.

People today are panicking. They are all the more lost, as everything alive turns into a commodity, when this commodification concerns a sexuality which has been repressed for 2000 years, only to resurface as a commodity. It then becomes apparent that relentless sensuality (e.g. the film *La Grande Bouffe*), in a world of commodities, isolates individuals even more from humanity, one's partners and oneself. Since they end up with the impression that the idea of sexuality is deadly and alienating, people ultimately readopt a Christian outlook.

For example, the work of someone like Georges Bataille reveals a lot about Western evolution since the beginning of the century. Going against the grain of the history of civilization, Bataille starts with sexuality and ends up with religion. From the fiction piece *L'Oeil* until the end of his life, Bataille searched for what was implicit in *L'Oeil*. On the way his trajectory crossed that of the revolutionary movement, only to veer away all the more quickly and easily when the movement almost completely disappeared. Nevertheless, during the last years before World War Two, he defended positions with respect to anti-fascism and the threat of war which lucidly cut through the verbiage of the vast majority of the extreme left. This is why his work remains ambiguous. It can be used to illustrate the religious impasses where the experience of the limits of unleashed sexuality ends up:

> "A brothel is my true church, the only one that leaves me unquenched."

But if, in the above, as in most of his work, he limits himself to going against the grain of accepted values, to refining a new version of Satanism, he has also written sentences which reveal a profound intuition about essential aspects of communism: "taking perversion and crime not as values which exclude, but as things to be integrated into the totality of humanity."

Ecstasy

Through the cultural constructions to which it has given birth (love as it was practised by the ancient Greeks, courtly love, kinship systems, bourgeois contracts, etc.), emotional and sexual life has constantly been the stakes, a matrix of passions, a zone of contact with another cultural sphere: the sacred. In trances, in ecstasy, in feelings of communion with nature, the desire to go beyond the limits of the individual expresses itself through states of paroxysm. This desire to become one with the species which has been channelled towards the cosmos or a divinity has until now worn the prestigious rags of the sacred. Religions, and monotheistic ones in particular, have circumscribed the sacred, assigning it a leading role while at the same time distancing it from human life. In contrast to primitive societies, where the sacred is inseparable from daily life, in statist societies it has become more and more specialized. Capitalist civilization has not eliminated the sacred; it has kept a lid on it, and its various residues and ersatz manifestations continue to encumber social life. In a world in which obsolete religious ideas and commodity banalization coexist, a communist critique is double-pronged: it gets rid of the sacred, that is, it flushes out the old taboos from the places where they have taken refuge, and at the same time it begins to go beyond the sacredness which capitalism has only degraded.

every human activity, a world which proposes that we love the species and individuals whose insufficiencies will be ones of the species and no longer those of existence. The stakes today — what is worth risking one's life for and what could impart another rhythm to time — is the content of life in its entirety.

Crime

> "The meaninglessness of history is delightful. Why torment ourselves about destiny's happy ending, a final party that can only be earned through our sweat and disasters? For future idiots prancing on our ashes? In its absurdity a vision of a paradisiacal culmination surpasses hope's worst wanderings. The only pretext to apologize for Time is that some moments are found to be more profitable than others — accidents without consequence in an intolerable monotony of perplexities." (E.M. Cioran, *Precis de decomposition*)

Communism is not a paradise-like culmination.

Calling communism a paradise, in the first place, allows accepting *everything* in the meantime. In the event of a social revolution, not changing society from top to bottom will be accepted: a society without a state or prisons — fine, but for later, when people are perfect. Until then, everything becomes justifiable: a workers' state, people's prisons, etc., since communism is only fit for a humankind of gods.

Next there is the soothing vision of a desirable society which would disgust us if it were achieved. Any community, whatever its size, obliges its members to renounce a part of themselves. And, in the sense of positive desires — ones whose bringing to fruition would not compromise other people — to leave certain positive desires unfulfilled, for the simple reason that these desires are not necessarily shared by others. What makes such a

Today this instant of "communal unity" is to be found at concerts, in the panic which grips a crowd, and, in its most degraded form, in the great patribtic outbursts and other manifestations of the "union sacree" ("*sacred* union")[4] — whose manipulation allows every dirty trick. As opposed to what is taking place in backward capitalist countries like Iran, it can be presumed that in modern war only a minority would participate; the rest would *watch*. But nothing is for certain. The manipulation of the sacred still has sunny days ahead, perhaps, because until now it is the sacred which has represented the only high point where people's irrepressible need to be together has manifested itself.

If they have provided a more or less imaginary nook sheltered from class struggle, mystical practices have also cemented revolts. This has been demonstrated for example in Taoist trances in resistance to the central powers in ancient China, in voodoo during slave revolts, and in millenarian prophecies. If contemporary mystical quests play a counter-revolutionary role because they are just a way for bourgeois individuals to withdraw into themselves, the fact remains that commodity banalization of every aspect of life tends to empty existence's passionate content. Today's world asks us to love just a jumble of individual inadequacies. Compared to traditional societies it has lost an essential dimension of human life: the high points when people are united with nature. We are condemned to watch harvest festivals on TV.

But we are not interested in a ridiculous longing for the past, a return to the joys whose repetitive, illusory and limited nature history has made plain. At a time when capitalism tends to impose its reign without sharing, searching for "communal unity" and "convulsive communication" elsewhere than in revolution becomes purely reactionary. Since capitalism has banalized everything, this gives us an opportunity to free ourselves from sexuality as a specialized sphere. The world we desire is one in which the possibility of going beyond oneself exists in

The sacred aspects of the zones where the old obsessions such as the pubis have taken refuge must therefore be removed. To counter adoration of the penis, its conquering imperialism, the feminist ideology has come up with nothing better than fetishizing women's genitalia, and, backed by piles of pathos and literature, making it the headquarters of what makes them different; the obscure fold where their being is located! Rape thus becomes the crime of crimes, an ontological attack. As if violently inflicting a penis' penetration were more disgusting than forcing a woman into wage slavery through economic pressure! But it is true that in the first instance it is easy to locate the guilty party — an individual — whereas in the second it is a question of a social relationship. It is easier to exorcise fear by making rape a blasphemy, an invasion in the holy of holies — as if being manipulated by ads, innumerable physical aggressions at work, or having the apparatus of social control start a file on you did not constitute forms of intimate violence which are just as profound as an imposed intercourse!

Ultimately, what makes a Somalian rip out his wife's clitoris and what animates the feminists flows from the same concept of human individuality as the object of property relations. Convinced that his wife is one of his belongings, the Somalian believes that it is his duty to protect her from feminine desire, which is seen as parasitically dangerous to the economy of the group. But in so doing, he profoundly reduces and impoverishes his own pleasure and his own desire. In the clitoris of

[3] Author's note: this sentence and the following two paragraphs have been understandably attacked by many readers since they were based on our biased understanding of a famous slogan of the free abortion movements of the 70s: "My body belongs to me." This slogan did not mean what we said it did ("I am the property-owner of my body") but was just an ea»y way to say "My body (the right,to give birth or to have an abortion) is my business and not that of politicians, doctors, or priests." If re-written today, this part would have to be entirely different. Translator's note: Several people who read or proofread this part (and the preceding paragraph) had trouble with it too.

his wife it is the human desire of both sexes which is symbolically targeted. The mutilated woman *has been amputated from humanity*. The feminist who shouts that her body belongs to her wants to keep her desire for herself.[3] But when she desires, she becomes part of a community in which appropriation dissolves.

The demand "My body belongs to me" supposedly gives concrete content to the "Rights of Man" of 1789. Has it not been often enough repeated that these rights only concern an abstract person and have only ultimately benefitted the bourgeois individual! Bourgeois, male, white, adult, it is said nowadays. Neo-reformism claims to correct this by giving real content to this hitherto abstract "man." The real "rights" of the real "man," in short. But the "real man" is simply the woman, the Jew, the Corsican, the gay, the person from Vietnam, etc. "My body belongs to me" follows directly in the footsteps of the bourgeois revolution which these feminists are attempting to complete and perfect for ever and ever by requesting democracy to cease being "formal." What is being criticized here are effects which are said to be their cause!

The demand to control one's body is a restatement of the bourgeois demand for property rights. To escape the secular oppression of women who were previously treated as objects to be possessed by their husbands (and who still are today in other ways), feminism has come up with nothing better than expanding property rights. By becoming an owner in turn, women will be protected: to each her own! This pitiful demand reflects the obsession with "security" which the media and all the political parties are doing their utmost to make contemporary people adopt. This demand arises in relation to a horizon which is blocked off: to master something (in this case one's body), private appropriation is the only means which can be envisioned. Our bodies, though, belong to those who love us — not because of a legally guaranteed "right," but because, as flesh and feelings, we live and evolve only through them. And to the extent

that we are able to love the human species, our body belongs to it.

At the same time that it strips away what is sacred, a communist critique denounces the capitalist Utopia of a world in which people are no longer able to love to death, a world where, since everything has been levelled, everything is equal and everything can be exchanged — playing sports, making love and working would take place in the same quantified, industrial time frame chopped into pieces like a sausage. Sexologists will be around to cure any libidinal letdowns, psychotherapists to avoid mental suffering, and the police, with the help of chemistry, to prevent any excesses. In such a world there would no longer be a field of human activity which would create a different temporal rhythm by making questioning everything the stakes.

The a historical illusion which is the basis of mystical practices is a dangerous one. The only important thing about these practices is what, by definition, they don't really possess: what can be communicated. We cannot escape from history, but the history of individuals or of the species is also not a purely linear unfolding which capitalism produces (and convinces people that it produces). History includes high points which go beyond and are part of the present, orgasms where people lose themselves in-other people, in society, and in the species.

"Christianity has substantialized the sacred. But the nature of the sacred (…) is perhaps the hardest thing to pin down which takes place between people. The sacred is simply a privileged moment of communal union, an instant of convulsive communication which is usually snuffed out." (G. Bataille, *Le Sacre*, Works).

[4] Author's note: *Union sacrée*: term used at the beginning of the First World War when the parties in France worked together against the German threat. We witnessed a broader "union sacree" (worldwide this time) at the beginning of the Gulf War.