VLIENIST

EMANCIPATION FROM THE PRODIGIOUS ILLUSION OF EMANCIPATION

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

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"In political economy, law is determined by the absence of law. The true law of political economy is chance..."
— Marx, on Mill & Ricardo; 1844

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE

A sense of terrible urgency paralyses our thinking: we only want to know what to do. For example, putting on one shoe before putting on the other, taking the first step before taking the second. Is this how the thought of emancipation lives – neurotically conditional? If the first forays are so problematic, how is a revolt against cultural habits by minds utterly overwhelmed by them even imaginable? Minds steeped in the quotidian violence of merely *permitted* actions? *Please, mummydaddy, tell us how to defeat you.* They've codified the algorithms of dissent, transforming enactment to anxiety tended by infantile pleasures: museum, TV, gamespace. Day-care centres of co-opted subjectivism. Vocational guidance counsellors are on hand to sell instalment plans. Knowing you'll always settle for less, they tell you ART IS MORE THAN ENOUGH. In an economy run on the logic of pure surplus, there still has to be something to point a finger at. Is this the only way to be *authentic*? A parasite hates nothing more than whatever throws its unadorned image back at it (capitalism's Anti-Oedipus complex). But the parasite's hatred of the "parasite" is only as substantive as the mirror's influence over the image it transmits: a mere reflex-effect. For the parasite, there's no "outside" of this parasitic relation – WHICH EVERYTHING EXISTS TO FEED. Like the God-illusion, it's the Ideal Signified because it's an ideal totalitarianism. *Do nothing*, it benignly says, *because anything you do will only confirm your place in the system*. It knows an idiot when it sees one.

THE "LANGUAGE OF POWER" IS STILL LANGUAGE

Obscenity only makes itself exceptional by evoking the force of Law. Yet the language of obscenity isn't a transgression of the Law, but a mimesis of it, since the meaning of obscenity derives solely from the operations of Power. For example, the "self-supersession" of the Corporate-State – publicly rehearsed with the nauseating regularity of opinion polls, news cycles, referenda & elections. Reform, renewal, regeneration, change. Nothing, perhaps, is more grotesque than the enchaining of "emancipation" to this rhetorical charade of built-in obsolescence. The mistake has always been in believing that Power maintains a terrible secret at its heart. Those who believe a revolution can be manufactured by proxy, through the revelation of Corporate-State secrets, have fallen victim to the seductive force of Power's true obscenity. For POWER HAS NO HIDDEN MEANING. Moreover, the pretence to disavowal & secrecy only enhances the audacity of Power's mystification, since – in accordance with the principles of Nuremberg – Power desires nothing more *than the public performance of its obscenities*.

THE BANALITY OF TERRORISM

When lapsed-Dadaist André Breton wrote in 1929 that the ideal Surrealist act would be to go out into the street, pistol in hand, & fire randomly into the crowd, "art" was merely holding a cracked shaving-mirror up to a Corporate-State Apparatus that'd already accomplished Verdun. The remains of 100,000 conscripts, arbitrarily gunned down & blown to pieces at Marshall Pétain's behest by the industrial war machine, lay merged into its mud. Breton, a medical orderly during the war, bore witness, yet his socalled Surrealist *acte gratuit* is held up as a brazen incitement to terrorism (not because it is incompetent & underwhelming, but because it *openly announces* its failure even to become abstract: its crime is to betray humanism poorly). Bound to a different set of moral standards, the gratuitous acts of the avantgarde similarly fall at the feet of instant conformism (politics lining up behind the voice of righteous indignation). Art – the Corporate-State's perennial alibi – thus remains both culpable & superfluous, the strawman of an institutional nihilism. In the mythology of the Corporate-State, 100,000 dead are 100,000 instant commodities for the proliferation of its own sacred victimhood, like plaster-of-Paris Virgins for sale. And the stakes are always set to rise. In ten years, it'll be a million. Six million. Twenty million. Yet the "terrorism" of the avantgarde only offends the sacred office of the Corporate-State to the extent that art, rather than contradicting, *parodies* its crimes.

IT WAS NECESSARY, FIRST OF ALL, TO TEACH SAVAGERY TO THE SAVAGES

Democracy fails at the limits of its language *as an institution of representation*. The politics of this mimesis eclipses the political idea that democracy claims to present, to realise, to embody. This body-politic, in thrall to its own miraculous image, is traversed *solely by the desire of that image*, in which everything is accomplished in advance. Only as the image-of-democracy is democracy able to serve as the condition for its own promise of emancipation. But how to represent the "distance still to be travelled" – between a theory of emancipation & emancipation in action, between "consciousness" & "reality" – in a language in which emancipation itself is the most widely advertised *illusion of present experience*? It's as if the entirety of history had traversed itself only to come to an end in the spectacle of its own unpresentability: the idea of emancipation, everywhere made visible, is in fact the unthinkable *par excellence*. Emancipation from the prodigious illusion of emancipation. How to bridge this distance, this impossible topology, between alienation & its non-presentation, when not only will reaction always find a way to metabolise the language of revolt – to

translate this language into a commodity form – but when this itself will have been the inaugurating circumstance of revolt, its *fatalistic impulse & constant certainty*?

DICTATORSHIP OF THE ECONOMY OVER SOCIETY

The dialectical force of the commodity derives from the integration of two seemingly contradictory principles: the principle of *equivalence* & the principle of *inequality* – equivalence of exchange, inequality of exchange value. Here, in abstract, is the basis of all power relations: of power *as such*. The efficiency of these principles testifies to the efficiency of the commodity in encapsulating an entire social dynamic. NOTHING HAS ESCAPED THE PULL OF COMMODIFICATION. Not even evolution itself. Yet if the superabundance of the commodity means the ubiquity of trash it also means the ubiquity of ideology: ideological trash. That the contradiction between equivalence & inequality is posed as a *problem* is the masterstroke of the commodity system, which sets about offering solutions: yet *there is no problem*, there are only *premises*. For contradiction is the foundation upon which the commodity operates & the territory in which it proliferates. When the "problem" assumes critical dimensions, it shifts from an "economic" register to a "political" one: from seduction to force. What, for example, do all the conflicts centred around the socalled War on Terror have in common? What's the underlying condition, the "circumstantial" rationale versus the avowed rationale? Is it not the very *disavowal* of the social under the guise of exporting the idea of *protest* onto the external threat of a *shapeless terrorism*? A threat that *necessitates* the very contradiction of the "democratic" as such? In the geopolitical theatre of conflict & crisis "management," what purpose do such provocations serve, if not the perpetuation of a global state of crisis? To give rise to & abolish not the system-in-crisis itself (the system *of* crisis), but a series of increasingly untenable, increasingly *apocalyptic* forms of "opposition" to it: by a combination of simulated vulnerability & general attrition, disillusionment & brute force. Yet just as visible protest feeds the apparent momentum of "opposition movements," so too it informs, legitimises & enlarges their suppression – by causing them to desire it.

LIFE-LESSONS IN "SOCIAL CREDIT"

In its reach & application, Power manifests through the counter-logic of the "call to order" – which is to say, the discourse of catastrophe management. The task of *forces of order* is to sow panic under the pretext of quelling it. The façade of order is as a mirror in which the social discovers only an inverse reflection of itself. It is an image of the mass *individually disciplined* body, directed & constrained both in space & through the pervasive abstraction of time. An image of embodied paranoia. Of the collective reification of the personal "God." This mystification of a physiology of perception into an epistemological system goes even further, since epistemology as such *doesn't concern itself with the ideological condition of "seeing"*: on this question (fundamental to the entire metaphorics of Reason), it is blind. Power, on the other hand, isn't constrained by such an epistemological blindness: it *refigures* what "seeing" *is*. The totalisation of its systems of surveillance & control points instead to a political *ontology*: To emergent possibilities of social becoming. To unconscious states of social being. To conscious evasions of the permitted. Total surveillance, as the projected presence of *forces of order* into all areas of representable experience, doesn't seek to *know*, so much as to determine *the secret dimension of social representation*. It conjugates dissent not in the terms of ideological content, but of ideological *situations*: it asserts its real force not at the level of the avowed (oppositional politics, protest movement, the self-proclaimed avantgarde) but at the level of undisclosed associations (the anonymous, the conspiratorial, the invisible). Metadata are the pressure-points of the physiognomic system over which it reigns: the constellated architecture of the interior social body. For Power, the architectonics of surveillance is first & foremost a matter of getting the world into its grasp by constituting the *logic* of the world. It is the hand that never lets go because it is its precondition. Its work is that of a seizure *in advance*. Of an irresistible hermeneutic *force*.

LIVING ON THE BRINK

It is the work of Power to create conditions for *active* submission, through the programmatic appeal to a collective "irrationality" of the *individual* & the *marginal*. Full-spectrum normalisation. In this formulation, the domain of the irrational is the domain of the *permitted* as constitutive of the *possible*. The appeal to the irrational is thus always an appeal to phantasmatic means for abbreviating the "struggle for emancipation" – an appeal made to coincide with the containment & expropriation of "social change" by those forces of technological "progressiveness" that constitute the Corporate-State Apparatus. Yet however "progressive" such forces are made to appear, there is no such thing as disinterested Power, which in every respect remains an operational programme for the control & regulating of possibility *to the extent that it becomes indistinguishable form the possible itself*. In this respect Power, mediated by the commodity, comes to stand paradoxically as the sole guarantor of an emancipation that is both perpetually deferred & constantly advertised as *accomplished in the reality of our present condition*. Without it, liberty will be withdrawn. Without it, freedom will no longer be possible. Etc. (Its nuclear deterrent.) It goes without saying, that such an eventuality would be not only *unthinkable*, but the *irrational itself*. Power proceeds on the premise of a unique indispensability for everyday life. Like a quantum-state machine, everything is entangled in its operations.

THERE'S NO EGO IN EMANCIPATION

One of the greatest deceptions passed down by the Enlightenment, is that the Ego stands on the side of Reason & that Reason stands on the side of Emancipation. This is nowhere more visible than in the transformation of economies by way of "free" commodities (the street, TV, social media) – in which the labour of critique becomes nothing so much as the *guarantor* of exchange value (which is to say, the socalled *monetization* of user production). Social media is the mirror of social production because it is the mirror of social desire *in all its facets*, but above all in its "revolutionary dimension" (which it both facilitates & encapsulates by engineering a simulacral *collective subjectivity* out of the very contrary of what we believe an algorithmic rationale to be: not the content of willed actions, of decision-making, of choice, but the *radical ambivalence* that haunts the relation between endless deferral & instant gratification – the very hinge of subjectivity). All of this tends to a situation in which theoretical concepts of emancipation end in *normalisation*. Emancipation withers wherever it is objectified: image, concept, programme – for in composing itself as such, *as ideological content*, it accedes in a contest of algorithmic capture. Algorithmic logic is a narrowing of the odds, pre-emption by ratiocination, driftnet feedback, standard deviation, non-coincidence, etc., by which emancipation is entrapped in an impossible game of *emancipation of emancipation*. Emancipation, then, as firstly the ALIENISM OF DISCOURSE *in confrontation with the impossible & the unpresentable*. The capacity of emancipatory discourse, under external duress or by self-critique, *to envisage itself in its contrary* & recognise that *this* as its *fundamental condition*: AS IT IS STRUCTURED, NOT AS IT IS COMPOSED. A starting point.

WEAPONS OF MASS COMMUNICATION

If the world of appearance is the world of ideology: the presentation of the world's *disappearance* through architecture, is ideology's summa. It is the void that fills the vacuum created by evangelists of "disillusionment." Architecture – as the aesthetic organisation of the Corporate-State – provides an image of a collective unconscious fear *it itself inaugurates*, reified into a geometry of control & an aesthetics of disconnect & dislocation, quantised at the level of the individual. This instrumental image achieves its apotheosis in mobile communications technologies & surveillance systems: the "machinery" of the human algorithm. These kinetic nodes of a distributed architectonics of Power, under the guise of an emancipatory function, construct a city-without-walls. In this veritable rat-maze, the individual clings to its machinic placebo with the sociopathic intensity of a full-blown hysteric. This is because algorithmic logic, like narcotics, produces corresponding effects in the social cortex. Neural, subjective, symbolic, libidinal. This cybernetic architecture is capable of communicating "instructions" to all of its constituent elements at any given "point" in space-time – which is to say, continuously. In its essence, all *architecture* is panopticism.

ARCHITECTURE: A PROCESS WITHOUT A SUBJECT

Urban architecture & the "Smart City" have evolved from the monumentalisation of industrial culture to the monumentalisation of the commodity itself, as a social landfill operation in which accumulated obsolescence is reprogrammed into a development project without limits. Like the recycling of fluoride into drinking water, the entropy of a global debt economy is recommodified as infrastructural credit & "regeneration." Yet it goes without saying that the underlying processes of devaluation are recuperated only to the extent that, by doing so, they serve to generate new capital in a closed loop, from which all that devolves into the broader social architecture is commodity saturation – whose dynamic is sustained solely by a continuous inflationary movement, from within, of *economic subversion*. How to *critique* such a movement – which is merely the outward form of an entire ideological system – when it flaunts its immunity to any sustainable opposition? When it is capable of greater *devaluation* than any détournement of it? When it itself *is* that movement of acceleration that always already triumphs in a "race to the bottom" in which all critique is devalued & subsumed into its object, as a *subversion-of-subversion*, thereby *feeding it*? A system abstracted to pure geometry: a succession of event-horizons, imaginary walls, intersecting screens – an entirely functional *nihilism*? But the weakness of a mirror lies not in debating with it.

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