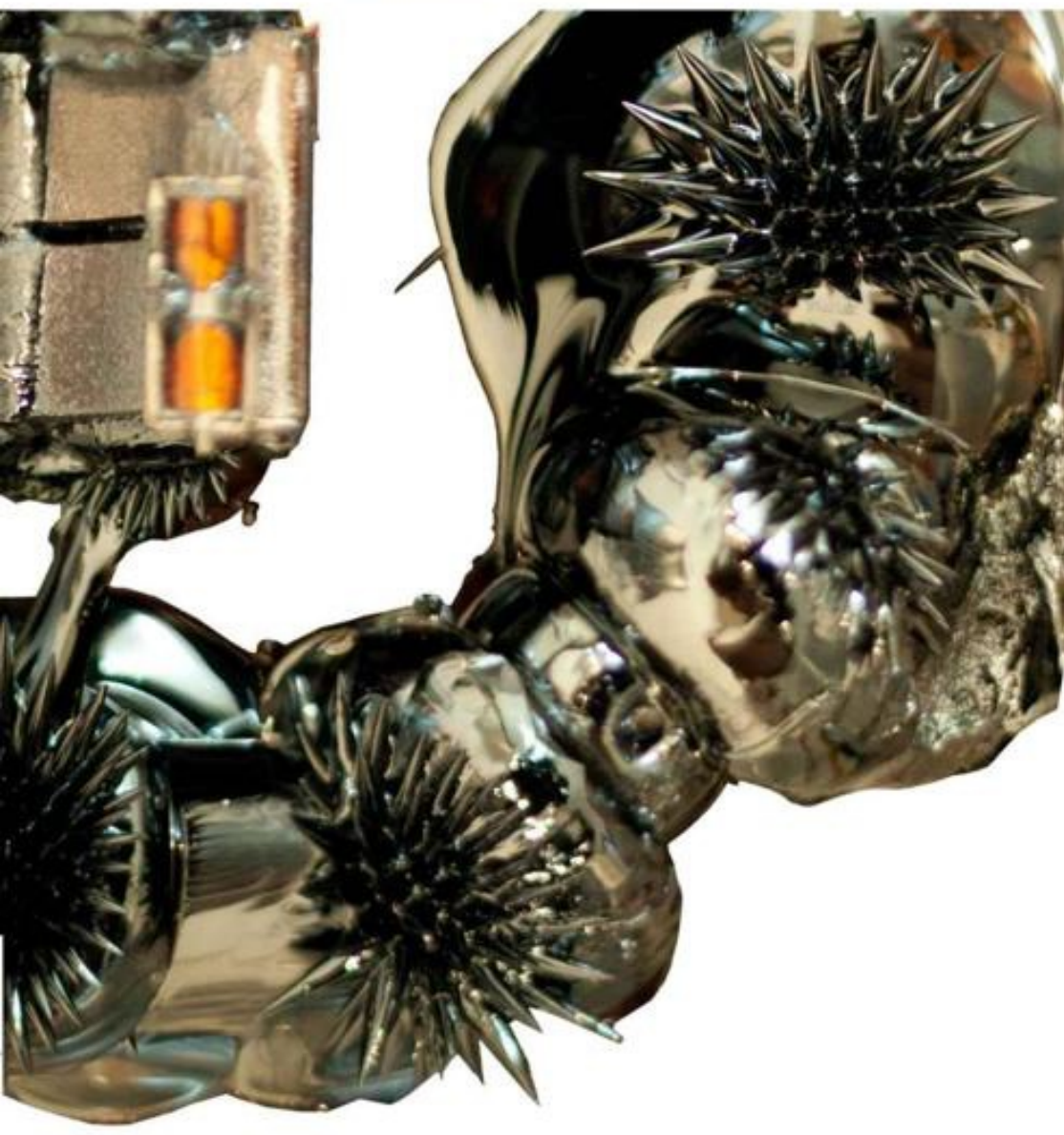


GILLES CHÂTELET

To Live and Think
Like Pigs

THE INCITEMENT OF ENVY AND BOREDOM
IN MARKET DEMOCRACIES

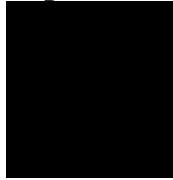


GILLES CHÂTELET

To Live and Think Like Pigs
The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies

Translated by Robin Mackay

sequence



For Patrick Baudet, Copi Damonte, Michel Cressole, Gilles Deleuze, Daniel Guérin, Félix Guattari, Guy Hocquenghem, who always refused to live and think like pigs.

My greatest thanks to Dominique Lecourt, for his encouragement and his attentive reading of the manuscript.

Truth — and justice — require calm, and yet they only belong to the violent.

G. BATAILLE

Human rights will not make us bless capitalism. A great deal of innocence or cunning is needed by a philosophy of communication that claims to restore the society of friends, or even of wise men, by forming a universal opinion as 'consensus' able to moralize nations, States, and the market. Human rights say nothing about the immanent modes of existence of people provided with rights. Nor is it only in the extreme situations described by Primo Levi that we experience the shame of being human. We also experience it in insignificant conditions, before the meanness and vulgarity of existence that haunts democracies, before the propagation of these modes of existence and of thought-for-the-market, and before the values, ideals, and opinions of our time. The ignominy of the possibilities of life that we are offered appears from within. We do not feel ourselves outside of our time but continue to undergo shameful compromises with it. This feeling of shame is one of philosophy's most powerful motifs. We are not responsible for the victims but responsible before them. And there is no way to escape the ignoble but to play the part of the animal (to growl, burrow, snigger, distort ourselves): thought itself is sometimes closer to an animal that dies than to a living, even democratic, human being.

G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI,

Foreword: What is it to Live?

Alain Badiou

Controlled violence, biting sarcasm, discontent with the world and with oneself in the world; the courage to hold fast, solitary, in the face of contemporary abjection—the reader will encounter all of the above in this book, and will understand why the rage to live that animated Gilles Châtelet was tempered by a terrible melancholy: the melancholy of seeing that we are solicited (and increasingly so) to live—and to think—‘like pigs’.

I should like here to inscribe the memory of Gilles Châtelet in a broader context, and to respond to a question that seems to suggest itself: How is it that a thinker specialising in the history and the theory of the sciences, this mathematician doubling as a philosopher, this subtle intellectual favoured with a great talent for writing, could be swept up in such a polemical rage against our current terrestrial life? How could someone who in academic language would be called an ‘epistemologist’—a discipline one might assume to be the calmest of all—come to foment within himself a ferocious polemic, a sort of sacred fury?

To respond to this question, and to situate the present book within the overall intellectual horizon of its author, I should like to take up what I believe to be the five major maxims of our friend’s thought, and to demonstrate their connection to the potential amplitude of the life of the body. By indicating, in short, why Gilles Châtelet was not at all an epistemologist: Gilles’s philosophy, far from all academicism, is a romantic dialectic since, for him, every proposition on science can be converted into a maxim for life.

1. Firstly, a motif that is for him far more than a speculative conviction, far more than a topos of the philosophy of science; which is, I think I can safely say, an existential, even political certainty, since it is at the heart of his romantic dialectic: thought is rooted in the body. The body conceived of as dynamic spatiality. Gilles Châtelet, at the most fundamental level of his creation, maintains that thought has a geometrical origin. All thought is the knotting together of a space and a gesture, the gestural unfolding of a space, even.

The maxim of life that corresponds to this motif might be set out as follows: ‘Unfold the space that does justice to your body.’ Gilles Châtelet’s love of partying obeyed this maxim. It is more ascetic than it

might appear, for the construction of the nocturnal space of pleasure is at least as much of a duty as a passive assent. To be a pig is to understand nothing of this duty; it is to wallow in satisfaction without understanding what it really involves.

2. This geometrical origin of thought is only uncovered when we discern in every realisation, and moreover in every mathematical formalization, the virtuality of articulation that is its principle of deployment. Geometry is not a science of extrinsic extension, in the Cartesian sense; it is a resource for extraction and for thickening, a set of deformational gestures, a properly physical virtuality. So that we must think a sort of interiority of space, an intrinsic virtue of variation, which the thinking gesture at once instigates and accompanies.

In terms of life, this time it is a matter of remarking that solitude and interiority are, alas, the intimate essence of alterity and of the external world. Gilles Châtelet knew innumerable people, but in this apparent dissemination there was a considerable, and perhaps ultimately mortal, dose of solitude and withdrawal. It is from the point of this bleak solitude, also, that he was able to judge the abject destiny of our supposedly 'convivial' societies.

3. The latent continuum is always more important than the discontinuous cut; to Koyré's 'breaks', to Kuhn's 'revolutions', to the 'falsifiabilities' of Popper and Lakatos—apostles of the discontinuous whose unity Châtelet perceived beyond the apparent polemics—we must oppose another type of localisation of thought.

For Châtelet, the history of thought is never ready-made, pre-periodised, already carved up. Thought is sleeping in the temporal continuum. There are only singularities awaiting reactivation, creative virtualities lodged in these folds of time, which the body can discover and accept.

The maxim of life this time is: 'Reactivate your dormant childhood, be the prince of your own unsuspected beauty. Activate your virtuality.' In the order of existence, materialism might be called the dessication of the virtual, and so Gilles sought to replace this materialism with the romantic idealism of the powers of childhood. To live and think like a pig is also to kill childhood within oneself, to imagine stupidly that one is a 'responsible' well-balanced adult: a nobody, in short.

4. Being reveals itself to thought—whether scientific or philosophical, no matter—in 'centres of indifference' that bear within them the ambiguity of all possible separation. This dialectical ambiguity is signalled by the rout of spatial self-evidence, which always believes it is capable of orienting itself and fixing its path. It is at the point of such centres of indifference, such reversible sites, such unstable points, that separative understanding and intuition fuse, in a paradoxical intensity

of thought. There is nothing more revelatory, nothing that better discloses Châtelet's elegant uncertainty, than these 'points of maximal ambiguity where a new pact between understanding and intuition is sealed'.

This time we shall say: 'Be the dandy of ambiguities. On pain of losing yourself, love only that which overturns your order.' As for the pig, he wants to put everything definitively in its place, to reduce it to possible profit; he wants everything to be labelled and consumable.

5. The higher organisation of thought is always attained through the active combination of an axis of penetration and lateralities which are arranged in relation to this axis, yet are orthogonal and thus resistant to its pure linearity. Only this arrangement (the 'straight' force of the axis and the resistance that tends toward the lateral) can grasp the multiple, or diversity. What is the multiple? Ultimately, for one who thinks, the multiple is the production of a deformation of the linear through laterality. On Grassmann's 'capturing' of extension, Châtelet writes as follows:

The theory of extension proposes to master the birth of the continuously diverse. This diversity must not be regarded as being like that of blocs dispersed in extension, but must form a system: a coherent deformation must produce it. This ambiguity thus necessitates the most resolute poetic propulsion, that most orthogonal to transitivities, and exalts to the highest degree the gesture that cuts out and exposes form.

As we can see: a thought is that which masters, in the resolute gestural treatment of the most resistant lateralities, the engendering of the 'continuously diverse'. The grasping of being does not call for an averaging-out, or for the gathered presence of the unicity of sense; it convokes—this is perhaps the most important word—the irreducibility, the dialectical irreducibility, of dimensions. In this sense thought is never unilaterally destined to signifying organization, even if Châtelet, scrupulous here as elsewhere, always recalls the necessity of the letter and of pure algebra. But this is not where the ultimate stakes of thought lie. They lie in a capacity to seize the dimension; and for this one must invent notations, which exceed the power of the letter.

On this point, romantic idealism teaches us to seek not the meaning of our existence, but the exactitude of its dimensions. To live is to invent unknown dimensions of existing and thus, as Rimbaud says, to 'define vertigos'. This, after all, is what we ought to retain from the life and the death of Gilles Châtelet: we need vertigo, but we also need form—that is to say, its definition.

For vertigo is indeed what the romantic dialectic seeks to find at the centre of rationality itself, in so far as rationality is invention, and

therefore a fragment of natural force. Yes, Gilles Châtelet ceaselessly sought 'these sites where the understanding reels. At centres of indifference we attain the highest uncertainty, which thus calls for the most irreversible of decisions'.

But as we shall see in the following text, all of this is taken up again, as if at once set in motion and thrown off course, by the style of the romantic dialectic, a joyous, peremptory, but also detailed, labyrinthine style, a sort of fulminating abstraction.

It is a matter of discerning, or retrieving, through polemical violence, in the contemporary commercial space, the resources of a temporalization; of knowing whether some gesture of the thought-body is still possible.

In order not to live and think like pigs, let us be of the school of he for whom, however great a scholar and great thinker he was, only one question mattered in the end—an imperative question, a disquieting question: The question of the watchman who hears in space the rustling of a gesture, and calls out: '*Who's living?*' Gilles asked, and asked himself, the question: '*Who's living?*' We shall strive, so as to remain faithful to him, to choose.

Preface

Let it be understood, first of all, that I have nothing against the pig—that ‘singular beast’¹ with the subtle snout, certainly more refined than are we in matters of touch and smell. But let it be understood also that I hate the gluttony of the ‘formal urban middle class’ of the postindustrial era.

Why choose the end of the 1970s as the opening scene for these socio-philosophical sketches of contemporary market democracies? The soixante-huitard of a certain age must not forget that, for an adolescent reader in the Mitterrand era, those years seemed as far away as the Korean War might have done from May ’68; and that the reader of 1998 was separated from Bob Dylan’s first records by thirty-six years—equal to the entire period from the end of the Weimar Republic to the events of May.

At that time, the generous unrest of the 60s was tailing off into its final ripples, just as the peaks of the highest mountains gently dwindle into foothills and hummocks that can be prudently domesticated into pastures and vineyards. The Night and its *Tout-Paris*, with its dances, its dizziness, its gossip, allowed what was no longer anything more than post-leftism to stagnate deliciously in an infinitely protracted ludic transit, and even to play the arbiter of elegance, without sinking too quickly into the treacherous pestilence of that which, a few years previously, had put itself forward as a ‘nouvelle philosophie’. Post-leftism did not want to seem too jaded, and presented itself as festive, ‘reasonably’ leftist, and attentive to what was to become of ‘universalism’. For post-leftism it was not yet a question of systematically enclosing the terms ‘imperialism’ and ‘monopoly’ in scare-quotes, of calling militants ‘activists’, or of expressing one’s indignation at the way in which Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault and other narco-leftist paedophiles tyrannized the daily *Libération*, in league with escaped prison convicts.

At this decade’s end, a veritable miracle of the Night takes place, enabling Money, Fashion, the Street, the Media, and even the University to get high together and pool their talents to bring about this paradox: a festive equilibrium, the cordial boudoir of the ‘tertiary service society’ which would very quickly become the society of boredom, of the spirit of imitation, of cowardice, and above all of the petty game of reciprocal envy—‘first one to wake envies the others’.

It’s one of those open secrets of Parisian life: every trendy frog, even a

cloddish specimen, knows very well that when Tout-Paris swings, 'civil society' will soon start to groove. In particular, any sociologist with a little insight would have been able to observe with interest the slow putrefaction of liberatory optimism into libertarian cynicism, which would soon become right-hand man to the liberal Counter-Reformation that would follow; and the drift from 'yeah man, y'know, like...', a little adolescent-hippy but still likeable, into the 'let's not kid ourselves' of the Sciences-Po² freshman.

The pseudo-libertarian imposture of 'chaos' and 'self-organization' deserves especial attention. A reader surprised to find an analysis of chaos following a description of a night at Le Palace³ must not forget that certain fashionable partisans of the liberal Counter-Reformation saw in the 'Great Market' a manifestation of the 'creative' virtues of chaos, and thus sought to liquidate as quickly as possible the providential state—that cumbersome 'dissipative structure' inherited from the first wave of industrialization—so as to make way for the postindustrial third wave—light, urban and nomadic.

They claimed to have seized Nature in mid-blink—the socio-economic order emerges just as naturally as the fittest species in the struggle for life—when in fact they had merely rediscovered the English tradition of Political Arithmetic and of a social control as cheap as hunger, capable of domesticating the 'Ordinary Man', making of him a statistical creature, the 'average man' of socio-politologists. An average man who emerges as the product of the powerful sociopolitical engineering that succeeded in transforming what Marx called the 'free peasant of England' into a panelist-citizen, an atomic producer-consumer of sociopolitical goods and services.

Having advanced from cannon fodder to consensus fodder, dough ready for moulding, is indeed 'progress'. But this fodder spoils quickly: consensual raw material is liable to rot, transforming into a populist unanimity of silent majorities that is anything but harmless. Onto this classic populism now seems to be grafted a yuppie populism—a techno-populism—which happily advertises its carnivorous postmodernity, ready to seek out and digest a best-of selection of the planet's goods and services. The techno-populist point of view now parades itself shamelessly, and seeks to reconcile two spiritualities: that of the corner grocer and accountant—'every penny counts'—and the administrative spirituality (which used to be a little more ambitious) of the Inspector of Finances.⁴

These two spiritualities now march hand in hand, confident of their entitlement, distributing ultimatums: 'What are you for? You should be ashamed to be so abstract, so elitist'. Annoyed, exasperated even, by any activity that cannot be circumscribed within the narrow horizon of

the accountant and which therefore is seen as an intolerable challenge to the poverty of the contemporary 'pragmatism' that techno-populism likes to claim for itself. Here we touch a raw nerve of this hypocrisy: the fact that it feels insulted by everything that is beyond it, and has to denounce as 'elitist' any undertaking distanced even the tiniest bit from the bustle of the 'man in the street', from what have been agreed on as the 'serious things in life'—and from the vacuity of its 'will to communicate'.

This is why, for we techno-populist 'democrats', teaching has too high a cost given that, in any case, cretinization by communication replaces and improves on the authoritarianism of yore.

And yet even a summary acquaintance with countries such as Germany, England and France shows that the most brilliant periods in their histories invariably resulted from an ability to accommodate spaces sheltered from the pressures of immediate social demand and from established hierarchies, and thus able to welcome new talents without any class distinction; in short, to harbour a cultural aristocracy that is not coopted by birthright or by money.

It is not hard to guess why techno-populism flatters the baseness and cowardice of the average man, and above all those who belong to its techno-commercial avant-garde, those little port thugs initiated in econometrics, those unsavoury prototypes adored by statistical policy thinktanks, those 'maneaters' in SUVs whose critical sense is only slightly greater than that of a tapeworm, who, as they drive, mull over their 'let's be realistic now' and their 'celebrating difference'.

Techno-populism carefully distinguishes between two 'radicalisms': the one that it detests—which it suspects of being the enemy of democracy, because it claims to make an effort to subtract itself from contemporary boorishness and impatience, and seeks to derail the socio-economic scenarios of the World Bank—and the one whose scent it appreciates, the heady aroma of the moral majority, the Bogeyman and the media pillory. To those who ask it to define the new age, it responds: 'It is the era of the Internet, the family association, and the electric chair'. This is why it loves to transfigure its Aggripinas, its Thénardiens and its Tartarins into TV show Gavroches who slay the 'privileged' and gorge on Good Causes.⁵

But there is worse to come: what goes for individuals also goes for peoples; all social protection, all notion of public service 'preserved artificially outside of the market'—in short, all historical achievement—must be erased and also denounced as a 'privilege'⁶ that threatens the great equilibria and throws into panic the socio-economic indicators of History promised by techno-populists the world over. For it is only by bringing to bear its 'real'—econometric—weight, by resolutely rejecting

all 'utopian and Marxist' standards, that every country might aspire to a good pupil's place at the high table of global prosperity.

It has taken the French a long time to understand that this concerns everyone—not only the 'metics' from the South. Which is why, since 1974, techno-populism has been uneasy: France is 'overweight', it suffers from symbolic obesity; and the intolerable 'French singularity' was just a sleight of hand cooked up in the late 80s by the young pedants of the Institut d'études politiques.

Well, the liberal Counter-Reformers—and many others with them—can rejoice: France is symbolically adjusting to its market share—and not without many of its intellectuals lending a hand. The Republic is no longer glorious. It finally accepts a destiny better suited to its means—those of a 'democratic' subprefecture of the New World Order² which knows that it must prostrate itself before an opinion over which it has less and less control; and that it must abandon the 'Jacobin' idea that democracy is worthy only in virtue of the excellence of the destinies it envisions ideally for all and cannot just keep its eyes fixed on the common average of egoism and cowardice. It will come as no surprise that the racist-nationalist plague has resurfaced.... We have almost succeeded in transforming a great people into a servile provincial audience rating, and a good part of its intellectual elite into a compradore mob, a quadron of editorialist attendants ministering to the vast mental latrines that the market democracies have become—kept busy cutting up their unsavoury aggregates, the product of the fermentation of hundreds of millions (and soon billions) of panelist-consumer psychologies eaten up by envy and the desire to corner the market as cheaply as possible.

'Be positive, and maximise with every breath!'—such could be the slogan of this global middle class who intend finally to enjoy the End of History. After all, how can this terminus of History be anything other than the discovery of the optimal form of termite mound, or even better, the optimal middle-class yoghurt-maker—of which Singapore would be the sinister scale model—with which to manage the minimal mental and affective fermentations of social protozoa?

'Trade permanent mercantile cynicism for secondhand crocodile tears': such is the motto of the yoghurt-maker. For, as we have known since Princess Diana, it is no longer even necessary to play or to sing to become a superstar—you only have to breathe and get divorced to make two billion people snivel.

For the liberal Counter-Reformation, there is no longer any doubt: the twenty-first century will see the complete triumph of the individual. Which leads us—unwittingly, of course—to the heart of the future politico-philosophical struggle: to make every effort to prevent the

ordinary man, that singular who is never produced nor terminated, from any longer being confused with the Homo Economicus of market democracies.

To vanquish techno-populism, to obsolesce the yoghurt-makers, is also to vanquish racist nationalism.... This calls for a philosophy of struggle. It is once more time for the French intelligentsia to pull itself together, to ignore the Trissotins⁸ and the postmodern ladies of letters, and above all to put an end to Anglo-Saxon style soft cretinization — ‘rorftyfication’.⁹ In short, to make the leap and to refuse the destiny of cognitive cattle; to make less vogues and more waves.

NOTES

1. On the pig, see Claudine Fabre-Vassas’s fine book *The Singular Beast*, tr. C. Volk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
2. [Sciences-Po: Paris’s Institute of Political Studies, a highly selective institution specializing in social sciences, which has traditionally been the training ground of France’s political elite—trans.]
3. [Le Palace: Parisian Theatre with 1930s décor, which from 1978–1985 was host to a notoriously hip nightclub, hosted by flamboyant impresario Fabrice Emaer, and known for its extravagance and its cosmopolitan door policy—see chapter 1, below—trans.]
4. [Traditionally, Inspectors of Finances are elite public servants drawn from the prestigious École Nationale d’Administration (ENA). Most French Presidents and ministers have been graduates of the ENA—trans.]
5. And this is why philosophy and mathematics, which for twenty-five centuries have been associated with a discipline totally alien to everyday life (‘survival’), are now both feared and detested targets.
6. Monsieur de Closets specializes in this kind of denunciation (see his book: *Always More!* [François de Closets, *Toujours Plus!* (Paris: LGF, 1984)]).
7. Techno-populism has obtained some brilliant results in this operation to ‘optimise the weight’ of the Republic: the output of the ENA have learnt to manage their ‘human resources’ to maximum effect, with top graduates fighting over Finance while Employment and, of course, Education, are left to the ‘also-rans’.
8. [Trissotin: mediocre and pretentious scholar-poet pursued by the titular ladies of literary ambition in Molière’s *Les Femmes Savantes*—trans.]

[9](#)After Richard Rorty, philosopher, emblematic figure of postmodernity in Virginia in the 80s.

1. The Palace's Night of Red and Gold: On the Entry of France into the Tertiary Society

*Are the good times really over for good?
It was back when the country was strong,
Back before Elvis; before the Vietnam war came along,
Before The Beatles and 'Yesterday'.⁴*

A Sunday night, November 1979.... No one wanted to miss the 'Night of Red and Gold'. Everyone who had been anyone, was anyone, or still claimed to be anyone, had promised to be there: brilliant academics rallying to the night, former and future ministers, professional socialites, young condottieri of fashion, predators and headhunters.

But for Fabrice—the master of ceremonies—there was no question of 'keeping it between ourselves', between *entendidos* as the Brazilians say, between chic gays and top-ranking queens—in short, between initiates able at a glance to recognize and salute those who can hold aloft three generations of elegant parasitism. Above all, Fabrice didn't want to hear any talk of an 'Indian summer'. He wanted the Night of Red and Gold to be a generalized Parisian rite of passage—that of the *entendidos*, the condottieri of fashion and the suburban youth—without knowing quite who was going to initiate whom....

A shrewd diplomat, Fabrice had realized that the Night would provide the best credentials for a modernity à la française: an equilibrium must be found between the ceremonial and the shambolic, the wild and the elegant, in order to toast the entry of France into the tertiary service society.

When it came to elegance and disarray, Fabrice knew what he was doing: it was he who had 'got the Paris Night moving', had succeeded in getting the fashionable thug, the Drouot auctioneer and the Collège de France professor dancing together, imparting some swing to the collision of the worlds of Money, Fashion, and Knowledge; and had even spiced up the soup of high society with the most audacious of lowlifes. With the sure instincts of the great upstart, he had been the first to detect the minute vacillations of a society yearning to electrify itself with new rhythms, to sniff out new scents. But to him all of this seemed completely interconnected: we have to move from the concept of the club to the concept of the 'large space', as his friend/rival Mike had done with Studio 54, giving New York a factory for dancing and

sweating, engorged with the petulance of black and latino gladiators.

Like Studio 54, the club had to bring together money, fashion, the press, but also (Fabrice's dearest wish) talent and the street. It had to wager on the elegance of the masses: anyone could be an *entendido*, a citizen of the Night; but for Fabrice, this 'everyone' did not include just anyone—and above all not those obscene individuals who claimed some kind of entitlement on account of their social status. On this point, the Red Glutton—his truculent collaborator—was quite implacable: readily indulgent in regard to gladiators, she wouldn't tolerate any insolence from an agribusiness nabob or a director of the ministerial cabinet.

To the imbecile who might have asked: 'The Night, Fashion—how many divisions?', Fabrice would have responded: caprice and elegance, those are my divisions! For Fabrice knew that he who had seduced the Night by touching her gloved hands would win the magic ring, benevolent toward those who live for pleasure, but unforgiving to puppets who dare invoke any social hierarchy whatsoever.

Fabrice savoured his triumph: in a few moments, he would give the signal. The heavy black and purple velvet gates guarding the entrance to the great ballroom would open with all the sedate majesty of the portals of Ali Baba's cave, releasing the torrent of hundreds of bodies impatient to bite into the beautiful apple of modernity.

Each of them awaited, heart racing, for the moment when a diagonal laser beam or a mobile cone of light would fix itself upon their movement, their dancing form, preened and perfected over many hours for the party. Hadn't Andy said that from now on everyone would be a star...for a second? He had promised to come, but only for one night. Amends had to be made for this all too brief visit: by the last 747 jumbo jet, Fabrice had received a gigantic red and gold fruitbasket constellated with superb Studio 54 astronaut gymnasts, freshly swiped from under Mike's nose. Fabrice relished the 'American type', as we said in those days, but wanted to balance this booty of muscled chests and square jaws sent by Andy with a few prototypes of Parisian sexiness, a little less hunky perhaps, but spirited, with those feline asses stacked à la française.

Here once again the Night proved a kind fairy: Fabrice had an embarrassment of riches to choose from in his pool of beautiful, available, and arrogant suburban hounds, who had made it this far through sheer animality and were proud of it, prancing with that fierce air that purports to discourage every advance, only to submit to the most audacious. Fabrice smiled...the Red Glutton had just whispered to him that he was indeed Prince of the Night! Thanks to him, everyone would enjoy a crumb of the pleasures of Borgia, of Talleyrand. Most decidedly, anyone who had not known the end of the 70s would not

have known the sweetness of life, the thrill of this seesaw where History teeters between an old regime and the roar of a Revolution.

For many here on this night, Paris, Europe, the whole planet, were as light as a soap bubble: the Prince of the Night knew that the master is not so much he who possesses but he who can set things off, the firekeeper of thresholds and tipping points, capable of triggering a thousand gestures. Fabrice excelled at working up this or that type of 'cool and confident youth': Shouldn't a Prince of the Night be capable of making age groups, generations and social categories bear fruit by interbreeding them and seminating them with looks, just as the gentleman-farmer selects the best layers and the best milking cows—and, of course, the stallions with the most promising packages?

Right next to the basket that Andy had sent, those whom Fabrice called 'the Four Tuxedos' discussed the night: 'What a nerve, this Fabrice guy! Everyone who's anyone in the nightlife of Europe is here... along with a good chunk of the suburbs. Hasn't he taken a bit of a risk? Isn't he mixing up the politics of the suburbs and haute couture?'

'Come on, Tuxedos! Quit grumbling! Why shouldn't the politics of the suburbs have something to do with haute couture?', immediately replied the Red Glutton, stationed a few metres away. The Four Tuxedos bowed their heads, smiling soberly. The intervention was well judged, just verging on insolence.... The Four Tuxedos, who up until this point had been stuck on the couch with people of a certain age, were delighted: finally they could adopt the modest, defeated tone of celebrities who, yielding to the crowd, had agreed to remove their disguises.

This little socialite triumph had surpassed their hopes: it had floored with consternation the couch opposite, that of the Cyber Wolves, a quartet of young pedants prey to every trend, whom the Red Glutton had not deigned to visit.... It became an urgent matter for Charles-Éric—the 'pack leader'—to improvise a counterattack: 'Come on, Charles-Éric, big wolf! Do your deadly howl...Don't forget you're the leader! Show no pity against the statism that still pollutes your arteries!...'. Charles-Éric knew he had no choice; after all, he was indeed the pack leader. But he was to be quickly disillusioned: the great wolf succeeded only in emitting a kind of bellow, more like the plaintive lowing of a ruminant than the splendid victory cry of a predatory prince.

The situation now turned disastrous for the Wolves. The pressure of the grinning Tuxedos, applied from a distance of several metres, became unbearable; in all urgency another couch had to be found, one less exposed and, above all, hidden from the Glutton's patrols, now a humiliation for the whole pack.

Pathetic young snobs trying to keep afloat in what already could only

be called post-leftism! Without knowing it, they would be the model for hundreds of thousands of others, with their 'let's not kid ourselves', their 'it really resonates with me', and above all their 'in my opinion, personally...'. They believed that they shared with Fabrice that celebrated niche of firsthand snobbery, that infinitely calm and infinitely fragile eye of the cyclone where 'ideas' are supposedly born so as to take flight, embrace the world, and then fall back down rather swiftly, pitilessly, aped and disfigured. Like so many other suckers, the great goofballs of the cyber-pack thought of themselves as princes of networks and tipping points, when in fact a centrifugal force millions of times more powerful than they were had already relegated them to the subsidiary provinces of secondhand snobbery—the distant satrapies to which fashion cruelly exiles those who believe that they have mastered the right moves to install themselves just behind the locomotives, without knowing that they are already contaminated by that which socialites fear the most: they were *passé*.

A mere nod of Fabrice's head and the grand finale was set in motion: the basket decanted its young gladiators, who carried out a simulated raid against the crowd...it was pure delirium, everyone wanted their own barbarian! The Glutton was jubilant: it was she who had had the idea of the sexy commando. 'Look, Fabrice...what an amazing atmosphere! Your friend Mike is finished!' The Glutton was something of a magic mirror for Fabrice. And this time, once again, the mirror had decided: 'Oh prince, I know of no rival to you beyond the mountains, beyond the oceans. Even proud New York must yield to you'.

And yet Fabrice was uneasy. Something bothered him, and he feared things were about to take a turn for the worse. Had he himself, like the Cyber-Wolves, already been betrayed by the eye of the cyclone? He more than anyone was a past master in the diplomacy of caprice and the art of the cocktail. And he could sense how unstable was the cocktail of Money, Talent and the Press—as finely poised as the physicist's famous critical point where gaseous, liquid, and solid states coexist. The pact between these three powers, even when enchanted by the magic ring of the Night, was just a fool's bargain, a Treaty of Amiens in which everybody knew that sooner or later, someone would be the loser.

The reality check would come soon enough! It took less than three years to dissipate the charm and to assure the triumph of the 80s, with their nauseating ennui, greed and stupidity, the years of neoliberal 'conservative revolutions', the cynical years of Reagan and Thatcher... and of the hypocritical triviality of the Mitterrand era, the years of the planetary counterattack of imbeciles embittered by the rainbow of generosity and freedom that had begun to unfurl over the preceding

fifteen years. Now would come the era of the market's Invisible Hand, which dons no kid gloves in order to starve and crush silently, and which is invincible because it applies its pressure everywhere and nowhere; but which nevertheless, just as God has need of men, has need of a voice. And the voice was right there waiting. The neoliberal Counter-Reformation, that zealous mercenary, would furnish the classic services of the reactionary option, delivering a social alchemy to forge a political force out of everything that a middle class invariably ends up exuding—fear, envy, and conformity.

This would be precisely the work of undermining of the Mitterrand era (all things considered, a rather obscene process): emasculating a tradition of the combative left so as to install the inanities of modernist democrats, while taking care to 'demarcate itself' from the too-shrill gesticulations of the Reagan administration. It would be a question of promoting an elegant capitulation—a capitulation à la française—to the ultimatum of the Invisible Hand, by presenting it as an unavoidable rendezvous with modernity, or even as liberatory utopia finally coming of age. The years of the triumph of the Mitterrand era would also be those of a spectacular rout of the French intelligentsia, however replete with talent and generosity they may have been—those who had managed to find the Archimedes' lever to shift the enormous barges of secular prejudices and imbecilities that had imprisoned women, homosexuals, convicts, and many more besides. All of these agitations and struggles, often prosecuted with relentless ferocity until victory was in sight, had ended up irritating the contemporary Metternichs—the advisors of the Trilateral²—embittered by this handful of agitators who threatened to contaminate thousands of reasonable young people. The Latin countries and their revolutionary tradition—France in particular—were increasingly stigmatized as being 'ungovernable', with their overactive militants, their subversive intelligentsias, their powerful unions, all of whom were so many viscosities detrimental to the fluidity of the future Great World Market.

But in France, the intervention of the Trilateral was superfluous: infatuation and parochialism would, as usual, overcome the French intelligentsia, who had been something of a flagship for European subversion. The 60s had been the years of the ruin of 'dialectical materialism', which had lost all of its claws one by one; it had had to cede the terrain to 'Nietzscheanism', which, in turn, began to crumble. Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche certainly had nothing to do with this; but every great thought, as acute as it might be, will always perish in the hands of overzealous devotees. And there was no shortage of the latter: a vagabond Nietzscheanism that roamed from Zarathustra to the cfdt,³ a fashionable Nietzscheanism for the most enlightened—as

indispensable to Parisian diners as the hostess's entremets—and finally, a postmodern post-Nietzscheanism for the most retarded and provincial, weary of 'grand narratives' and of all the 'outdated campaigns' they'd always been too scared to join. The Cyber-Wolf style, apolitical and blasé, began to spread: how to resist the delicious frivolity of those who strove to 'shit on the negative', who believed they had finally found the secret of permanent jubilation, and who claimed to be cultivating orchids in the desert without bothering much about the thorny problem of irrigation? Marvellous Gardeners of the Creative, who wanted to take off before having learned to walk, and who had forgotten that freedom, unless it is reduced to nothing but whim and daydreams, is also the concrete—and often arduous—mastery of the conditions of freedom.

The neoliberal Counter-Reformation was to wreak its revenge without making any concessions to the Gardeners of the Creative. Every idea, even the most generous, would be mercilessly turned inside-out like a glove, chewed up only to be belched back up in the form of a nightmarish replica, just as the Evil Fairy of the fable makes her victims spew up toads and vipers as soon as they open their mouths. Let's hear the Counter-Reformation speak, then, and admire the kind of truly demonic magic with which it strives to grant the Gardeners' every wish:

'You want to affirm Difference and even (if I understand correctly) to affirm the right to Difference. Thanks for the gift! But we don't ask quite that much. It was you who helped us work it up. We don't say that any race is superior to any other—your dad's racism is gone, don't worry—we just say that they are different. Isn't modernity respect for difference?

—You want as little state as possible? If only you knew how much we agreed! It's time to slim down the providential state: a fat nightwatchman is no good to anyone. Are we going to carry on exhausting ourselves dripfeeding national health and education?

—Nomadism and mobility, you say...here again, you'll be amazed at our audacity: our companies will 'nomadize' (pardon the neologism) faster than your most switched-on backpackers. Obviously, in New York, Paris, or London there will be a few more people on the streets. But after all, isn't it already like that in New Delhi, Caracas and Sao Paolo? Why should the rich countries be privileged?

—You want to reserve some room for creativity, for 'each to his own' (pardon the phrase). So be it! Your wish is our command! We will give you extra helpings of 'each to his own', but spiced up with our preferred ingredients: envy, narcissism, the possessive spirit—which, as you know, are the raw materials of our market democracies.

—You're tired of oppositions and dialectical confrontations. You want to invent a sort of 'diplomacy of the continuous'.... Make one more little effort to come closer to us and you'll see that the market loves fluidity—just like you—and that it detests all those corny demands, all those manifestations of nostalgia and resentment, all that tension over privilege, and all the 'viscosities' secreted by dinosaur unions incapable of integrating with the generous social mobility of market democracies.

—You want a more experimental and more festive university? Feel free! Do all the 'experiments' you like, so long as they don't cost too much. But watch out! We must follow the rule of 'each to his own'. You see the extent to which we also are capable of creativity.

—You want to capture the creative powers of chaos—just what we'd expect of Gardeners of Creativity—and to replace the big political choices with a cyberpolitics that would allow solutions to emerge graciously, delivered out of disorder by self-organization, just as butter floats gently to the surface of buttermilk? Come now, just a few centimetres and our fingers will touch...completely ditch all politics and its voluntarism. Just be patient, that's enough: the chaos of opinions and microdecisions will always end up giving birth to something reasonable.

The Gardeners of the Creative had basically sought to play Nietzsche against Hegel, and often against Marx. But they had chosen the wrong target: it is neither Hegel's owl nor Marx's mole, nor Nietzsche's camel that surprises us at the turn in the road: it is Malthus, peddler of the most nefarious conservatisms, always smiling and affable, who stands watching the suckers hagglng over the libertarian gimcrackery of nomadism and chaotizing.

NOTES

1. Merle Haggard's (1982) song *Are the Good Times Really Over for Good*, cited by Guy Sorman in his book *The Conservative Revolution in America* (Chicago: Regnery, 1985). Sorman is certainly the least irritating representative of the French liberal Counter-Reformation, and has taken courageous positions on certain 'social issues', in particular on the problem of drugs.

2. Recall that the Trilateral Commission was founded in 1973 on the private initiative of European, Japanese, and American politicians, to find a 'solution' to the 'problems' confronting Western democracies at the time. Certain of the Commission's works were published in 1975 in a report on the 'governability' of democracies entitled *The Crisis of Democracy*, which made no bones of its pessimism as to the future of the 'great democracies'. One of the editors, French sociologist Michel Crozier, did not hesitate to evoke the 'ungovernable character' of European democracies, the 'romanticism' and 'civic irresponsibility' of certain intellectuals, and in particular the postindustrial

proliferation of 'so-called intellectuals' and 'para-intellectuals'.

[3.](#) [CFDT—Confédération française démocratique du travail, a major confederation of trade unions formed in 1964—trans.]

2. Chaos as Imposture, Self-Regulation as Festive Neoconservatism

Superstition always requires its Devil, who exudes mischief and excuses one from facing the fire of the negative; and a Prince Charming who can awaken virtues with just a kiss. For the first, our epoch has found a figure, radical Evil—‘absolute malice’—and for the second, Chaos, its counterpart, initially somewhat disquieting but ultimately rather useful, because it is tricked out with ‘creativity’ and possesses the virtue of being able to magically fabricate singularity (just as certain plants have a dormative virtue). Chaos would like to present itself as the Prince Charming who awakens virtualities. But isn’t it just a baleful brawl of possibilities, an abject copulation of rule and chance? Remember Milton:

Chaos umpire sits,
And by decision more embroils the fray
By which he reigns: next him, high arbiter,
Chance governs all...

For more than fifteen years now, Chaos has had the upper hand. Where exactly does its fascination lie? Mathematics and the physical sciences no longer hesitate to venture into this space which is disputed over by the confused, the obscure, and the disorderly, but also the singular from which new modes of contemplation and action emerge. This cannot leave philosophy indifferent, for better or worse. The temptation is always no longer to conceive of Chaos as a blossoming of virtualities, but to accept it as a new ‘natural’ given, as a competition of possibilities, sometimes a little hairy maybe, but already domesticated and just precisely disobedient enough to give a frisson to the ‘honest man’ of the twentieth century, the ‘honest humanist’ who just adores stories of hippopotami whose yawns unleash a cyclone in the northern Baltic.

Philosophy seems finally to have been relieved of a problem it had held very dear—that of the riches of darkness—and whose resolution had been sought in cosmologies without Creation, which always begin with a Chaos of primordial waters, an equivocal mixture of Sky and Earth in a state of ontological putrefaction...a state they could never have escaped had not another God decided to separate them.¹

These cosmogonies give us one of the keys to understanding the

uneasy fascination that emanates from Chaos: the latter installs thought in a space that one hopes will be fruitful, but which is already gnawed at by the virulent opposition of two principles. Chaos is the unresolved equilibrium of two forces, an equilibrium incapable of assuming the coiled, heightened ambiguity of a couple.² It presents itself as a precarious totality within which the possibilities it will supposedly deliver are already confronting each other.

This is the whole paradox of Chaos: from the start it is torn apart by the very rivals to which it must give birth; it must resign itself to being nothing but a neutralization, abandoning its fine ambition to deploy a spectrum of virtualities and ending up as a botched dialectic, going no further than the troubled presentiment of a multiplicity haunted by an ordinary Unity, itself always already contaminated by the Manifold. This is why the fascination exerted by modern scientific theories of chaos is by no means free of equivocation—it brings together two seductions: that of the comfort of operativity, and that of a marvelling in the face of all that is just on the verge of appearing.

Thus seems to be dissipated the whole perplexity that inexorably accompanies the 'chaotizing', and which Bergson correctly described, in *Creative Evolution*, as resulting from a mental oscillation that shuttles between a simple mechanical order and an expressly willed order. It is precisely this clear distinction between the two orders that allows for the elimination of the equivocation through which disorder lives. Bergson shows firstly that any theory of knowledge that wishes to be consequent will have to start out by destroying the type of superstition that leads us to imagine that there could be no order at all. He gives an example which is crucial and which functions as a true thought experiment—that of the progressive emergence of chaotizing:

First we think of the physical universe as we know it, with effects and causes well proportioned to each other; then, by a series of arbitrary decrees, we augment, diminish, suppress, so as to obtain what we call disorder.³

The striking effect of this example owes of course to the fact that here the Will seems to emerge from the comfort of the order of normal causality to haunt all things; such a spectacle is all the more disquieting than the pure delivery of a figure of the chaotic: what seems to be placidly domesticated by the laws of physics succumbs to the confrontation between the order of the Will and the order of Mechanics, or more exactly to the victory of caprice over the latter and its subversion by a multitude of elementary wills, in so far as we imagine the appearance and disappearance of phenomena. According to Bergson, only a superior Will could bring order to this colony of

pulverized wills. Certainly, 'our own will is there', but it 'objectifies itself in each of these capricious wills in turn'.⁴

The dislocation of the order of Mechanics calls up the phantom of a will that hesitates between remaining the guardian of unity, and dispersing itself into a constellation of elementary volitions while bringing in a 'mere intention' to hover over the latter. What is more, this is what makes Bergson's analysis so remarkable: that he makes us live his example as a thought experiment through which we fall into a vertigo of thought before the disquieting rebellion of will as soon as the impediments of ordinary habits and proportions are thrown off—a rebellion that ruins the order of Mechanics in things even as it leaves an 'intention' hovering over them.

This experiment also reminds us of the art of the great masters of still life, of their capacity to insinuate that there is some terrible threat in an upturned goblet, in a pile of apples or grapes, or in a basket hung with game; that the Truce of the Penates has broken down, that the tidy folds of the tablecloth at the corner of the table will topple into a cataract and join the heavy sags below the table, that some conspiracy is afoot between the victuals, the candlesticks, and the napkins, to allow themselves to be engulfed in a pitiless war of things....

Here we find brought to its apex the perplexity that Bergson describes before the conflict of these two orders, at once present and absent, before an indetermination not at all grasped as creative, before a masterless proliferating plurality—a perplexity that culminates when the willed order takes its revenge on the dissolving automatic order. This is what happens when one attempts a noncoherent deformation of the laws of physics (one that is not disciplined by robust contemplation): mechanical necessities, routines, give way to the chaos of scattered, capricious wills. Here we are at the antipodes of the serenity of those thought experiments through which geometers and physicists subtract themselves from the order of causes—without for all that taking refuge in a heaven of intelligibles.

To escape the caprice of the order of things calls for the most extreme resolve, and this is why these experiments bring into play situations, and liberate gestures, that are as incongruous as can be. This radical incongruity, obtained through one of the most rigorous disciplines of thought, is a thousand miles from the seductions of the 'chaotizing' that supposedly (like an Aladdin's lamp) generates the most varied forms out of scattered particularities. What a bonanza for the hard-pressed thinker: order emerges from chance and at last allows itself to be snapped up at a bargain price.

Thus the Great Baroque Cauldron of chaotizing succeeds in incarnating the myth of auto-emergence, the myth of an innocent

transaction or operation, forgetting that every such operation supposes—implicitly or explicitly—the putting in place of a (sometimes very brutal) apparatus of equivalence, and an (often even crueller) distinction between the ‘operator’ and the ‘operated-on’, which are not quite so painlessly discernable as butter and buttermilk. Something has to have been decided, then; there has to have been confrontation—and perhaps struggle—and a symmetry that has been irreversibly broken.

Remarkable individuals and ordered structures that seem to be graciously dispensed by an aleatory stew of particular units or pre-given possibilities—here is something to seduce scientists anxious, in the twilight of their life, to share with the world their ‘ethical worries’ and their ‘perspective on knowledge’; and above all, of course, something to excite the appetites of economists and politologists always on the lookout for an umbrella of scientific rigour.

Let us reassure the reader! It’s always the same imposture that goes into the Great Cauldron: not knowing or feigning ignorance of the fact that the panoply of illustrations⁵ borrowed from science—which are supposed to give a bit of backbone to chaotizing thought—aim to mask a crucial dissymmetry in the givens of a problem—whether it is a problem of mathematics, physics or chemistry—in order to stage the Miracle of auto-emergence, the election of a remarkable structure on the basis of supposedly perfectly symmetrical or perfectly contingent ingredients. For the ‘honest humanist’, always a bit of a sucker for science, the effect is guaranteed: How could one not be bowled over by this enigma, the birth of the Singular out of Nothing?

‘Hadn’t we better catch up? Isn’t Nature more libertarian than we are? Doesn’t it offer us a great lesson in democracy?’, the juggling Tartuffes of self-organization ponder gravely. More freshly cynical and less pedantic, their Victorian counterparts had already delighted in the famous nursery rhyme of the Island of Goats and Dogs:⁶ Abandoned on a desert island, a few examples of two species reproduce, leading within a few years to a certain stability in the predatory and the herbivorous population. What could be more edifying than this equilibrium emerging from the Chaos of teeth and stomachs? There can be no question as to the conclusion: human society must banish all ‘voluntarism’ and all ‘interventionism’ so as not to disturb the self-organization of the Chaos of economic appetites that will sort out those who eat from those who will be eaten.

How could one not bow before this Elect of the invisible? How could anyone refuse to see that modern chemistry and biology, steeped in cybernetics, finally give us the key to the painless scientific management of political sovereignty? The socio-economist von Hayek⁷ remarks that the power emanating from a particular identifiable

individual—a ‘tyrant’—soon becomes hateful, and is certainly less tolerable than the pressures exerted by an anonymous and nonlocalized entity—public opinion or the market—an entity one is tempted to qualify as ventriloquial. This is why the Chaos of opinions, of economic supply and demand, forces respect—like all ventriloquial entities with a voice but no face, who speak with their viscera.

The sociopolitical mystification of Chaos combines two advantages: it is an affordable rather than a dangerous thought; and it legitimates a type of auto-domination swathed in all the ‘liberatory’ and baroque glamour of scientific theories, certain of which even claim to have vanquished ‘old-fashioned determinism’. We can appreciate the full force of the cretinizing seduction of the ‘chaotizing’ and of the ‘self-organizing’: a massive force like that of miracles, perfectly suited to excite the lusts of economists, of postmodern aesthetes, in short of all sociopolitological ‘researchers’, and of everything that feeds on the decline of the thinking of the political as such.

Like all noncreative metaphors—which we should call second-marriage metaphors—Chaos, the Fractal, and Catastrophe are content to ‘illustrate’ and to ‘bring to life’ a model imported, as a turnkey solution, from mathematical theories. So they can happily dispense with any real thought experiment that might justify the choice of variables and parameters used to articulate pure mathematics with real causalities.

NOTES

[1.](#) This is the role of Atum, the Egyptian God who separates Nur into his two elements, and of Marduk, the Babylonian God, who differentiates Sky from Earth.

[2.](#) See G. Châtelet, *Les Enjeux du Mobile* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), chapter 3.

[3.](#) Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, tr. A. Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998), 233. Bergson insists strongly on the distinction between the ‘willed order’ and the ‘automatic order’.

[4.](#) *Ibid.*, 233.

[5.](#) This panoply is rather indigent: it is always a matter of presenting certain phenomena—always interpretable in terms of classical determinism—that illustrate the epistemological gadget of ‘order emerging out of Chaos’. The standard examples are those of the crystal, an ‘ordered structure’ that ‘emerges’ from a disordered structure; and that of a fluid compressed between two horizontal plates kept at different temperatures and capable of bringing about

turbulence. In other words a dissymmetry is given from the start, which vitiates the theses of the 'Gardeners of Chaotizing' who would see in such examples a 'refutation' of Boltzmann's principle of increasing entropy.

6. W. Townsend's (1986) 'Dissertation on the Poor Laws', cited by K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Beacon, 1968), 55.

7. F. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

3. Hobbes's Robinson-Particles

If the imposture of Chaos proves so tenacious, it is because it seems to have substantiated the myth of an invisible power, an operator that is at once engineer and umpire, full of solicitude for every atom of will, and which asks only that we 'allow for emergence' and 'let things be'. But we shall see that this innocent game in fact inscribes itself in the lineage of a far crueller thought experiment, that of Hobbes's fiction of the state of nature, which founds and introduces 'Civil Philosophy', the 'science of the just and unjust consequences of the accidents of political bodies'.

This Civil Philosophy appears in *Leviathan* as the second component, completing the general table of Science, counterbalancing Natural Philosophy (or 'the Science of the consequences of the accidents of natural bodies').¹

Thus it comes as no surprise that Hobbes's fiction transports us into a world of 'political bodies', and that this world is rather like an exact copy of Galileo's famous thought experiment, which propels itself into an infinite space purified of all forces, of all friction, so as to stage the free particle, a pure impulsion subtracted from causality. Galileo saw very well that in order to articulate Mathematics (the Science of figures and numbers) with Mechanics, one must enforce a kind of ascesis that minimally incarnates Geometry and Algebra by stripping bodies of all their qualities.

It is in a very closely-related optic that we ought to assess the fiction of the natural state as forged by Hobbes: it aims to grasp the degree zero of politics, at the risk of conceiving the complete dislocation of what we would now call 'socio-historical conditions' and expounding a principle of inertia governing the behaviour of free and solitary wills.²

How to lend some cohesion, in space and time, to this multitude of Robinson-particles, gnawed at by a future hunger,³ by appetites anticipating other appetites, and therefore more ferocious and more vicious than beasts? We know Hobbes's own response: only a Sovereign can control this Chaos of hostile wills striving to live by and for themselves, but in fact doomed to the absolute misery of mechanical contingency; our Robinsons are just billiard balls which at any moment can be hit by other, more crafty or bigger billiard balls. And yet it is this extremely crude mechanics associated with the contingent that feeds Hobbes's fiction and makes it possible to found a political arithmetic,⁴ thus far surpassing what is traditionally held to be the central project of *Leviathan*: the legitimation of absolute monarchy.

Like Galileo's free particles, Hobbes's Robinsons must firstly be conceived of as units destined to be added together, each of which can be balanced out by the appropriate aggregate of other units. Hobbes emphasizes that differences in physical force or talent are negligible: for many men can team up against one. Seen from the point of view of absolute sovereignty, these Robinsons, as ferocious as they may be, are no more than grains of sand, units of greed, pathetic warring billiard balls, whose every effort to differentiate themselves only bogs them down further in a great equivalence.

If the Sovereign can claim to be a centre of absolute coercion, it is because he functions first of all as a horizon-operator that 'puts into perspective', that begins by fabricating the homogeneous in order subsequently to discern and distribute distinctions. What is crucial here is the Sovereign's capacity to take advantage of a state of mechanical contingency so as to transform it into a field of equivalence. These equivalences and the operations they permit become 'natural' if one succeeds, like Hobbes, in exhibiting and presenting as self-evident certain units of measurement for political bodies, minimal capsules of empirical freedoms capable of storing up the two types of 'natural faculties'—those of the Body and those of the Mind⁵—that Robinsons have at their disposal.

This field of equivalence, of course, allows one to compare, group and break up political Bodies at leisure—operations indispensable for the constitution not only of military forces, but also (and above all) that of norms of substitution for appetites and talents, and thus for the establishment of exchange contracts. Hence the Robinson-particle who, for the Sovereign, the army chief, is above all a minimal unit of military force, of cannon fodder, can also be transformed into contract fodder. Hobbes's thought experiment does not stop at legitimating submission to a centre incarnated in the visible body of the Sovereign; it allows the multitude of Robinsons to be conceived of as a mass possessing all the characteristics—fluidity, predictability, and impersonal 'operativity'—of a market.⁶ As field of socio-economic rationality, the market implies a proof of the equivalence of Robinsons, an 'equality' assessed from the point of view of distress and ferocity. This demonstration is crucial: so long as it is not established, ferocity and distress will remain 'irrational'—not because they far exceed those of animals, but because they are not socially 'operational', and therefore cannot claim the 'naturalness' of comfort and habit. They therefore cannot be domesticated as the affective material of a Social Physics that seeks to calculate, store and exchange them, claiming to oversee all disputes so as to legitimate conventions that go beyond the pathos of litigants. This claim to incarnate the ruse of History in some way is, moreover, one of

the most tenacious foundations of what deserves to be called the Contemporary Cybermercantile Order.

In order to impose itself, this Order has need of many companions whom we shall meet in the pages that follow: the mercantile empiricist, the classical populist, and the urban populist, of which we shall sketch out two prototypes, Bécassine Turbo-Diesel and Gideon Cyber-Plus, full of the whole voracious agility of the 'tertiary service society'. The mercantile empiricist is the most 'philosophical' of this sinister team; he loves to seduce and to present himself as a congenial travelling salesman, a fellow of the ordinary man, an everyman 'who loves life'.

For the mercantile empiricist, no effort must be spared in turning the ordinary man away from the vain speculations and 'sophistries' of philosophers, always so stubborn in their refusal to see what is obvious to everyone: 'Everything I speak of, you can find on any street corner. Isn't it natural that, left to themselves, men should be ferocious Robinsons?'

Our salesman even successfully manages the feat of not boring the ordinary man when initiating him into the austere catechisms of 'methodological individualism' and 'rational choice',⁷ since he loves to illustrate these by way of delicious stories of campus cafeterias⁸ or, better still, with robinsonades spiced up with domestic quarrels between Robinson and Friday, ostensibly as a prelude to their supposed 'rational agreement'.

'To rational folk like you and I, doesn't it seem natural that, rather than resign themselves to mutual plunder, Robinson and Friday should come to an agreement to best utilize their talents and maximize their happiness as a couple? Isn't it natural for Robinson to keep the rifle to hunt with, while Friday, more agile than he, continues to climb coconut palms?' The mercantile empiricist continually swears on the head of democracy, as Tartuffe swore on that of all the saints, and even likes to put himself forward as the postmodern companion of the Levellers of the English Revolution, who thought that 'the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he'.⁹

The mercantile empiricist, like the Levellers, does indeed support the right of every ordinary man to 'live his life', just like the powerful. But this equality is not at all, as with the Levellers, the condition for the blossoming of singular individuals, in whom the mercantile empiricist has no interest and whom, in any case, he does not meet on the street corner. It is the equality in distress of the atoms of supply and demand —so crucial for the stability of the cybermercantile order—that interests the mercantile empiricist, an 'equality' to which he appeals constantly, and which he waves like a benevolent banner to distract us from the fact that a whole social physics had to be put in place in order to

dislocate the Ordinary Man and to establish the Hobbesian kinematics of political Bodies.

NOTES

1. T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61.
2. '[C]ontinual feare, and danger of violent death: And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.' Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.
3. L. Strauss, *Hobbes's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 7, and *Leviathan*, chapter 11.
4. On these questions, see: J.-C. Perrot, *Histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique* (Paris: EHESS, 1992), 334–54; A. Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), chapter 1; J. Affichard (ed.), *Pour une histoire de la statistique* (Paris: Economica-INSEE, 1987), Hecht and Bédarida's articles; B. Ingrao and G. Israël, *The Invisible Hand* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).
5. T. Hobbes, 'Human Nature', in *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.
6. See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
7. On all these questions, see the glossary and brilliant exposition by J.-P. Dupuy, *Introduction aux sciences sociales* (Paris: Ellipses, Cours de l'École polytechnique, 1992); J.M. Buchanan, G. Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 1971); K.J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963); J.M. Buchanan, *The Limits of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).
8. The mercantile empiricist adores nursery rhymes for students which charm with their 'slice of life' aspect...by allowing all problems to fall by the wayside. What could be more delightful than the tale of an encounter between a university professor and a watermelon vendor to illustrate the notion of a contract? (Buchanan, *Limits of Liberty*, chapter 2):
During summer months, a roadside stand outside Blacksburg displays seasonal fruits and vegetables. I can purchase watermelons in quantities that I choose at prices which, by convention, are established by the salesman. There is little or no haggling, and a transaction can be completed in seconds. Economic exchanges like this are so familiar to us, so much a part of everyday routine, that we often overlook the bases upon which such institutions rest. I do not know the fruit salesman personally, and I have no particular interest in his well-being. He reciprocates this attitude. I do not know, and have no need to know, whether he is in direst poverty, extremely wealthy, or somewhere in

between. Likewise, his ignorance concerning my economic status is complete. Yet the two of us are able to complete an exchange expeditiously, an exchange that both of us accept as 'just.' I make no effort to seize watermelons without his consent and without payment. The vendor does not grab coins and currency from my purse.

We transact exchanges efficiently because both parties agree on the property rights relevant to them. Both of us acknowledge that the watermelons, stacked neatly by the roadside, are 'owned' by the salesman, or by the person or firm for whom he acts as agent. Both of us also acknowledge that I have the rights of disposition over the money in my pockets or in my bank account. Furthermore, both of us recognize that any unilateral attempt to violate these assigned rights of exclusion will be subject to penalty through the arms and agencies of the state. In other words, both of us agree on what 'the law' is that is relevant to the exchange in question.

The point illustrated by these simple examples is clear. Economic exchange among persons is facilitated by mutual agreement on defined rights. Both parts of this principle must be satisfied. Individual rights must be well defined and nonarbitrary, and, in addition, these rights must be recognized and accepted by participants. If rights are known to be well defined and nonarbitrary but if knowledge about them is available to persons only on considerable investment in information gathering, many exchanges that are otherwise mutually beneficial may never come into being. Once both parts of the principle are met, however, once the limits of each person's rights are defined by agreement, economic interchange becomes almost the archetype of ordered anarchy. Individuals can deal with one another through wholly voluntary behavior without coercion or threat. They can enter into and complete exchanges without detailed knowledge of the political persuasions, sexual attitudes, or economic statuses of their actual trading partners. The traders may be unequal in any or all of such descriptive characteristics, yet they can and do deal with one another as equals in the exchange itself. In this classic sense, economic exchange is wholly impersonal, which seems to be precisely the ideal-type interaction embodied in ordered anarchy. Each person is treated strictly as he is, and presumably as he wants to be, in such a relationship. The fruit stand operator may beat his horse, shoot dogs, and eat rats. But none of these qualities need affect my strictly economic trade with him.

We shall leave the reader to appreciate the 'clarity' of the argument. Is it not 'natural' that, 'with neither coercion nor threat', the worker in Mali should present himself in the 'global supermarket' in the company of a Zurich dentist?

9. 'The Putney Debates', in D. Wootton (ed.), *Divine Rights and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England* (London: Penguin, 1986), 286. Recall that the Levellers constituted the most radical faction of the combatants in the English Revolution of 1648. They called for the establishment of an absolutely egalitarian Republic, the 'Christian Society', and were eliminated by Cromwell, who considered them dangerous.

4. The Average Man as Statistical Degradation of the Ordinary Man

It has been said that figures rule the world. Maybe. But I am not sure that figures show us whether it is being ruled well or badly.

GOETHE,

There is in moral man left to himself a point around which all the passions, all the forces that dominate him, find their equilibrium. This point is analogous to that which in a body is designated by the term 'centre of gravity': I call it the moral centre.

L.-A. QUÉTELET,

Such a social physics is outlined by Belgian sociologist and astronomer Lambert-Adolphe Quételet in his theory of the 'average man',¹ which succeeds in hauling up the great collectives of Robinson-particles to the dignity of an object of an applied mathematics: 'moral statistics'.

We have just seen the talent with which Hobbes, through his dislocation of the Ordinary Man, had prepared the ground for what Quételet calls an anatomy that would study the parts of the social body, just as vegetable, animal or human anatomy decompose into parts every organised being endowed with life. This anatomy—which Quételet emphasizes 'has been wrongly designated under the name of statistics'—makes it possible to operate on masses of Robinsons as on masses of stars, and to make numbers out of the weight and height of bodies, the size of body parts—arms, chests...—the shape of noses and skulls, and even their instinct to conjugal union, their suicides and their crimes. The bodies and body parts of Robinsons and their social behaviours alike, en masse, obey certain laws, which may well be invisible to the profane or to the puritan humanist, but which are revealed by the existence of peculiarly stable averages that can function as parameters, just as there are parameters and universal laws for boxes of sand.

Quételet emphasizes this paradox very clearly: the 'wise man' is he whose free will is like a spring oscillating around an average, reasonable state, that of the 'average man':

Whatsoever may be the circumstances in which he is found, the wise man deviates only a small distance from the average state in which he believes one must remain. It is only in men entirely abandoned to the impetuosity of their passions that we find those abrupt transitions, faithful reflections of all the external causes that act upon them.

Therefore, free will, far from posing an obstacle to the regular production

of social phenomena, is on the contrary favourable to it. A people who were formed only of wise men would yield the most consistent return of the same facts every year. This may explain what at first seems paradoxical: that social phenomena, although influenced by the free will of man, proceed year upon year with greater regularity than phenomena influenced purely by accidental material causes.²

The 'wise man' is thus conflated with a creature, the 'average man', which physicists would willingly qualify as adiabatic, a creature antipodal to the dionysiac or the demoniac, and whose behaviours are about as subversive as the secular perturbations of the planets.

Quételet goes on to specify that 'the average man is to the nation what the centre of gravity is to a body'.³ We must take this metaphor very seriously. It means that the 'average man' serves to sum up all the living forces of a nation, just as the centre of gravity concentrates into one point all the weights dispersed throughout a solid, coalescing them into one unique mass.

In thus summing up a nation, the 'average man' provides a most precious fulcrum with which to guide every conservative strategy and to realise its old dream: that of capturing the inertia of Hobbes's Robinsons, by storing them up in enormous silos of average men, so as to make of them a political force, an opinion, whose evolution one would be able to keep track of through appropriate surveys.

For Quételet, there is a certain excellence of the average as such, whether in the order of the Good or the Beautiful: the most beautiful face is that obtained by taking the average features of a whole population, just as the wisest conduct is that which best approaches the set of behaviours of the average man. The conclusion follows naturally: great men, 'geniuses', are those who best incarnate the 'average man', since the latter is possessed of a maximal capacity to concentrate and sum up a whole epoch.

Here the romantic tradition of genius is absolutely at odds with 'social anatomy' à la Quételet: for the former, the singular is absolutely primary and absolutely concrete, with a necessarily universal vocation; whereas for the latter, the singular is an abstract fiction resulting from the dissolution-aggregation of particulars into an average, a fiction which we cannot ever 'really' come across except through particular copies—the classic example being that of the distribution of the heights of conscripts who appear as measures of a 'physical magnitude' existing independently of these measurements. This is the same puerile empiricism that claims that the circle of pure geometry is the average of the multitude of sensible circles and which, far from attaining a concrete capable of giving rise to new gestures and new actions, fetishizes the 'figures' vomited up by the contemporary Jupiter: the

Quantum. These figures, eructated in their hundreds, produce values, encouraging, scrutinising, rewarding or punishing.

Like Chaos, the Quantum is a ventriloquial entity that 'expresses' objectively millions of wills, presiding with senatorial dignity over the fluctuations occasioned by the agitated and the eccentric. Along with the 'average man' and the great god Quantum there comes a swaggering socio-politological inanity: there is indeed a music of the spheres for the consumers of yoghurt, for the states of mind of socioprofessional categories and demographics, a music as sublime as that of the stars!

Why do figures fascinate so many simple souls, and the impatient, always so fond of references and certainties? Almost by definition, a figure is not open to discussion; there is indeed an imbecilic virility to the number, stubborn and always ready to hide behind a kind of scientific immunity.

These certainties are obtained by way of the 'clarity' of the self-evidence of statistics, which effaces the conditions of the genesis of the individuals upon whom statistics does its work. Thus there is an imposture of the statistical that is ultimately very close to the more baroque imposture of chaos. As we have already remarked, chaos claims to deliver an individual, or a structure, from out of a democratic stew of possibles; whereas the (more primitive) imposture of statistics forces itself on us with the crudity of a music-hall comic.

There is indeed, however, a political and military understanding of the Number, not the number as juxtaposition of units of distress, as a 'population' grasped through height, weight or 'social behaviours', but as a coalition forcing the event and animating a struggle.

The fighting Number does not preside over a set of completed individuals—like the cardinal number of a collection—but catalyzes a new individuation, enabling a collective accession to a higher plasticity. This plasticity, which totally escapes the division by aggregate of 'average men', is diametrically opposed to the mass individualism so admired by certain socio-politologists.

This plasticity and intelligence of the number already fascinated the military leaders of the Great War. They admired and feared this type of giant amoeba poised to overflow frontiers:

They discovered that the physical properties of men reckoned by millions made up an element that conditioned and neutralized all considerations of strategy. Armies of so vast a size were found to possess an unexpected fluidity, a tendency to flow into, and fill up, any holes that might be made in their compact body, to envelop, impede and turn the point of any opposing thrust; to give beneath a blow, to bend without breaking, to seep outwards from the flanks, covering more and more ground with an ever-

active, ever-shifting front, growing to such a size that the forces involved could be regarded as nothing less than nations in arms....⁴

What to do with this promising leaven, this protoplasm whose every quivering can deploy a new dimension, this innocent gravity of the 'million men'? We know all too well what follows: the forced march toward 'singing tomorrows', toward 'Race' and 'Living Space', in its own way, lent a 'political weight' and an impact to this giant amoeba by fabricating a destiny for it as fodder for the cannon and the blast-furnace.

The New Deal would invent (this is where its merit lies) a more reasonable solution. An ingenious social chemistry permits the preservation of the natural qualities of this mass—its homogeneity and elasticity—while channelling its potential into the demands of the Great Market. In this way one eliminates all these dangerous dimensions 'anterior to and indifferent to all strategy' whose articulation would risk transforming tens of millions of men into living bombs. One retains all the advantages of a vote fodder, decidedly wiser (and sometimes even more mobilisable) than cannon fodder and its mechanical services. Jules Romains's fine mobile unit was successfully torn apart by exorcising everything that makes five hundred thousand a great deal more than five hundred thousand individuals.

But the leftover pieces also had to be picked up and endowed with some semblance of 'collective identity'. The concept of the 'average man' allowed choice fodder to be injected with a statistical and moral authority. It remained only to articulate it with the demands of the Great Market: never again would any demands or conflicts be tolerated except those susceptible to being fluidified by a market or appeased by a group of specialised mediators. This social chemistry naturally leaves a residue of demands and desires judged too turbulent—or too 'immature'. As we shall see, however, this tar will be recycled by a panoply of 'demonizations' which aim at a coagulation of groups of 'average men', so as to constitute 'moral majorities' legitimated by a number that is not that of combatants—that of packs and of walking forests⁵—but that of reservoirs and alembics of resentment, of flywheels, of digital photographs of 'socio-economic tendencies'. By articulating three redoubtable entities—the ventriloquial Number of 'opinion', the signalling Number of 'great socio-economic equilibria', and finally the figure-Number of mathematical statistics⁶—it has become the masterpiece of cretinization implied by the equation:

Market = Democracy = Majority of Average Men

—the equation that legitimates market democracies, and any

contestation of which will from now on be little short of sacrilege: 'you disdain the people, you can't face reality', etc.

NOTES

[1.](#) Lambert-Adolphe Quételet (1796–1874), Belgian mathematician, statistician and astronomer. We also have him to thank for some fine research on astronomical optics and social statistics, and, in particular, a *Statistique criminelle de la Belgique* [*Criminal Statistics of Belgium*] and a *Statistique morale* [*Moral Statistics*].

[2.](#) L.-A. Quételet, *Du Système Social et des lois qui le régissent* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1848), 97.

[3.](#) *Ibid.*, 491.

[4.](#) J. Romain, *Verdun*, tr. G. Hopkins (London: Prion, 1999), 6–7.

[5.](#) E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, tr. C. Stewart (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984).

[6.](#) On the mystification of number, see A. Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, tr. R. Mackay (London: Polity, 2008).

5. Democracy as Political Market, or: From Market Democracy to Thermocracy

*Only through the **principle of competition** has political economy any pretension to the character of a science.*

J.S. MILL,

To complete the metamorphosis of the ordinary man into the 'average man', it is not enough to juggle a few discrete, already domesticated units using statistics; one must also know how to rig out their rational ferocity in the fine cloth of the 'differential' and the 'optimal'. This explains economists' infatuation with the rudiments of the calculus of variations, their thirst for the minimax and for the hunt for equilibria. The 'calculation of margins'² gives some fluidity to the brutal exchange of X against Y: by considering the relation of differentials dX and dY , we can hunt down that precious point where the consumer becomes indifferent—to the 'sacrifice' of a first pear and that of a last apple alike.³ Poor old differential calculus, which had succeeded for more than three centuries in mastering the infinite, now consigned to carrying out the mediocre chores of economist-politologists: keeping the ledger of microconfrontations, identifying equilibrium points, softening up and fabricating apathy!

The equilibrium point is a sinecure for the Robinson consumer: in it he can savour all the pleasure of choice, without submitting to the evident pressures of 'too much' or 'not enough'. Who would not envy the 'average man' ('who is both you and I', says the mercantile empiricist) this status of a euphoric Buridan's ass⁴ whose sole constraint is that of choosing choice? Who would not love, albeit just for a few seconds, to play at choosing, savouring the thrill of balancing up options, the delights of these set-ups that elevate you and allow you to float free of all relations of force and all confrontation? Who would not be fond of this floating free of gravity? Completely given over to the magic of equilibrium, the ordinary man allows himself to be bewitched, and slides gently into the universe of the 'average man', of all those little blasé posers⁵ hungry for optimizations, startled by everything with weight and everything that decides, scandalised by the violence of all that cuts and confronts—in brief, by anything that has the audacity to determine itself outside of the stationary.

Because, for a psychology like that of the 'average man', always 'undermined' and totally contaminated by the behaviours of equilibrium and compensation, determination is always too bold, if not indecent; it goes beyond a resignation to the desultory tinkering authorised by the pacified field of indifference curves and preference levels. To the 'average man' socio-historical conditions appear 'archaic', like the residue of an obsolete social physics crudely expressed in terms of hostile blocs, incapable of mastering the nuanced play of a socio-economic continuum.

This euphoria of the stationary can only give rise to a political philosophy eager to flush out (albeit only to make them yet more 'operational') stable forms of domination compatible with the minimal sphere of empirical freedom accorded to Robinsons. With the Invisible Hand or the 'Hidden God', economists claim to smooth out determination by encompassing all the microwills of Robinsons—in short, by rendering 'average man' baroque.⁶ Ploughing on with their mathematical researches, they lay claim to an 'objectivity' of the socio-economic capable of guiding the first steps of its younger sister—political science, always importuned by the irrational perturbations of 'extremists'. The 'fixed point' towards which the invisible hand conspires cannot be attained by the particular demand of this or that average man—unlike the tangible coercion of the absolute Sovereign—but necessitates a radical application of the operator of homogenization. The Invisible Hand is a masked totality that cannot be grasped through the eyes of this or that Robinson-particle, but only through an understanding of the fluidity of the networks and equivalences it organises, of the type of sympathy it claims to secrete between its operations and each of the Robinson-particles. No one escapes the action of the Hidden God. The market imposes itself as a 'popular' spatio-temporal ultimatum, permanent and omnipresent: no salvation without the fluid imperium of the market. It is here once again that we meet our old friend the mercantile empiricist: 'You meet the market at every street corner? What could be more natural, since the market is you and I...!' We know how talented the mercantile empiricist is at rendering this routine congenial, but of course it is the 'average man' who awaits the ordinary man on the street corner.... There is nothing like participation in the innocent games of society to facilitate the exchange of roles, so that the Ordinary Man may take himself for an 'average man'. The mercantile empiricist knows that the ordinary man likes to appraise the 'scientific evidence' and adores the mathematical farce and cybernetic vaudeville (the prisoner's dilemma, Newcomb's problem, the games of Common Knowledge...)⁷ which stage mutilated subjectivities—'players' full of craftiness and good sense—and which are

supposed to introduce the average man to good manners: those of envy and the contract. The mercantile empiricist does not even hesitate to swear that he is a mercantile, well-mannered anarchist, a grown-up and healthy anarchist, having broken with the romantic anarchy that still paralyses the prepubescent thinkers of the Old Continent:

Under regimes where individual rights to do things are well defined and recognised, the free market offers maximal scope for private, personal eccentricity, for individual freedom in its most elementary meaning. The failure of the romantic advocates of anarchy to recognise this feature of free markets is difficult to understand.⁸

Thus even the most eccentric objectivity ultimately remains within easy reach of politics! A fixed point can emerge from the Chaos of Robinsons' wills—on condition, of course, that they do not overstep the rational ferocity allowed to the 'average man'. But this fixed point presents itself as a mirage to the eyes and hands of every 'average man': the visible and the palpable promised by the mercantile empiricist escape him, as ungraspable as the 'true' fulcrums of an Archimedes' lever or of a set of scales. These points are 'true' because they have been able to subtract themselves from the direct actions of forces, whose moments they articulate and deploy: to understand a lever or a balance entails not being enthralled by the opposition of forces but grasping the pivot point that organises the spaces within which they can virtually work.

For the mathematician-politologists of 'choice', a seductive market-chaos of opinions is given, then, as 'natural' parameter and thermometer—capable of adding up opinions so as to neutralise them—just as the fixed point and the invisible hand are a necessity. Thanks to the baroque miracle of chaotizing, the austere figures of recording, of accountable compensation, of a posteriori summation, rediscover the freshness of the newly-born, of that which 'self-organizes' with all the vigour and innocence of flora and fauna. As on the Island of Goats and Dogs,⁹ everyone devours everyone else joyously, with all the felicity of those who sacrifice themselves for the advent of 'great equilibria' that vanish 'miraculously' before our eyes...but at the price, as we shall see, of a degradation of politics into the management of a contest of aggregates, a game theory governed by incontestable (because mathematical) 'rules' dispensed by the sympathetic chaos of our precious little caprices.

With the market's operation of pulverisation, the multiple becomes mere 'diversity', a continuum assuring a supplement of soul for exchange and for a tertiary postindustrial society that would like to see itself as 'democratic and swarming with life'.

This operation also has the advantage of dissolving certain global entities defined through solidarities which are refractory to homogenization. These solidarities, which come to the fore in class conflicts, fortify the Ordinary Man by initiating him into the disciplines and contestations of political combat, giving him a real autonomy a million miles from the 'personalization' and 'identification' that emerges from the competitions of 'average men' orchestrated by the curves of indifference and the servile (if not obscene) behaviours of equilibrium psychology—in short, those of communication and of the intersubjectivity of client-kings.

The entities (unions, parties, etc.) that come out of these solidarities and develop through struggle forge their individuation 'by hand'; unlike aggregates of average selves, they themselves have the concrete experience of their consistency, and can therefore put up a strong resistance to operations governed by the Invisible Hand, always allergic to 'viscosities'. It is therefore important that these 'syndical viscosities' be massaged, or, better, marginalized! All that is tolerated are docile aggregates, disassemblable and nomadizable at will.... The 'socioprofessional categories'—provisional summations of wills atrophied and penned into economic functions—can then always be denounced at leisure as 'egoistic' by economists when they come up against the supreme will of the Hidden God. The perfect fluidity required by the auto-emergence of the fixed point tolerates no 'privilege': let us be 'equal' so as to be 'fluid'!

This 'equality' that results from a massaging of singulars in view of their subordination to the Invisible Hand does indeed look like a mercantile forgery of the equality demanded by the Levellers, who sought to give a chance to each singular. This capacity of the Invisible Hand to turn the generous hope of equality inside-out like a glove, to associate it with an equilibrium psychology, did not escape a conservative as cunning and as keen on social stability as Pareto,¹⁰ who recognised in the identification of the chaos of political opinions with the chaos of economic forces a prodigious force for regulation and for social anaesthesia. Pareto does not underestimate the difficulties of such an identification: the political arena is indeed more 'irrational', far more difficult to domesticate, than the economic appetites of consumer-Robinsons.

But the stakes are so high and equilibrium psychology so successful that in its wake, what we might call 'politologist-economists' will succeed in taming the irrationality of politics, so as to twin it with economic rationality. These politologist-economists compile a dictionary that ensures an almost perfect tracing of political dualities by economic dualities. In this model, politicians are entrepreneurs, suppliers of

political goods and services who compete in the market for the votes of citizens-panelists-consumers of these political goods and services. Consider: just as the pressure of the market constrains the entrepreneur to maximise the utility functions of consumers, so politicians and parties enter into competition to satisfy the demand for political goods and services.¹¹

Thus the heart of 'governmentality' mirrors the fixed point of the Invisible Hand! Its headquarters is a type of Black Box, which swallows up inputs—demands for political benefits issued by coagulations of citizen-panelists ('pressure groups')—and spits out political outputs—laws and decrees to ensure the equilibrium of the supply and demand of political goods and services. Thus politicians and electors can be considered as rational agents, 'maximizers' operating under conditions of free political competition; the result, just as for the market, is 'an optimal equilibrium of inputs and outputs—of the energies and resources people would put into it and the rewards they would get out of it'.¹²

Through this optimal investment in time and 'energy', the entrepreneur-politician aims to be a deadringer for Adam Smith's famous baker, who does not make his buns for our pleasure, and must curb his enjoyment. In such a system, politics is a drudge-service, and ethical care a 'rare resource', a precious economic good that must not be squandered: 'that scarce resource Love...the most precious thing in the world...'.¹³

Consequently, the conduct of political matters must 'minimize' the consumption of amorous matter and maximally stimulate the instinct for appropriation. Envy is therefore not a regrettable pruritus of market democracies that will eventually be extirpated by suitable political treatment, but a prior necessary condition of its stability, as Thomas Jefferson quite rightly remarked: 'Free government is founded in jealousy, and not in confidence.'¹⁴

Pareto's dream has come true: the Hidden God, as the operator of symmetry seeking to pulverise and regulate, is now a diptych: for it now has a political component, envy, secreted by the Black Box—a replica of the economic component need, secreted by the Fixed Point.

Those who govern—those who tend to the Black Box—would be 'democrats', as affable and fond of 'everyday pragmatism' as the mercantile empiricist who sealed the nuptials of the Ordinary Man and the Invisible Hand: 'I am an ordinary man and, like you, I envy other ordinary men.' But it is precisely this everyday pragmatism that leads to the stifling of politics by the insatiable quest for self-improvement.¹⁵

Once more it is a question of applying the same principle that assured the triumph of the Invisible Hand: of drawing the Ordinary Man into

the market of dupes, of making him believe that he himself concocts his fixed point, just as others speak in prose without knowing it, and of presenting for his contemplation—all the better to place it out of reach—this fixed point that supposedly emerges from a fraternal flux of the millions of molecules of the wills of ordinary men. In short, of making him mirror a gimcrack immanence—that of the ‘average man’—all the better to implant the transcendence of equilibrium.

A maximal fluidity propagating mimetism like gangrene, a confusion of mobility with the dubious ‘nomadism’ of ‘temporary gigs’ and part-time, expedient solidarities, of the camaraderie of bare survival—such are the characteristics of the ‘new civil society’ that serves equilibrium alone, orchestrated by a thermodynamic vision of politico-economics. Thus it would be no exaggeration here to speak of a thermo-civil society, or, better, a thermocracy, dictating the everyday lives of hundreds of millions of average men, consumer-panelist Robinsons, distant descendents of Hobbes’s Robinsons pompously saluted as the prototypes of postmodernity, finally freed from all ‘great expectations’ and all ‘grand narratives’.

We know that the ancestor of the ‘average man’, Monsieur Prudhomme, is often worried that the ‘chariot of the state navigates on a volcano’. Even more than the state—which he wishes to be ‘minimal, but a competent nightwatchman’—his postmodern great-nephew, as a more crafty and more ‘informed’ Topaze¹⁶ than he, is worried by the state of the economy’s lungs, the ‘viscosities of the market that certain intellectuals would like to see degenerate into social bronchitis’. The great-nephew thus readily declares that he has ‘personally learnt the bitter lessons of history’ and ‘personally he always predicted that the calculator and the dishwasher would ultimately do away with Althusser and Foucault’. He very much appreciates the notion that ‘the learning that falls within the purview of the State, as the brain or mind of society, will become more and more outdated with the increasing strength of the opposing principle, according to which society exists and progresses only if the messages circulating within it are rich in information and easy to decode. The ideology of communicational “transparency”, which goes hand in hand with the commercialization of knowledge, will begin to perceive the State as a factor of opacity and “noise”.’¹⁷

With the arrival of the postmodern philistine—the Cyber-Gideon¹⁸—‘civil society’ can celebrate; it can finally parade itself shamelessly, showing off its egoism and its cowardice, it can trash Hegel’s critiques, shatter politics into ‘microdecisions’, and feast in celebration of its wedding with the market, that formidable machine of festive exclusion within which hundreds of thousands of destinies can be ground out with a minimum of ‘noise’. An ally of the Penates, the Hidden God has

managed to carve up Athena and package her up into billions of 'free wills'.¹⁹

Narrow and dislocate the spirit of the people to make them obey—Hobbes and Pareto saw this clearly: miniaturization is indeed the key to the efficiency of the market and the stability of the fixed point. Why not go further? Why not sharpen the offensive of thermocracy yet more by inventing a microphysics of obedience, a neurocracy that would permit one to close in on the absolute zero of politics, passing from a thermo-civil pax to a cyber-civil pax?

After all, the tertiary society had shown the way by striving to replace 'class struggle' with competition between 'pressure groups'. But in order to reach absolute zero it is necessary to discover statistico-juridical units finer still than the backwaters of freedom reserved for Robinsons. A science, the general theory of networks and systems—cybernetics—will offer its services, permitting audacious 'social engineers' to push back the frontiers of methodological individualism—to conceive scenarios that, not too long ago, no average man would have dared dream of: to transform thermocracy into neurocracy, to succeed in fabricating behaviours that will guarantee a watertight barrier against political intelligence. Thus 'functions of regulation, and therefore of reproduction, are being and will be further withdrawn from administrators and entrusted to machines. Increasingly, the central question is becoming who will have access to the information these machines must have in storage to guarantee that the right decisions are made. Access to data is, and will continue to be, the prerogative of experts of all stripes. The ruling class is and will continue to be the class of decision makers.'²⁰

By proposing in the 40s a behavioural method of study valid for 'all natural, psychological and social phenomena' that would allow one to conceive of a society without conflict and thus able to do without politics, the mathematician Norbert Wiener had opened up a promising path.²¹

Professor Wiener's Behavioural Method allows one finally to hope for a cyber-civil pax²² worthy of the technical exploits of our modernity: the rational ferocity of panelist Robinsons could finally give way to a captivating 'rational anarchy', a conviviality of campus neighbours always on hand to lend mowers, watermelons, and above all, 'information'.

For, as one will have guessed, it is communication that is the queen of Wiener's 'Great Planetary Campus', jealously watching over the neuronal hygiene of the new thermo-civil society's emitter-receiver-Robinsons: the latter may exchange messages, decant and perfuse the 'informational', but must submit to a very strict discipline of fluidity,

transparency and clarity.

For Professor Wiener, all viscosity, all ambiguity, emanates from the diabolical, from a 'social entropy' that is the analogue of 'background noise', from the 'heat-death of the universe'. Wiener is convinced that the Universe is a world rushing toward its death. 'In a very real sense', he writes, 'we are shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet [...] We shall go down, but let it be in a manner to which we may look forward as worthy of our dignity.'²³

What's more, according to Wiener, two devils lead the dance: the Devil of imperfection, linked to the 'natural entropy' of the universe, which secretes a 'background noise' according to known physical laws; and another even more terrible devil, Devil number two, the devil of the disorder and confusion of human societies, of the 'background noise' fomented by men wilfully to stir up language and 'to subvert its meaning'.²⁴ Their plots pervert language, spoiling the serene enjoyment of 'true' communication. On the Great Campus, scientists—mathematicians in particular—are the privileged instruments of civil-cybernetic peace, charged with purifying language of its ambiguities, just as the Hidden God seeks to see off the viscosities of the market. In this way one might resist Devil number two, 'at least locally', and assure the comfort (albeit a precarious comfort, on 'a doomed planet') of billions of little telegraphers exchanging perfectly clear messages, persuaded finally to live the great adventure of rational anarchy, the adventure of self-regulating global conviviality. Thus replete, our little telegraphers simply forget that they are no more than citizen-thermostats, more or less 'complex' organic units decked out with human rights and capable of 'feeding back on the environment'.

With the Citizen-Thermostat, Pareto's project—to utilise the raw materials furnished by the impulsive and mobile masses to manufacture politico-economic equilibrium fodder—has finally found its seven-league boots. One might speak of a Triple Alliance, political, economic and cybernetic, capable of 'self-organizing' the explosive potentials of great human masses and of conjugating the benefits of three prototypes of postmodernity:

—*homo economicus*—the medusa-citizen—the egoistic and rational Robinson, an atom of service and consumption;

—*the 'average man'*—the panelist-citizen—the hero of Keynes's beauty pageants, relentlessly taking the 'risk' of guessing what the average opinion will be, and jubilant at the idea of riding all the future Gaussian bell curves.²⁵

—*homo communicans*—the citizen-thermostat—transparent creature of tertiary services, billiard-ball-inhabitant of a society free of both 'archaic' social conflict and confrontation, pleased with himself for

existing only as a cybernetic tapeworm perfused with inputs and spewing outputs.

It is no exaggeration to speak of a cybernetic warden in relation to the thermostat-citizen who knows that ‘communication is the cement of society’ and that ‘those who have made the clear maintenance of the channels of communication their business are those who have most to do with the continued existence or the fall of our civilization’. Worry not! The warden takes very seriously his role as thermostat: that of analysing the external temperature of the environment (the inputs of ‘opinion’) and possibly producing ‘feedback’ by sending outputs designed to reestablish equilibrium, to make the Great Campus (what tradition agrees today in calling the ‘human species’) optimally productive. Resplendent in the Sunday best of human rights and free will, our tapeworm-citizens flatter themselves with having driven out ‘barbarism’, with having finally attained the ideal of the weak, the slave morality of which Nietzsche says that it ‘first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all,—its action is basically a reaction’.²⁶

NOTES

- [1.](#) J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 50.
- [2.](#) Economics’ version of elementary differential calculus.
- [3.](#) Buchanan-Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent*, chapters 2, 3 and 4.
- [4.](#) See Glossary.
- [5.](#) See chapter 9 on the Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons.
- [6.](#) All of this naturally brings us back to chaos, which is able to deliver us from the singular and the baroque as if by magic.
- [7.](#) See Glossary.
- [8.](#) Buchanan, *Limits of Liberty*, 18.
- [9.](#) See chapter 2, note 6.
- [10.](#) See, in particular, V. Pareto, *Treatise on General Sociology*, tr. A. Bongiorno and A. Livingston (New York: Dover, 1963), §2079, §2419, §2073.

[11.](#) See C.B. Macpherson's detailed exposition: *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); *Democratic Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[12.](#) Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 79.

[13.](#) D. Robertson, 'What does the Economist Economize?', in *Economic Commentaries* (London: Staples Press, 1956), 154.

[14.](#) T. Jefferson, *Kentucky Resolutions of 1798*.

[15.](#) See G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 248–9 on possessive individualism.

[16.](#) [*Topaze*—the eponymous schoolteacher of Marcel Pagnol's play (and later, film) who gradually learns how to get on in life by abandoning his naive moral scruples—trans.]

[17.](#) J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, tr. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984), 5. For a critique of postmodernity, see the glossary, and also H. Meschonnic, *Modernity, modernité* (Paris: Verdier, 1988) and F. Guattari, *La Quinzaine littéraire* (February 1986), 21.

[18.](#) See chapter 9.

[19.](#) On all of these questions, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §257, §258, §272.

[20.](#) Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 14.

[21.](#) On all of these questions, see N. Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Houghton Mifflin: 1954).

[22.](#) It must be emphasised that Norbert Wiener, a convinced progressivist, did indeed foresee the dangers of a cybermercantile order.

[23.](#) Wiener, *Cybernetics and Society*, 40.

[24.](#) *Ibid.*, 93

[25.](#) J.M. Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1964), 156:

Or, to change the metaphor slightly, professional investment may be likened to those newspaper competitions in which the competitors have to pick out the six prettiest faces from a hundred photographs, the prize being awarded to the

competitor whose choice most nearly corresponds to the average preferences of the competitors as a whole; so that each competitor has to pick, not those faces which he himself finds prettiest, but those which he thinks likeliest to catch the fancy of the other competitors, all of whom are looking at the problem from the same point of view. It is not a case of choosing those which, to the best of one's judgment, are really the prettiest, nor even those which average opinion genuinely thinks the prettiest. We have reached the third degree where we devote our intelligences to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be. And there are some, I believe, who practise the fourth, fifth, and higher degrees.

[26](#). F. Nietzsche, 'On The Genealogy of Morality', in *On The Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, tr. C. Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20.

6. Market Democracy will be Fluid or will not be at all: Fluid Nomads and Viscous Losers

Young nomads, we love you! Be yet more modern, more mobile, more fluid, if you don't want to end up like your ancestors in the muddy fields of Verdun. The Great Market is your draft board! Be light, anonymous, precarious like drops of water or soap bubbles: this is true equality, that of the Great Casino of life! If you're not fluid, you will very quickly become losers. You will not be admitted into the Great Global SuperBoom of the Great Market... Be absolutely modern (like Rimbaud), be a nomad, be fluid—or check out, like a viscous loser!

The cybermercantile knows what he's doing, no doubt about it! Thus the 'energetic youth' is supposed to incarnate modernity and to set an example for 'losers' and 'rigid conservatives' who show little enthusiasm for this fluidity which, curiously, is invariably decreed from on high by those teflon-coated decision-makers always in fleeting transit from one directorial appointment to another.

Fluidity: here we put our finger on the essence of the stability of market democracies. This fluidity can only be implemented through a social chemistry capable of exerting a permanent pressure that is present everywhere and nowhere, a kind of obstinate policeman intent on following each Robinson-particle like his shadow.

In fact this policeman—peaceable, silent, reliable, and above all free of charge—had always been nearby, ready to hand: it was hunger! Someone just needed to realise it...and numerous were the conservatives who, like Bentham during the Industrial Revolution,¹ would marvel at how Nature galloped back into the social and took responsibility for producing just what the labour market of the time demanded: a great mass of people rendered submissive and stupefied by hunger! Here we can appreciate the superiority and 'modernity' of Bentham's system: it consists in replacing a costly and in any case necessarily incomplete and discontinuous political coercion with a permanent natural sanction.

The 'economic', in the form of this most rudimentary and most brutal necessity, thus offers itself as a prosthesis for political stability, a winning substitute for the violence of the Prince, which may induce fear with its tens of millions of swords but sooner or later ends up

exciting hatred: 'So what's going on in that head that sends us our orders...One day it'll end up getting sliced off'. Such are the limits of the classic Sovereign, condemned to intimidate and gesticulate, with a power which, of course, is neither self-regulating nor free....

The sudden emergence in the seventeenth century of what must indeed be called a hydraulic democracy—that of the Dutch state—as opposed to Karl Wittfogel's famous hydraulic despotisms,² marks the wholesale entry into modernity, and sees the solar fury of the central sovereign replaced by the oppressive power of fluidity: the Principle of Generalised Fluidity was born. This principle replaces the Prince—who strikes, and thus belongs to a social mechanics of impact that externally fashions society—with a social chemistry that operates internally, through dissolutions, catalyses and fermentations that implacably inundate the bulkheads that supposedly divided off the spheres of politics, economics, and the social.³

The recent history of industrial technics illustrates its power very well, as François Vatin has clearly shown.⁴ This fluidity is not that of nature, but that of the productive process itself, swiftly transmitted into economics and finance. Mechanical-type production, with its stock shortages, its production queues, and its orders handicapped by discontinuities, had to bow out in the face of the elegant fluidity of networked production which, among its other advantages, eliminated the worrying problem of idle workers always on the lookout for 'downtime'.

Already Taylor, that famous captain of industry, had sought to remedy this detrimental indolence by experimenting with the Principle of Fluidity: it was a matter of fluidifying a stout pig-iron handler by optimizing him as a beast of burden—an 'ox', according to Taylor's apt expression—and thus attaining previously impossible rates of return in the mechanical work of foundries.⁵

But let us quit the steel industry and its Robinson-particles who, even when transformed into oxen, still look forward to the end of the working day, for the chemical industries, which belong by vocation to the outposts of fluidity. In fact, Marx saw a model of political patience for the revolutionary in everything that is fabricated in vats, with their fermentations and their macerations, certainly a little repugnant for the non-specialist, but rich with the promise of generous yields of grands crus, fine cheeses...and revolutions!

With the fluidities of chemistry, technics becomes patient, and thus acts as a catalyst for the economic and social fluidities that take up where it leaves off. Vatin's book provides a fine analysis of how nineteenth-century petrol refineries inspired a whole social alchemy: the old-fashioned vulgarity of the hammer that hits things, and whose

handle smells of sweat and elbow-grease, is replaced by the festive clicking of buttons.

These buttons are the key nodes in an empire which, with its network of pumps, filters, vats and basins, incarnates the Principle of Fluidity, all the way from oil deposit to gas station.

If the Principle of Fluidity is triumphant in chemistry, it is not so much because of the nature of the raw materials as by virtue of the productive process itself, whose vocation, in striving toward the horizon of fluidity, is financial volatility.

In approaching this horizon, the ideal would be a factory without matter and...without workers! This is the photonic image of the world dreamt of by the financier-speculator, a world where everything is absolutely in motion but without anything actually moving, with its startlingly elegant perfect competition, subtracted from the stench of actual competition so as to try and forget what it really is: a gangster elegance, which, with a snap of its fingers, can make a 'problem' disappear.

Woe betide anyone who is enough of a loser to be proud of working with his hands! To be an aristocrat of the volatile is first of all to scorn he who is less volatile than oneself, he who smells of sweat and the 'productive', and has few buttons under his control. The more volatile a manufacturing process, the more divisions open up between those who govern the flows, staying close to the controls—the 'plant supervisors' within—and the 'roundsmen' outside, the nomad subcontractors unfortunate enough still to possess hands. There is no gradual continuum; to fluidify basically means to render more conformist, to compartmentalise and divide by separating the steersmen from the plebs, the latter kept firmly on the periphery, the former at the heart of the action:

Behind the machine, the maintenance of the machine. Behind the tanks, the cleaning of tanks. Behind the thermal cracking control-unit, the whole petrochemical site pullulating with its division of works, management, temps, the men who do the packing, the handling, the transport, the servicing, the major repairs, the cutting and scraping of pipes. Behind the factory, the subcontractors' cabins. Behind the large company, the patchwork of small companies. Behind the conceded union rights and the labyrinth of equality commissions, the army of the rights-less and the cosh, the private militia, the killer. Behind the facade of Shell, the unregistered floating slums of Liberia and their starving seamen setting sail for Hong Kong and Singapore.⁶

With a sort of natural instinct, petrochemistry chose to follow an absurd course: claiming to close every gap between real fluidity and the volatility we have defined as the horizon of all fluidities. From the point

of view of this horizon, everything is pathetically old-fashioned—matter, production.... Every industry and all production are ‘has-beens’: capital is no longer a factor of production, it is production that is a mere factor of capital.

Everything that subordinates itself to a horizon has but one dream: to become as one with it—and civil society is no exception to the rule! It exhausts itself in efforts as vain as those of an obese man training for the Olympics, or those of an ignorant rocketship pilot trying to overtake the speed of light. It unhesitatingly seeks the advice of a whole cohort of showmen-quacks, the new classics of modernity: socio-politologists, mediators, etc.

‘Help me to transform myself into a perfect great alembic and into a perfect great centrifuge—perfect like all these financial markets that taunt me and which, unlike me, do not have mouths to feed, to care for and to educate.’

Everyone agrees on the remedy. ‘Above all, modernity is a diet: keep on slimming down! Tell your poor that they are not exploited but are losers, klutzes, and that some civil societies are far less lenient...bird societies, for example: The highest branches are reserved for the strongest, who shit as they wish upon occupants of lower branches. Imagine those at the bottom who harvest the whole lot! There is even a bit of social mobility: some individuals on the second branch manage to hoist themselves up to the first, and so on. Quite a lesson for this bunch of klutzes!’

NOTES

[1.](#) On these questions, see K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*. The modern form of this transformation is of course the need for ‘flexibility’ of work.

[2.](#) Hydraulic despotisms play a preponderant role in the foundational work of Karl Wittfogel: *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New York: Random House, 1988).

[3.](#) On the opposition between chemism and mechanism, see G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, tr. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, Press, 1989), 705–34 (Vol. II, section two [Objectivity], chapters 1 and 2).

[4.](#) F. Vatin, *La Fluidité industrielle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1987), especially part 2.

[5.](#) *Ibid.*, 43–70.

[6.](#) R. Linhart, ‘Les archipels du capital’, *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 1978.

7. Robinsons on Wheels and Petronomads

Petrol is our life.

A FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF FRANCE

We others, Western drivers...

TV PRESENTER DURING THE GULF WAR

Contrary to received ideas, air quality has noticeably improved in the last few years.

JACQUES CALVER, CHAIRMAN OF PSA PEUGEOT-CITROËN

Circulation is the state.

A FORMER MAYOR OF PARIS

Move or die! The most audacious socio-politologists have even dared to compare the Great Alembic of the tertiary service society to an immense highway. But above all it is the inverse that is the case: no highway, no Great Alembic!

For it takes a great deal of room, of sacrifice, of energy, a great deal of mutilation and many corpses, in order for the 'average man' to become auto-mobile and to take himself for a nomad. This is why all administrations that claim to be faithful to the voice of modernity—from the Pompidou administration that sought to 'adapt the city to the car' to the Mitterrand administration, so fond of highways and trucking—have always striven to be the vestal zealots of the car, of the average man on wheels who supposedly incarnates the 'dynamism' of civil society. Thus every highway is first of all a social highway, and what we must call the petronomadism of the car often turns into a Pétainism on wheels: the car is first of all work, family, and stupidity, on rubber tyres.

Benevolence toward petronomadism is a point that all conservatisms have in common, from the burlesque and genteel—the conservatism of a former mayor of Paris, with his famous declaration 'Circulation is the state'—to the more perfidious form, that of Reverend Moon, leader of the Unification Church, who claims with his project of transcontinental tunnels and highways to realise one of the oldest dreams of humanity: to drive one's family or buddies from London to Tokyo without ever encountering a red light! It would be unjust not to salute in passing the most pigheaded form, that of the Swiss Automobilist Party....¹ Poor Victor Hugo, who was already worried about the proliferation of Alpine cretins—they have now metamorphosed into cretins on wheels!

We must fear the worst: imagine our millions of little rhinoceroses in a jam in one of Rev. Moon's massive pipes! They bawl their 'freedom' loudly and, from near quarters, have a somewhat fractious air in their sheet metal enclosures; but seen from the summit of the 'great alembic', they form a perfectly docile mass, demanding only one thing: to drive freely.

One cannot emphasise enough just how crucial was the mass domestication of the car, ensuring the transition from what might be called 'traditional solidarities' to the unprecedented unleashing of modern individualism. What does it matter if the car kills, pollutes and often makes people into total jerks, its proliferation destroying every urban space worthy of the name, when what is at stake is to ensure the domestication of gigantic human masses, the forging of thousands of psychologies of average men on wheels, 'highway mentalities', aping day and night the fluidities and competition of the Great Market, etching it into the landscape...?

No cars, no market democracy! No life size mock-up that enables us to live the market, a familiar object encountered on every street corner, granting the dearest wish of the mercantile empiricist: to fabricate a panoply of mental bubbles and clichés to endow the Great Market with a folklore just as popular as that of Newton's laws of attraction.

This is why a guard dog of the cybermercantile order as talented as Paul Yonnet can celebrate the fact that 'the driver appropriates for his personal use a part of public space, which he occupies, cordons off and arranges, which he takes care of, dusts and cleans, where he makes his niche and which protects him from the outside, a public space that he privatises and makes into his interior'.²

A 'democratic equality' between average men on wheels, then. Of course there are more or less luxurious, more or less fast cars, but this vanity only leads to a healthy aggression: 'Who's this asshole crawling down the highway like a bum? Who's this nut overtaking me in his mafia-chief limo?'

Everyone will be equal...above all in the traffic jam, one of the rare moments of 'solidarity' between drivers. If the highway seems cruelly to underline the disparities between 'average men'—by way of the speed and above all the power at their disposal—the traffic jam revives the 'democratic vocation' of the car...by gratifying everyone with zero speed! The 'modest' driver can finally say with relish: 'Check out that Rolls. It's jammed like all the others. So there is some justice after all! Everyone has a nose, everyone has arms, everyone has to eat and piss! Everyone croaks it in the end...even the shithead in the Rolls!'

Thus the traffic jam functions like a kind of equalizer, or more precisely, a stripping bare as pitiless as that of a medical board. This is

the famous ‘solidarity’ of average men on wheels...always at its height when the wheels are no longer of any use, when they are reduced to what they are: units of distress. Gruelling competition when ‘things are moving’, ‘democratic equality’ in impotence when things are ‘jammed up’. Paul Yonnet is most decidedly correct: petronomadism is indeed the best apprenticeship to the manners of our market democracies!

This is why flawless adhesion to this petronomadism is necessary, just like the discipline demanded in former times of the good soldier. Any somewhat barbed critique of the average man on wheels is sacrilege, nothing but a delirious outburst on the part of those left intellectuals who took the triumph of mass individualism so badly.

As soon as one really looks into critiques of the car, one discovers—in the name of the Supreme Being—a calling into question of automobility, an apologia for collective constraints—in short, a full frontal attack (and not even as implicit as that) on democracy.

The worshippers of the Supreme Being invoke highway hecatombs, the cost in human lives, the financial cost of road accidents. Can’t they see that these resistances and these hecatombs obey a logic more fundamental than that attached to the preservation of one’s own life? For here there is a strategic maintenance of a mobile site of privacy outside of the expectation of collective decisions and manipulations, the preservation of a maximal autonomy in individual decisions, every attack on the latter being understood as an indication of other attacks to come, a sign heralding the threat of a domino effect on the scale of society as a whole.³

There is even a threshold of tolerance for slowness beyond which a society can no longer be called democratic: ‘A society obliging personal cars not to go faster than 20 km/h, as dreamt of by Ivan Illich, would very probably lower the risk of death. But it would most certainly no longer be a democracy.’⁴

NOTES

¹. This ultraconservative party obtained between 5–10% of votes during the 90s.

². P. Yonnet, *Jeux, Modes et Masses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 279.

³. *Ibid.*, 289. Emphasis ours, except for ‘automobility’.

⁴. *Ibid.*

8. When Good Sense Turns Nasty: The Fordism of Hate and the Resentment Industry

My drug is the Family.

AN EX-MINISTER

Drugs are Evil. They must be prohibited.

AN ANTI-DRUGS 'TSAR'

To drive and hustle for market democracy, to incarnate with virility what certain imbeciles call the 'dynamism of civil society', to fabricate hundreds of millions of rhinoceros psychologies and reservoirs of the imaginary for the pack leaders of mass individualism—all of this is beguiling, but still leaves much to be desired: only exceptionally do Robinsons on wheels manage to emerge as a political will. For a political force never emerges from mere aggregates of bad tempers or from the states of mind of mass individualism. The crowds must be rallied to just causes, as they rallied in former days to the panache of the Prince; some passion must be injected into the twinning of the Invisible Hand and the Black Box.¹

But, as we shall see, the Prince's panache has been replaced by the *bête noire*. It is to Hearst's merit that he was the first to detect the full potential of a 'popular press' and—by inventing the technology of 'media lynching'—to reinvigorate the ritual of the scapegoat. The popular press enables the capturing in one bloc of hatred of all the energy of fermentation steaming out of the tens of millions of units of envy whose interaction ensures the consistency of market democracies, as Jefferson saw.² To metamorphose socio-democratic putrefaction into a political explosion: such is the miracle of Hearst, who comes into his own in assuring a complement for the apathy following the prerevolutionary agitation that marked the end of the war of independence.

For there is a recurrent ambiguity in American populism³ which is skilfully turned to profit by a popular press who harbour a kind of visceral hatred toward the federal state, for better or worse: for better, as we saw twenty years ago with the resistance to the Vietnam War; and for worse, as with the bellicose individualism of the cowboy. Hearst realized that it would be a winning formula to combine the superstition

of the hick, the hateful scheming of the grocer, and the whole imaginary of 'great open spaces' (previously cleansed of their indigenous peoples with great delicacy, as we know!). He also understood that market democracy, which demands a complete identification of political microdecisions with economic microdecisions, engenders apathy,⁴ which is certainly salutary for an ultraconservative, but does not function as a figure around which to assemble political wills capable of embracing a multitude and thereby facing off the contagious fraternity of revolutions.

Envy is fierce, but in a certain sense remains too rational and calculating. It is certainly capable of introducing an effective mutual vigilance—the rivalry of panelist-consumers is beyond parody—but it can never decide anything whatsoever by itself. To the murky self-regulation of the cloaca of envy, its highly putrescible but sickly and entirely invertebrate social ingredients, Hearst seeks to oppose all the healthiness and pugnacity of hatred, always impatient to act and to manifest its own petulance. Hate gets you fired up: at every instant something must be 'sparked off' somewhere so that tens of millions of average men can believe that they know 'true joy': the joy of decision, of release, a sense of completeness. This is why hate and its clients spend their time seeking to eradicate the 'bêtes noires' they themselves have fabricated.

The pugnacious nature of fabricated mental images—the basis of what we might well call Hearst's Fordism of hate—their capacity to coagulate of themselves, bringing about high degrees of hysteria comparable to the effects of panic, could not but come to the notice of the 'social engineers' who, some years later, would define the principles of what Chomsky calls the 'manufacture of consent'.⁵ For the founding members of American Public Relations Industry, the vocation of the 'articulate intelligentsia'—what we would today call the politico-media class—was to become a consensual elite by diffusing 'necessary illusion' throughout the masses in order to correct the stupidity of generic man.

In just a few years, it accomplished this *tour de force*: giving a collective identity to a mass of consumer-contractors, by nature little inclined to solidarity and as immovable as a barge in regard to its prejudices. Yet it still seemed fragile, oscillating between the securitarian and the humanitarian and always threatened by implosion or disintegration. The consensual elite grasped that this fragility might, through the spokesman of the average man, be transformed into a prodigious force of coagulation. This is the whole secret of the famous silent majority: generations and enemies come and go, but the silent majorities remain, faithful reservoirs of conservatism, always ready to be mobilized for a just cause.

The end of the twentieth century has perhaps rendered industrial Fordism obsolete, but the 'Fordism of hate' has had no problem in adapting to the cybermercantile order that increasingly carries the day: narcoconsensus, 'reaganmania', petroconsensus (during the Gulf War) and, more recently, antipaedophile hysteria. We shall limit ourselves to the case of narcoconsensus—a particularly edifying example—and try to understand through what kind of magic spell hemp, whose cultivation had been greatly encouraged (if not enforced!) was able over the course of a few years to become the accursed 'Mexican grain' that 'makes negros insolent' and bewitches respectable white women, making them stumble, intoxicated with jazz, into the arms of minstrels.⁶

By positing the sinister equation negros = chicanos = Jazz = marijuana, Hearst discovers that one can amplify the well known effect of the scapegoat by placing 'bêtes noires' in series, like electrical batteries, the sign = here possessing the power to make absolutely anyone detest absolutely anything at all. Hate can gnaw away at everything, multiplying through slippage.... Let's detail this chain reaction more explicitly. When I write jazz=marijuana, I am not simply juxtaposing two terms, I am positing an equivalence that gives rise to a proof-effect: 'As you can see, jazz is unhealthy since certain people listen to it while smoking that accursed herb'; and, reciprocally, 'as you can see, this plant is far from innocent, since it helps one listen to jazz...'. Naturally, the whole 'proof' is based on a kind of guilt by association accentuated by the 'reciprocally'—such is the whole mischievous miracle of cannibal metaphors....

We ought to emphasise that the 1937 laws against marijuana follow very closely the theoretical work of the 'engineers of consent' of American Public Relations and that, since then, the tsunamis of the Moral Order that periodically overcome the us—and, more recently, France—are always orchestrated in terms of 'just causes', which accompany periods of major capitalist 'restructuring'.

From the point of view of the cybermercantile order, just causes offer many advantages: a generic cretinization, swift and accompanied by a particularly stable working capital—four out of five Americans approved of the loyalty oaths imposed by McCarthy in the 50s, and the same proportion agreed with the famous drug-control urine tests.

But a price must be paid for accepting the degradation of political debate into a duel of superstitious allegories! It is in this optic that we should understand the delirium of so-called 'zero tolerance' politics. It is a question of detecting within a plant the very essence of the demoniac—that is to say, the infinite capacity to metamorphose, to collude with infamous music and deviancy, to orchestrate a carnival of vice through the most contradictory solicitations. It is the same plant that would by

turns be accused of 'inciting more violence than any other drug in the history of humanity' and of being allied with the Reds in plunging American soldiers into a state of blissful stupor.⁷

To such a perfidious enemy, it becomes urgent to oppose a figure that conjugates the virtues of the sacred and those of the military. So there should be no delay in introducing a tsar⁸ into a democratic country. It requires all the divine authority of a tsar (or, in France, a tsarina) to declare that marijuana makes one 'homosexual and hiv positive' or to have the audacity to rejoice in the dangers threatening those who insist on smoking an herb laced with pesticides; to recommend that we 'send our stoner neighbour to prison to do him a favour'; and above all, to claim scientific authority on the basis of long-discredited botched experiments.

There will even be an attempt to try to reverse the malefic powers of the plant by bringing them into the service of good. This was the magic trick of the celebrated 'White Badge' campaign launched in France in the late eighties, with its slogans such as 'My drug is sport!', 'My drug is work!' (The campaign even requisitioned for the occasion the most viscerally consensual and charming spokespersons, notably tv talk show host Anne Sinclair who, even today, can still conjugate the tranquil force of a Valkyrie of common sense and the postmodern spirituality of the Turbo-Bécassines.)⁹

Naturally, the result was disastrous: the effects of a fascination with the enemy were multiplied tenfold by designating it as the universal referent of good and evil. And the minimal state—the nightwatchman of the 80s—took advantage of it: the securitarian and the humanitarian saturated the panelist-citizen's field of social vision so much more easily than the classic missions of public service.

We often hear talk of 'France's honour' in its refusal to 'resign' itself to the scourge, but, in a question that is just as delicate, the state that does not abdicate is one that refuses the catechism of amalgams and unhesitatingly grasps that political courage here consists in discerning degrees of risk, and that all demonization merely aggravates the problems.

Might the marvellous lode discovered by Hearst and the 'social engineers' someday be exhausted? Let us reassure the concerned reader: the oil deposits will dry up long before the great sump of consensus! One 'social issue' will always succeed another, just as one 'scourge of society' will always succeed another.... Hate and cowardice will never go hungry. This is confirmed for us every day. One Just Cause always takes up the baton from another Just Cause; thus antidrug hysteria—a bit old-fashioned now—has had to give way to antipaedophile hysteria,

politically a much more plentiful hunting-ground.

But it is still the same apparatus crawling on, with its crocodile tears, its vipers in hand, and its mischievous similes that fabricate amalgams and etceteras like sausages: jazz=drugs=negros already in the 30s, then drugs=immigration=aids, and now, finally, thanks to the paedo-humanitarian zeal of the Transnational Association of Video-Vigilant Mothers: viewer of porno videos = paedophile = violator = murderer = pederast = homosexual = AIDS = ? (at the end of 1997, the sausage-maker with the = sign got

rather carried away: 'If we must pulp Sade to protect children, then I will do so.')

¹⁰ However, the classic populism of industrial societies, which as we have seen is still very much alive, must now deal with a postmodern rival-accomplice, urban populism, with a good claim to be the most caustic and most dynamic form of possessive mass individualism.

NOTES

[1.](#) See chapter 5.

[2.](#) See above, chapter 5.

[3.](#) On American Populism, see G. McKenna, *American Populism* (New York: Putnam, 1974) and L. Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[4.](#) On political apathy, see S. M. Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), 14–16, as well as Macpherson's commentaries in *Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*.

[5.](#) On the question of the 'manufacture of consent' and American Public Relations, see N. Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), and E. S. Hermann and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

See also E. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: H. Liveright, 1928) and *The Engineering of Consent* (Norman, OH: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955); R. Escarpit, *Information et pratique politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), and B. Moyers's interview with Chomsky in *A World of Ideas* (New York: Doubleday, 1989). The extracts cited are from Chomsky.

[6.](#) On narco-consensus, see A. Hoffmann, *Steal This Urine Test* (London: Penguin, 1987). Abbie Hoffmann describes very well the use of conformism to justify any licensing whatsoever. See also I. Stengers, O. Ralet, *Drogues: le défi hollandais* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1991) and F. Caballero, *Droit de la drogue* (Paris: Dalloz, 1989)

For a history of cannabis, see J. Herer, *L'Empereur est nu* (Paris: Le Léopard, 1993).

7. The citations are taken from J. Herer's book and from Michka's *Le Cannabis est-il une drogue?* (Geneva: Georg, 1993).

8. The democratic reader will perhaps be surprised at these historical facts: there was indeed an anti-drugs tsar in the US, and a tsarina in France.

9. See following chapter.

10. A female magistrate.

9. The 'Bécassine Memorial Lectures' on Urban Populism

Come on, be positive, guys...be positive!

Quick, be positive 'cos we've gotta be pragmatic.

OVERHEARD CAFÉ CONVERSATION BETWEEN STUDENTS PREPARING FOR THE H.E.C. AT A MAJOR
PARISIAN LYCÉE.

The Bécassines and Gideons¹ of the preindustrial and industrial eras, bogged down in a kind of sincere, earthy idiocy, their horizons limited by the clock tower or the suburban bistro, seem to be opposed on all counts to the whole new age, connected, volatile population that is so pleased with itself for being able to cackle electronically from London to Tokyo or Paris to Honolulu. Out of a concern for precision, we exhibit two picturesque prototypes, Bécassine Turbo-Diesel and Gideon Cyber-Plus (or, for short, Turbo-Bécassine and Cyber-Gideon, or even Neo-Bécassine and Neo-Gideon), examples of this personalised and laid back yuppie cynicism that calls for 'each to his own'—an expression as indispensable to the 'vital creative' health of 'civil society' and to the elimination of its 'social viscosities' as the bottle of mineral water that never leaves our Neo-Bécassine's hand and allows her 'to live the city better'.

The proliferation of Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons, and the concomitant emergence of a certain mass snobbery, are signs that do not deceive: these are the criteria of entry into the tertiary service society, criteria almost as reliable as those discontinuities in flora or fauna that indicate a crossing into a different climatic zone. Well before the spectacular sprouting of yuppie cynicism, intensified tenfold by the greenhousing of the 80s Mitterrand administration, perspicacious observers had recognized in certain cultural caprices of the time—middle class nomadism, nouvelle philosophie, etc.—the prototype of mass products that would be demanded by Neo-Bécassines in the following decade.

To follow the course of each generation of Bécassines is in fact most edifying. Let's begin with the grandmother, Bécassine Gribouille,² whose parents had just emerged out of a society—the primary-rural society—for which the fabrication of 2700 calories per day was still an effort.³ Bécassine Turbo-Diesel observes fondly how much care her grandmother puts into the confection of quince jam, or locally-sourced rillettes. She can even forgive the old lady's inability to think in real

time, and her astonished alarm when it's Singapore at the other end of the line.

Our Turbo-Bécassine is infinitely more infuriated by her mother, Bécassine Pétroleuse,⁴ one of whose impudent habits is that of falling asleep reading the books one has recommended to her: 'Oh Ma, you're too much...you should be ashamed! Falling asleep reading Francis Fukuyama and Alain Touraine! The other night, you even started snoring while reading Alain Minc.... Still, you must know that these authors you can't tell apart from your sleeping pills are read and reread by my generation, which is making its difference heard. Y'know, like, yours got ripped off...but you keep on running away from the reality of the market economy, and you see democracy about as clearsightedly as a blinkered ass.... Anyway, a certain Nobel Prize winner, one who smoked joints in his youth just like you, has said over and over again that the market is libertarian utopia finally become real and palpable....The scientific age has finally arrived.... It's the coming of age of politics. Yeah, y'know, like, what counts is social self-regulation.... Why bother since nature has done the work for us?.... Come on, Ma, you're wasting your life away turning your nose up at everything.... Yeah, y'know, like, you've even lost your generation's sense of the festive!'

The 'y'know, like' is one of the rare tics common to two generations of Bécassines. For Pétroleuse, it was a way of demarcating herself from the bourgeois who decides, the master who announces and unhesitatingly makes things explicit, from all that peremptory virility that is able to dismiss any hint of disagreement, making it seem nothing but unseemly, confused stammering. This stammering found a keen advocate in Bécassine Pétroleuse, in the form of a convivial stammering —like juvenile acne or a first moustache, a characteristically adolescent way of putting oneself forward through one's very timidity, building up one's supposed audacity by hiding gaffes in gracious awkwardness or, in the case of obvious failure, folding without any great loss, with one of those prepubescent poses of an almost thirty-year-old troubled teenager whose plight discourages any inclination to chastise them.

Very different is the 'y'know, like' of the Diesel-Bécassines' age bracket. (One might certainly speak of the generation of Pétroleuse-Bécassines, but it would be pushing things to speak of it as an 'age bracket'.) The cyber-turbo age bracket has found out how to transform the 'y'know, like' into a demi-mondaine strategy of deliberate gaucherie, aiming thereby to prudently manage the capital of elegant timidity and fearful vanity that are the supposed privileges of the adolescent. It took more than fifteen years to ensure the complete metamorphosis of the prepubescent 'y'know, like' of the Pétroleuses into the technico-

commercial 'y'know, like' of the Turbo-Bécassines and the Cyber-Gideons—very often associated with the spooling off of a resumé, and thus split between humility and sugared cynicism. However pathetic it might be, the contemporary 'y'know, like', at once insolently adolescent and pitifully adult, is now a part of the everyday equipment of what certain sociologists call 'adulescents'.

When she was still a young girl, Diesel Bécassine already dreamt of being chosen as a panelist-adulescent for *biba* magazine, an infallible foothold to optimise a cyber-political career, making the intrigues of the most high flying chicks of the industrial era look like mere provincial posturing. She is now a ripe young woman, 'singular and cosmopolitan', capable of uttering a 'y'know, like' whose impassioned indecision never fails to win the day: from the fabulous contract for waste incinerators signed with a couple of 'dragons' to some exclusive urban furnishings from Valparaiso.

'Anyway yeah y'know, like...at the end of the day, we're the New Hanse, the France that counts...we're the most animal, most festive fringe of contemporary adulescence. We're urban monsters, the hope for tomorrow. We voted 'yes' to Maastricht so as to look Europe right in the eyes...well beyond the Caucuses! Because we are already set for the ludic cyber-melting-pot of money, the city and democracy, and don't waste our time preferring the France that's losing over the France that's winning....'

The triumph of this 'New Hanse' and its voracious elegance, what's more, has been saluted enthusiastically by a socio-politist who sees in it the rout of the Gribouilles and the Pétroleuses. At the risk of boring the reader, we ought to cite at length here what has become a manifesto for Neo-Bécassines and Neo-Gideons the world over.⁵

For the first time, recomposition has the upper hand over decomposition. This is true firstly in terms of the sociological dimension of the vote [on the Maastricht referendum]. For the first time since the establishing of universal suffrage, a majority has constituted itself without—that is to say against—both workers and the peasantry. This was made possible by the evolution of the social structure: the last census has shown that senior and middle management blocs are the most active demographic force. This is a significant event. On one hand, it means the political defeat of social 'losers', who cease to be the arbiters of the legitimisation of major political currents. [...]

Dynamic, innovative and exporting bosses no longer need to drag along the Bof generation,⁶ who cede more ardently than ever to an average Joe ideology. The intellectuals no longer see any point in continuing to claim to be the natural representatives of the proletariat: the weakening of eschatological grand narratives⁷ has removed their taste for sacrificing themselves for a 'people' whose crisis of existence, moreover, strengthens corporatist inclinations, hardly very compatible with the new

universalisms. [...]

Thus the rich and the cultivated have come together again, for various convergent reasons, in favour of Europe. What market and culture, finance and communication have in common is that they think in terms of networks and organise themselves accordingly—networks on many scales, from the local to the global, none of them exclusive. It is just the opposite that unites 'the France that's losing': an ethnic, geopolitical and socioeconomic contraction down to one sole scale, that of the nation state. [...]

The space of 'yes' is not a territory, but a network. The points that compose it only touch via lines of informational and cultural flow. It is but one element in a vast European Hanse—each point of which can be reached with an hour's flight, and soon a two or three hour ride on the tgv train—an element that is itself connected to other networks, those of the North American and Japanese megalopolises. Many Parisians with a strongly 'central' identity feel closer to New York than to the French 'provinces'. [...]

The victory of urbanity and the alliance of great cities that it supposes will constitute, if it is confirmed, a spectacular rupture. Today, Montpellier and Toulouse are no longer prepared to die for the viticulturalists and maize producers. [...]

Culture, the city, Europe: these are no coincidental encounters. Ultimately each of these terms serves as a metaphor for the other two. Which means that the bearers of cultural capital and urban capital are delivering a message that goes beyond just the European question, heralding new configurations of political discourse and action. They express the emergence of a post-economicist and post-statist conception of the social....

There is a certain jubilation in this manifesto! It is a veritable anthology piece, for there can be few comparably scrupulous compilations of all the tics and trendy platitudes of contemporary anarcho-mercantilism and its urbane narcissism: a fascination for the networks of an 'urbanity' that is to finally reconcile the market and culture, money and communication, with a wink to the 'included', to 'the rich and the cultivated', who can finally enjoy themselves unshackled; and of course to all the 'bearers of cultural and urban capital', to all those elites of the creative finally liberated from the 'social losers' and given over to the fluid and the volatile.

This fascination for fluidity and networks—verging on the pathetic in the Turbo-Bécassines and the Cyber-Gideons—results from a confusion between horizontality and democracy. It persists in laying siege to abandoned fortresses without understanding that the true effectiveness of power is all the more savage for its invisibility, that the horizontal formations outlined by the future global City,⁸ far from 'democratizing', accelerate the concentration of foci of decision making that can act discreetly everywhere and nowhere, without this confrontation being compromised by any of the pomp of overly visible verticalities.

If urban narcissism appeals to the pullulating 'humility' of networks, this is, of course, only so as to dress itself up with the kudos of the medieval combat between marketplace and castle keep, to give a bit of panache to the cybernetic carnival of the city, democracy and money. All Turbo-Bécassines and all Cyber-Gideons love to repeat that the places for this banquet are sold out well in advance, and that since modernity never serves up the same dish twice—even to charmers of their age bracket—it is urgent that one become a 'cosmopolitan' Trans-Bécassine or Trans-Gideon, leaping lightfootedly from city to city in order to firmly mark one's belonging to the 'New Hanse'.

For here lies the whole imposture of the city-slicker narcissism of the Neo-Bécassines and Neo-Gideons: the claim to reestablish all the splendour of that nascent urbanism that, in the Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance, brings together talents, intensifying them in a new spacetime—whereas in fact all our new urbanists do is turn a profit from a placement, a double movement that pulverizes and compactifies spacetime so as to subordinate it to a socio-communicational space governed by the parking lot and the cellphone. From now on the spacetime of the city will be a matter of the econometric management of the stock of skills per cubic metre per second, and of the optimization of the number of encounters of functional individuals, encounters that naturally will be promoted to the postmodern dignity of 'events'.

This is why the elite of the 'New Hanse' delights in swallowing up what it calls second-wave spacetime—that of the industrial society. Bécassine Turbo-Diesel and Gideon Cyber-Plus love to see themselves as 'precocious nihilists', while remaining 'a bit romantic'. They adore prattling about spa towns while commending the fact that Marienbad is finally rid of retired proles and has managed to recover its 'cosmopolitan vocation' as the residence of princes and artists. The low point of cyber-bourgeois ecstasy? An exhausting journey spent searching out the 'coolest' sales, concluded with a 'Yeah, y'know... Descartes, Voltaire, Leibniz, they were just like us. They were cosmopolitans, too....'

We have just put our finger on one of the most nauseating manias of urban populism and its airport cosmopolitanism: scarfing down all the best ofs on the planet while professing a cosmopolitanism that was animated by a passion for humanity and aimed to liberate it from the abjection of necessity. This cosmopolitanism wagered on the capacity of every man and of every people to refuse to allow themselves to be crushed by the order of natural causality, or that (sometimes worse) of the hierarchies required by social control. This wager thus had a universal vocation and refused the tutelage of all particularity; freedom,

to be real, had to march hand in hand with fraternity. Here we are very far indeed from the cosmopolitanism of popular urbanism and its 'universalist' ingredients! In any case, for the great majority of Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons, cosmopolitanism is above all a certain transcontinental way of staying at home and amongst their own by teleporting the predatory elegance that immediately distinguishes the urban monster as a bearer of hope—the mutant of the New Hanse—from the Gribouilles and the Pétroleuses, afflicted with vegetative patience or saurian militancy.

Like other comrades of their age group, Turbo and Cyber Plus seek to be disciples of Master Gary Becker, the Nobel Prize winner in economics known throughout the whole world as the Ignatius de Loyola of the Liberal Counter-Reformation, the pioneer who succeeded in fervently intervening in the spirituality of the market and showing that the latter tolerates no concession:⁹ all human life is but the optimal management, through rational egoism, of survival behaviour in a world subject to scarcity.

Thanks to Master Becker, the End of Politics and the Era of the Brain are within the reach of the turbo-cyber generation, who love to repeat:

'We optimise as others breathe! We are the first generation to so perfectly "internalise"¹⁰ all behaviours as scarcity behaviours. Nothing escapes this, including relationship problems, suicide, altruism, previously confiscated by the intoxicating theories of the Pétroleuses.

'Take relationships, for example.... Doesn't getting married mean coming up against a specific market of goods and services along with its rules, its investments (children) and its competition for that rare resources (iq, sex appeal, education, wealth) that stroke the utility curves in the right direction? Can a couple last if it doesn't succeed in increasing the utility function of both partners?'

Indeed it is an unconditional fidelity to the principle of utility optimization that permitted the Master to prove that the standard Western middle-class couple constitute the most successful form of rationality, from the point of view of cohabitation—living under the same roof maximises encounters at a lesser price—and that of copulation and its expected fruits. By showing, for example, that three standard couples output more sociodomic units than two males and four females, Master Becker has imposed the choice of this standard couple as the incontestable benchmark for the future global middle class.

And the fervent adhesion to the spirituality of the market leads to yet more startling claims. The good news cannot be ignored any longer: the approach of economists is the twin sister of that of sociobiologists, for both allow themselves to be led by the same fundamental principle of

competition for scarce resources! The utility curves so dear to economists can be linked to genetic parameters, implying in a certain sense that natural selection and individual rationality reinforce one another.

NOTES

1. [*Bécassine*: one of the first nationally popular comic book characters in France, Bécassine first appeared in 1905 in Parisian girls' weekly magazine *Le Semaine de Suzette*, and later, as her popularity grew, was the subject of separate albums of long-form *bandes dessinées*, by 1950 amounting to over 25 volumes. The stereotype Bréton housemaid's provincial naivety is the butt of most of the humour in her early adventures, but her penchant for sincere plain-talking later becomes a more positive trait, making her something of a latter-day Candide. In the late 70s Chantal Goya recalled the character to national awareness once again with the hit song 'Bécassine, c'est ma cousine' ('Bécassine, she's my cousin').

Gideon: Anthropomorphised duck, star of an animated children's TV series that aired in France in the late 70s (as *Gédeon*) and later appeared in a dubbed version in the UK (*Gideon*). Gideon is an abnormally long-necked specimen who avoids the fated ugly-duckling narrative by using his wits to solve problems and help his animal pals out of various scrapes.—trans.]

2. [*Gribouille*: a stereotype simpleton or country bumpkin. For example the loyal, well-meaning, but rather stupid boy hero of George Sand's 1851 fairy tale *L'histoire du véritable Gribouille*, youngest child of greedy and dishonest parents whom he wishes only to please but who abuse and reject him. In the first chapter, Gribouille hides in a stream to prevent his new coat being rained on; an episode that is reprised in the Comtesse de Ségur's 1862 tale for children *La Soeur de Gribouille*.—trans.]

3. Nothing gives us to grasp the pathetic optimism of the 50s so much as *Le Grand Espoir du xxe siècle* by Jean Fourastié, the inventor of the 'concept' of 'The Glorious Thirty' and of the three societies: the rural, the industrial and...the tertiary service society, engendering the three Bécassine prototypes. See also A. Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society*, tr. L. Mayhew (New York: Random House, 1971).

4. [The *pétroleuses* were the female revolutionaries (possibly apocryphal) supposedly responsible for putting much of Paris to the torch during the final days of the Paris Commune—by extension, a firebrand, a woman (for example those of the '68 generation) with 'incendiary' ideas—trans.]

5. We refer to the socio-geographer J. Levy, in an article in *Libération*, 'Un nouvel espace légitime', September 25, 1992.

6. [The 'Bof generation' refers in France to those who came of age at the end of

the 1970s, a generation said to be characterised by an inability to find their place in the world, a lack of aspiration, and a general disinterest in politics, in sharp distinction to the 'May '68 generation' who preceded them – trans.]

7. Note the typical postmodern allusion; italics ours.

8. See S. Sassen, *The Global City: London, Tokyo, New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), especially the chapter 'Dispersion and Forms of Centralisation'.

9. Gary Becker, Nobel prize winner in economics (1992), economist from the Chicago School whose dream is to unify the logic of life and the logic of the social, and to take on sociobiology (in particular that of Edward Wilson: *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2000]) on its own terrain, raising the ineptitude of methodological individualism to rare heights. See in particular 'The Economic Approach to Human Behaviour' and 'Altruism, Egoism and Genetic Fitness', *Journal of Economic Literature*, March 14, 1976.

10. To 'internalise' this or that parameter means to try to give it a foundation internal to economics.

10. The New French Exception: Cultural Upstarts

So, science has decided: the Great Market has genetic foundations! This is why the Turbo-Bécassines and the Cyber-Gideons are counted in tens of millions, all coveting a place at the Great Banquet of the tertiary society. They can't wait to gorge themselves on a Great Market of ideas which in France, apparently, has not yet succeeded in completely eliminating that pocket of typically Latin viscosity that some call 'the French exception'.

The 'French exception' incarnates a compromise that many find irritating: it ensures a subtle and effective articulation between creation and diffusion that is not constrained to respond directly to a mass-public demand that sooner or later will be cannibalized by the rules of the market, nor to a simple 'informational need' for the documentation of academic production.

Naturally, this 'privileged' situation is scandalous to the shock pragmatism of the Neo-Bécassines and Neo-Gideons: an insolent frog's fortress still sheltering an elite corrupted by the nostalgia for subversion — in short, a den of Pétroleuses! How to eliminate this arrogant viscosity, which claims that its turbulences come from outside of the market, a viscosity even more perfidious than unionist contractions, and which generates social thromboses in the channels linking the firms that produce intellectual goods and services (universities) to the market of ideas-opinions under the joint responsibility of panelist-citizens and journalists?

Consequently, to realise this cultural equivalent of the political market, the Giscard-Mitterrand governments had to take on a delicate challenge: that of ensuring France's entry into the civil society of services. A task that calls for the discrete scrapping of the French Exception, whose symbolic pretensions must in some way be 'modestly' downgraded to its market dimensions alone, while retaining a few relics of its truculence, of course. In short, the task of unreservedly glorifying a consensual elite à la français. This implies the promotion of a fragrant mediocrity of insolence that somehow succeeds in grafting the petulance of a Jean Gabin onto the humble talent of an Alain Touraine.

It will come as no surprise that the twilight of the Pétroleuse era coincides with the mass production of cultural upstarts, brilliantly inaugurated by the young folk of post-philosophy¹ who offer

themselves up bare-assed to every risk of thought: 'Yeah, human rights exist! Yeah, God is a complex problem! Yeah, evil's evil and good's good.' Thus the French economy of the suckers of consensus was born, and has since seen a meteoric rise: the cultural crook à la française has even become an export product!

We know the pride with which our friends over the channel comment on the rare appearances of Nessie, the famous sea-serpent of Loch Ness. But even they envy us the performances of what they call French intellectuals, and in particular Jacques Attali, considered below. Even across the pond he is appreciated as an extraordinary burlesque act. And even in France we salute the perseverance and the audacity of this brilliant state counsellor who unhesitatingly confronts the ponderous weight of 'a peasant and statist nation (statist because peasant)² and above all renounces for himself the pleasures of nomadism and mobility, vegetating in a 'large body' to become one of the most zealous acrobat-intellectuals of the future global neurocracy,³ an advanced stage of the cybermercantile order.

To these 'ethical qualities' Jacques Attali adjoins the gifts of a powerful visionary, a festive Cassandra: fully six years ago he predicted the arrival of hundreds of millions of 'young nomads dressed in jeans, basketball sneakers, a walkman in their ears, free in their heads'.

The social order of the Cybermercantile is simple: like the great cities of yore, which demonstrated a solid appetite for the poor, it shows itself to be very fond of this whole cyberlivestock of 'young walkman-toting nomads free in their heads', a little querulous but basically malleable, easily segmentable into demographics and 'generations', and thus ideal sociological prey for fashion. But of course one must avoid any waste, and limit oneself strictly to the needs of the future neurocracy, to what is strictly necessary for a cybernetic fattening-up: to go beyond this would be unhealthy; to ensure the health of every body or to make sure everyone got a careful education would be an infringement of the liberty of brains, and would risk compromising the 'autonomy and self-management' of the units of livestock.

There is nothing like the self-medication and self-education of 'do it yourself' to subdue this whole mass for whom the mercantile empiricist, now himself also cognitively trained, prepares a destiny as neurocattle: 'These youngsters are the gray matter of tomorrow—which must be as high-performing as possible. For them, language is a tool. They must learn to send simple, strong messages to survive in the future cybervillage.'

Postmodern cretinization by communication is a more advantageous substitute for the subjugation perpetrated by the conservatism of yore, as described by Ernest Renan:

The French conservative party grieved on the day of the battle of Sadowa, and not without reason. This party's maxim was to reproduce Metternich's Austria—I mean, to combat the democratic spirit by means of a separate, disciplined army, and a populace of peasants scrupulously maintained in ignorance.⁴

So here come the cybercattle! The Grand Meaulnes, the peasants who come into college in clogs as proudly as gentlemen on horseback into churches—all of this is too costly and in any case old-fashioned. We must therefore 'organize the abandonment by States of their therapeutic and educative functions, confiding these progressively to the market...' and not imitate 'that old-style Europe that conflates public service with democracy, identity with territory, memory with the future...the most obstinate continent with regard to the disappearance of the concepts it created: State, nation, citizenship, institution, hospital, school...It will pay very dearly, through lasting unemployment, for the vain defence of these concepts.'

For the second-generation Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons, the Cybermercantile Order may prove highly appetizing: scrutinizing the horizon of millennial tendencies, Attali believes he discerns a multitude of young cavaliers in charge of more and more 'intelligent' nomad-objects. But perhaps their life will not be all that much fun: they will often be bulimic, constipated, constantly 'stressed', overwhelmed by tests and running on pitiless thermostats, always constrained to respond to their own ultimata: 'Oh Mirror! Am I on form? Am I conforming? Tell me, quickly! You know that's what I'm being paid for!'

It is not hard to see that 'walkman youths', predictable and stockable, are but the festive and transurban form of the creatures of Hobbes's state of nature,⁵ demanding a mode of sovereignty worthy of their mobility and the covetousness provoked in them by 'nomad-objects', always ready to overflow the dikes of envious equilibrium that regulate 'classical' market democracies. It is here that our acrobat-intellectual plays his master card: the Nomad Overclass of the twenty-first century, a volatile elite of predators (of which he sees himself as a most distinguished prototype). This is why, full of solicitude, he fears that France, stuck in its 'peasant and statist' tradition, is unable to recognise those twenty-first century condottieri who know how to 'create, play, make things move' and who often (this seems to be a decisive point for him) 'live without paying for what they consume'.

The nomad cavaliers of the Overclass flatter themselves with being the little 'cosmopolitan' cherry that 'makes the difference' from the old-fashioned bourgeois, who to their eyes are just as dopily sentimental as these Russians corrupted by seventy years of egalitarianism and still

indignant at the spectacle of a gleaming Mercedes alongside grandmothers rummaging in dustbins.⁶ At their table, the booty of the entire world's goods and services: 'fruits, spices, music, images of the most distant countries'. For we can grant one thing to this Overclass: it is not 'racist', and is even fond of exoticism. It just adores visiting these precious reservoirs of savagery that are the people-markets, purveyors of boxer-gladiators and feathered Nubians.

The Overclass does not want to be 'at the top' of the social scale—that would be to resuscitate social pyramids as old-fashioned as those of penguins and gorillas—but to be rampant everywhere and nowhere, always more furtive, always more ephemeral and, of course, beyond the reach of States. You can bet, however, that the Overclass will be yet more agile and cynical than the elite of the current Cybermercantile Order, shamelessly advocating its role as the guard dog of self-organization, stimulating the ecosocial dynamism of a modernity ever more under threat from the inertia of cybercattle. With the Overclass, we touch upon one of the most incontestable 'successes' of 'anarchomercantilism': its ability to turn a profit from a certain putrefaction of liberationist ideas—a putrefaction that is inevitable once they renounce any revolutionary ideal—by inhabiting the new technologies so as to propagate envy and conformism at the speed of light.

Of course, we might well imagine that a few 'fluctuations' provoked by the 'youths with walkmans and sneakers' might trouble the peace of the great goldfish bowl of market-democracy! Such are the famous 'hot nights', 'riots' even, in the banlieues.⁷ But you can bet that these 'riots' trouble the Overclass no more than they trouble Judge Richard Ponzer,⁸ for whom the city of New York illustrates the possibility for communities situated between two extremes of the spectrum of income to 'cohabit and to cooperate in conditions which are not perfectly harmonious and certainly not placid (!)'. On the contrary, in these riots it will see the experimental proof—already illustrated by the nursery rhyme of Goats and Dogs Island—of the systemic stability of a social Jurassic Park. Every revolt will only be a 'backwash'—inaudible by the markets—as inoffensive and pathetic as the settling of accounts between the young males of a bovine herd.

But the counsellor will be worried, foreseeing well enough that the transformation of political practice into an ethnology of ruminants is not so straightforward, and that the Overclass risk seeming rather unsympathetic: he who sews envy shall reap fury! For even today a few embers of popular lucidity remain; the kneading of market-people into reversible cybercattle has not yet triumphed! Excellence as such—that of scientists, artists, thinkers or great tribunes—is respected by many

people who are not ignorant of the fact that there is an abyss between parasites and creators.

'You're just old-fashioned populists', retort the acrobats of the Cybermercantile Order, furious at having the finger pointed at them. Tomorrow, naturally, the 'old-fashioned populists' risk barking—if not biting—yet harder. It is here that Jacques Attali, finally turning his gaze away from the Overclass and its elegant reversibilities, redons his gloves to confront the weighty issues of the decisive and the 'social': 'As a counterpart, a more strict social justice must be enforced, to ensure an equality of opportunity for everyone to accede to this overclass'. Given all the 'yeah, but perhaps', the 'rightly or wrongly', the 'on one hand, on the other hand' of the acrobat-intellectuals, it is difficult to see who is going to 'enforce' this 'social justice'. Is it going to emerge from the creative chaos of the Overclass's neurons? It doesn't seem likely, since the latter are hardly inclined to outbursts of altruism. They hold that every well-born man knows that it is unseemly and very ill-bred to perturb the equilibrium of market democracies, so much more refined than even that of Goats and Dogs. So will it emerge from the Chaos of the opinions of the cybercattle nomads? This would be to forget that authentic politics—that which takes the part of those who have no part⁹—is never a matter of an aggregate of already-established opinions, unlike conservative market democracies. It would also be to forget the lessons of the industrial revolution: an atrocious poverty was the outcome of the 'nomadism' of that epoch. A poverty that was only driven back through the formation of active units of solidarity—unions—forged in the confrontation of class with class. The question therefore becomes: how to defeat atomisation and its proliferation of units of distress reduced to their sneakers, their two kilos of brain and their walkman—and quickly? For nowadays, dislocation and depression is infinitely more rapid (the famous 'real time') than the patient maturation of united bodies of struggle, subversion and solidarity capable of embracing the multitude.

How derisory appear the 'advice' and the complaints in the face of irreversible tendencies that 'are expected but not desired'. Here we are indeed far from the courage of Prometheus—that young God admired by Marx—who, twenty-five centuries ago now, dared to say 'I hate all the Gods', dragging the West, and then the whole planet, into a perpetual war against tyranny. But, as we have guessed, Prometheus is decidedly not the God worshipped by the acrobats of anarchomercantilism. It is before Hermes—Hermes the servile, Hermes the slave of Zeus—and above all before Plutus the Gold-king¹⁰ that they prostrate themselves, quite shamelessly.

NOTES

- [1.](#) See Glossary.
- [2.](#) All of the citations from Attali are taken either from *Millenium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order*, tr. L. Connors and N. Gardels (New York: Times Books, 1991), from the article 'L'avènement de la planète nomade', *Libération*, October 1, 1993, or from the article 'La surclasse', in *Le Monde*, March 7, 1999.
- [3.](#) See Chapter 5.
- [4.](#) E. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* (Paris: Complexe, 1990).
- [5.](#) See chapter 3.
- [6.](#) A view shared by Olivier Rogez (*Le Nouvel Économiste* 1026, 8 December 1995, 67), who hopes that Muscovites become as 'modern' as Brazilians, who have not been bothered by this spectacle for some time now.
- [7.](#) Riots are marketable and must even be encouraged (Puff Daddy's 'street promo', as reported in *Libération*, 27 October, 1997, 35).
- [8.](#) Speech at UNESCO, March 1996.
- [9.](#) Following the fine expression of J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 39.
- [10.](#) Recall that *Plutus* is a play by Aristophanes. For a eulogy to *Plutus*, see F. Rachline's *Que l'argent soit* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993).

11. The Dissident Knights of Professor Walras, or Economic Droit de Seigneur

One of the consequences of the very good health of the American economy...is that the financial world and the stock market are getting worried.

LE MONDE, September 19, 1994

For less than 100,000 francs a month, you can only get imbeciles.

A BANKER, CITED BY CLAUDE JULIEN,

If he were to have visited the Great Campus or one of its scale models, the Great Yoghurt-Maker of Singapore, Monsieur Prudhomme may have been worried: 'Haven't my postindustrial great-grand-nephews killed the goose who laid the golden eggs?' Monsieur Prudhomme is quite right: in a state of perfect competition, there is no longer any competition, and the promise of a 'purely informational' world of thermostat-citizens is a phantasm just as puerile as the perpetual motion machine! Blinded by his immense naivety, the 'rational anarchist' forgot that to the paradox of the perfect market—'no competition in a situation of perfect competition'—corresponds the paradox of perfect communication: 'Perfect communication communicates nothing!' He dreams of expression so transparent and pure that there is no longer any point in speaking—and therefore no point in thinking...without realizing that in doing so he is merely fatuously aping Walras's favourite fiction of the perfect market with neither friction nor violence, with its bidders who can compete over who holds the most elegant soirées.¹

With the Grand Gala of minute adjustments to the market inaugurated by Professor Walras, the neoclassical theory of economics² succeeded in staging the most paradoxical of everyday rituals: juxtaposing Hobbes's Robinson-particles, now metamorphosed into peaceable and rational men of the world courteously confronting each other in two camps—that of supply and that of demand—refereed by a debonair market secretary capable of discerning equilibrium prices just like sorcerers discover water wells, and ensuring that none of them ever succumbs to the temptation to an envious and bestial imitation of the masses, since they enjoy all the beatitude of the optimization of individual preferences.

Note also that the Grand Gala cannot be loaded in any way: in order to make his calculations, each festivalgoer-trader benefits from free and

instantaneous information, which discourages all speculation and makes it impossible for him to beat the market in any way. Perfect competition that eliminates all competition, perfect information that informs us of nothing, perfect communication that communicates nothing—this is what irritates the Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons so much! The more the Robinson-optimisers live in harmony, the more they evaporate! Here we put our finger on the whole mystification of the perfect fluidity of the neoclassical market: we can easily see that the gangster-capitalist who concocts an oligopoly situation incarnates the spirit of competition far better than Professor Walras's festivalgoer-operatives! The neoclassical Grand Gala allows for the masking of the whole deliberate dissymmetry that organises the networks of market democracies. For, just as English chivalry distinguishes those born to sweat from those born to command,³ we must separate the Knights of finance, who in a certain sense possess a modern *droit de seigneur*—the right to 'symmetrize' others—from the patients of future cybercattle, the sucker-nomads they can symmetrize at will.

The knights are deft and know how to flatter the sucker-nomads: 'You simple folks have great opportunities—to be symmetrized is to participate in the great democratic game.' They know how to pamper the socio-professional demographic, but also how to dole out punishment to the ill-bred who allow themselves to be tempted by 'nostalgia', even 'romanticism', laziness or the spirit of resistance, so damaging to market health. 'Come now, Householders, you must consume more! Come now, 26–40s, one more effort on cellphones! Come now, railway workers, you need to slim down a little....'

It is here that the 'explicative' wing of the Black Box comes in,⁴ commissioned with communicating to the different demographics and with the fabrication of a well-targeted truth-speaking, so crucial for the stability of market democracies. It is a matter of tempering the abrupt 'objectivity' of 'figures' and 'graphs'⁵ with a kind of exhibitionist benevolence toward everything that is 'concrete and everyday': the basket of household goods, bathroom and bedroom projects for young couples, etc. How not to love this money—as palpable as a flower bed, as practical as a Hoover, the modern accomplice of the Penates; this innocent money as bucolic as the dream of Bécassine Gribouille, this money that claims to be nothing but the 'neutral veil' of exchanges as 'natural' as the bartering of pork cutlets for cyberhardware.

'Money? It's the oh-so-simple miracle that allows you to take home veal in your shopping bag...', the Trader-Knights repeat, forgetting that behind the head of veal or the pork cutlet there is a futures market in livestock and pork bellies, and that behind that market looms the futures market of exchange rates, interest rates and so many other levels

all the way down to absolute volatility, all utterly inaccessible to those bit-part players in the great comedy of trading, the small individual shareholders: the Carpentras widow⁶ or the chair attendant in Rambouillet park.

Indeed, it would be indecorous to speak of the 'neutrality of money' to the turbulent Knights of Speculation, to the Great Priests of the fluid and the chaotic, virtuosos of mimetic contagions and self-validating strategies, the Masters of credit who can pay with the future, who can impose their debts as means of payment and thus ensure their mastery of 'economic horizons'. Our Knights love to 'democratically' savour the market, but this market is not fluid and homogeneous like the one that is offered to the Carpentras widow or to the second-tier Cyber-Gideons and Turbo-Bécassines. The latter are kindly requested to know their place—that of the Penates and of domesticity—and not to get too close to the true market, that of the connoisseurs, the 'marketmakers', who know very well that it can never be reduced to a simple balance of payments, but is a taking control; that the value of a company is increasingly linked to the way it is managed, and above all to anticipations of control; that accountability is not objective but objectivating; that any calculations concerning 'real value'—fundamental parameters—must always be rebalanced by a pre-market value that completely escapes the criteria of symmetry of information, and which is fabricated by bubble-rumours far removed from the elegant cries of neoclassical economics.

The Trader-Knight sees himself as valiant and dramatic, always at the outposts of volatility, upstream of what has just been prepared as the new raw material of the market, and ready to confront head-on the Great Dragon of Contingency:

'We, the great predators of the market democracies, feed the fluctuations of markets, we protect the Widow of Carpentras and the grower of the Midwest as knights of old protected the widow and the orphan. We surf on the foam of the wave of economic fury: before us the lava steaming with fluctuations, behind us the new raw materials still warm.... We truly are the alchemists of ultramodernity, and in our hands risk turns into gold nuggets. Glory be to the pioneers, to the financial engineers of Chicago who, more than twenty years ago, realised that the dollar was the true raw material, far more volatile and full of so much more promise than livestock!

'We are at the summit of the great chain of predation. We are a necessary stimulant.⁷ The crab eats the plankton, the average man eats the crab...why not continue? After all, finance, like laughter, is a characteristic proper to man. It is quite right that the average man should pay tribute to us as the serf of old paid his tithe to the castle. We

tame contingency and take the risk of living on the back of a tiger, so that the institutional investors—the institutional investors who spend all day aping us—can graze their herd of suckers tranquilly in the pastures we have managed for them!

‘We are the great fluidificators. Because of us, the grandma in Sacramento can live out her life fully thanks to the dockers of Hong Kong, and, reciprocally, the Carpentras widow can help to irrigate a village in Niger....’ But there is no room for laxity here: ‘The markets vote every day, and punish arrogant states’,⁸ those ‘bad pupils’ who are too conservative and stubbornly set on preserving their health and education systems.

Anything now can be raw material for the market, and, what is more, will swiftly be relegated to the rank of an ‘underlying’ for cushy speculations, and replaced with another, more innovative, more volatile matter, one offering a quicker shortcut in the road leading from money to money. And the raw material can always be left to take care of itself.

The capability to transform anything and anyone into raw material: this could be the very definition of the trader-knights’ economic and financial droit de seigneur. It is also the criterion that allows us to recognize that neoproletariat caste, the future cybercattle of neurocracy, joyous sophisticate of the always-incomplete chain of predation, primed by silos of soya, stocks of onions, pork bellies...and completed by the global apotheosis of the Great Futures Market of neurolivestock, more volatile (and more profitable) than all the livestock of the Great Plains. Neurolivestock certainly enjoy an existence more comfortable than serfs or millworkers, but they do not easily escape their destiny as the self-regulating raw material of a market as predictable and as homogeneous as a perfect gas, a matter counted in atoms of distress, stripped of all powers of negotiation, renting out their mental space, brain by brain.

And then in contrast to this eminently ductile raw material, the luxury and insolence of the Knights, the arrogance of the droit de seigneur of the creative predators of the future Overclass, irrational, unpredictable, the bêtes noires of central banks, envied by Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons the whole world over.

So, do the trader-knights really deserve their privileges? Are they really the valiant crusaders of rational self-regulation, protectors of markets against fluctuations? Are they always in the forefront of the battle against the imitative hysteria of crowds? In short, are they brave enough to swap positions and provide a buyer countercurrent, when all the postmodern Topazes sell en masse? To master the true market, far more avid for rumours than for accounts, is certainly no easy task. Everyone keeps an eye out and tries to render ‘informative’ every intervention distilled by whatever reputedly unpredictable trading-floor

divinity (a reputation that is supposed to discourage any imitation) whose least rumbling becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'Why did Soros sneeze at the press conference this morning? Why did his trader decide to buy a hundred thousand pork bellies?'

Recall Keynes's Great Beauty Contest:⁹ the whole problem consists in anticipating the anticipations of others, in singularizing oneself by imitating everyone before everyone else does, in guessing the 'equilibria' that will emerge from cyberpsychodramas played out on a global scale. The rational attitude is no longer that of the lucid discipline that all self-regulation necessitates—'to buy when everyone is selling and to sell when everyone is buying'—but that which rewards the servile opportunism of the acrobats of 'speculative bubbles'.

But imitation is contagious. Everyone, from the groupies close to the self-validating trading-floor divinities to the institutional investors managing the affairs of Carpentras widows, ends up realising that one has to imitate the knights if one is to extract a few crumbs from the plunder. Completing a magnificent vicious circle, this insurrection of the suckers of tertiary raw materials irritates the predatory elite, guarantors of the virtues of contingency. 'The market can become too mercantile, just as sometimes water is too liquid! Is it our fault if everyone wants to imitate us, from the institutional investors right down to the Rambouillet chair-attendant? But they'll all end up going under: the true market will be responsible for educating all these Topazes who don't know their place.'

Because, naturally, sometimes the 'fundamentals'¹⁰ take their revenge upon volatility, in what is euphemistically called a 'growth adjustment'. Everyone is punished because everyone forgot that money called up through the simple clicking of fingers of a junk bond can evaporate just as quickly, and that the Aladdin's lamp of 'financial innovations' functions in both directions. The trickery of the 'true market' becomes obvious: the multiplication of risk management instruments, by inducing a proliferation of fragile links within the wholesale liquidity markets, reinforces the *droit de seigneur* of certain Knights and therefore reduces yet further the number of those who have prompt and reliable information at their disposal.

But there is even worse news than the spectacular folklore of 'liquidity crises' and 'speculative bubbles'. It is the notion of risk itself that is corrupted; according to Keynes, '[t]here is no clear evidence from experience that the investment policy which is socially advantageous coincides with that which is most profitable'.¹¹ The risks of innovation and the thirst for the 'palpable', for capital easy to liquidate, contaminates everything, from postmodern Topazes to the Rambouillet chair-attendant, less and less inclined to build a school in Patagonia or to

irrigate a village in Niger. Certainly all of this has repercussions for the institutional investors who are supposed to incarnate the financial citizenship of the 'true market' and to manifest the charitable benevolence of the trading floors of Frankfurt, New York, London and Tokyo toward Timbuktu or Bogota.

All of this gives the lie to the claims of the financial predators, chivalrous protectors of innovation and of the health of the spirit of enterprise, always under threat from mercantile contamination and the caprices of volatility. How can we now legitimate the privilege of the dissymmetry of these princes of self-regulation, constrained to imitate the suckers and even, sometimes, to humiliate themselves by soliciting the aid of the famous 'lender of last resort'¹²—in short to abase themselves before the tertiary raw material?

But the Trader-Knights have not had their last word: they know that, transformed into 'average men' and segmented into slices, the suckers become harmless and even conspire toward an equilibrium which, far from tending towards an extension of each one's capacity to act, induces and reinforces an equilibrium of inequality. For, just as in the financial market, the whole game consists in creating dissymmetry, in organising pressure groups, accumulating public spacetime, installing oneself at key points, proliferating networks in order to make ones 'message' triumph—and it is indeed this that destroys the democratic claims of an equilibrium founded on the principle of 'one man one vote', implying that Mr. X, retired, 'theoretically holds as much weight' as Mr. Y, 'opinion leader'.

For everyone has guessed by now that the political corpulence of Mr. Y does not grow through simple consideration of Mr. Y as a voting unit and simple thermostat-citizen, consumer of political goods and services, but through his (direct or indirect) capacity to influence the secret equilibria of the Black Box in his favour. It is obvious that the hour that Mr. Y dedicates to politics pays off infinitely more than that of Mr. X—who, certainly, is afforded every latitude in optimally dividing his time between politics and other activities, knowing that every minute he invests has very little chance of bearing fruit as a favourable political output. Mr. X is a voting unit that does not count. Worse, every move he makes testifying to his goodwill toward market democracy risks backfiring on him by legitimating the growth of inequality: so it is quite understandable when Mr. X, disheartened, joins the cloaca of political apathy.

Paradoxically, this attraction to apathy seems to be admired by certain politologists, who see in it a guarantee of stability. They can even go into ecstasies before this miracle of the self-organization of civil society: the Chaos of opinions secretes a parameter capable of eliminating the lame

ducks through their own apathy! Thus the latter must be elevated into the dignity of a useful parameter, a powerful stimulant for systemic health:

It is not quite correct that a higher rate of participation is always favourable for democracy.... A growth in the rate of participation can indicate a weakening of social cohesion which will lead democracy to its death; inversely, the widespread opinion that 'voting can't change much', by diminishing participation, can contribute to the stability of the regime. This poses an important problem for theorists of democracy, that of the optimal percentage of electoral participation that would permit a society to maintain its democratic institutions without the harshness of its party struggles threatening its cohesion.¹³

Here once more we meet market democracy's great obsession: the symmetry between Invisible Hand and Black Box must be merciless, meaning that those excluded from economic prosperity tend to coincide exactly with those who are apathetic in regard to the political game, thus realizing an identification of two major social asymmetries.

Once more, the asymmetrical and the unequal come to the rescue of the perfect fluidity of the market democracy! Which prompts a question: Should one take seriously those economist-politologists who hunt down any viscosity capable of curbing politico-economic equivalence and seek the convergence toward the fixed point that turns out to be endlessly evasive, even and above all in the ideal conditions of a mathematical model? For it has been shown that, in a world where all entrepreneur-politicians act rationally, an equilibrium only emerges if consumer-citizens act irrationally. Equally, mathematical politology shows that a democratic government necessitates an asymmetry of information and that, in a two-party system, the irrational vote—the vote that is stirred up by vague and ambiguous programmes—must be encouraged in order to force the decision.¹⁴

It straightforwardly follows from all of this that the citizen who wants to optimise his time, but who has no contact with lobbyists and information sources, will have to give up on informing himself: for him, therefore, apathy and conformism are rational behaviours!

The preceding theorems show, therefore, that the more market democracy approaches its ideal model—the homogeneously informed electorate, the triumph of optimistic rationality...the more it becomes self-contradictory! It can only be saved by what it claims to prohibit: the artificial asymmetry of 'voluntarism', the kernel of the decisive, opening onto a political irreversibility that goes beyond the simple summation of possibilities (even 'self-organized' ones)—a politics that leaps beyond 'complexities', right under the nose of all these models imported slavishly from the natural sciences.

A collective choice never results from a summation of individual tastes. Well before it was mathematically proven, Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew and founder of American Public Relations, understood very well the necessity of voluntarily injecting a certain asymmetry in order to arrive at mass social control:

If we understand the mechanisms and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it? [...] The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. [...] [I]t is the intelligent minorities which need to make use of propaganda continuously and systematically.¹⁵

It is often the 'bêtes noires' that incarnate this 'intelligent manipulation', and we have seen to what point the asymmetry of governmentality can be effective without having to don the gloves. Schumpeter lucidly concludes his analysis of the market democracy model by remarking that:

What we are confronted with in the analysis of political processes is largely not a genuine but a manufactured will. [...] The ways in which issues and the popular will on any issue are being manufactured is exactly analogous to the ways of commercial advertising. [...] [I]n reality [the people] neither raise nor decide issues [...] [T]he issues that shape their fate are normally raised and decided for them.¹⁶

Market democracy is essentially a contest of elites; the decisions, the political 'outputs', do not flourish of themselves, and the more the Triple Alliance of the identification of economic, political and communicational markets takes shape, the more necessary it becomes for the social engineers of consensus to prefabricate asymmetry. This asymmetry now has a global vocation—at once cultural, political and economic: a civil society on a planetary scale inspiring an offensive that has succeeded in uniting anarchy, legalism, logical empiricism¹⁷ and mercantilism under one flag: the banner of the Great Army of festive neoconservatism, of the one God reinvigorated by Chaos and the network, of the sociologist-mercenaries of the Trilateral, of disillusioned veterans, of the admen of human rights and the groupies of the post-totalitarian, and, to complete the work, the horse traders of cognitive dressage. The Great Army plays its trump card with no hesitation: it draws strength from a conjugation of talents—the tweed shirts of soft sciences and the white coats of hard sciences—celebrating the findings of scientists eager to 'do a bit of philosophy' and thinkers keen to make

themselves useful and 'predict something'.

It is not robots that threaten us but this instrumental relation to language—so lauded by mercantile empiricism—which claims to strip it of all ambiguity so that every cognitive operation can be seen as a series of elementary steps. This relation is conjoined to an ever more strict submission to the social order, conjoined with a demand for 'serious philosophy' addressed to 'great minds'. There are countless 'dialogues' or 'ethical reflections', differing in their scientific content but identical in their Sunday rationalism and their disillusioned armchair-intellectual tone. We are here, surely, at the antipodes of the dangerous philosophies advocated by Deleuze and Foucault: like a barge adrift, the only threat of this ethical rationalism lies in its inertia and its ponderousness. Naturally, the social order is fond of sloppy science, and this is why the brilliant scientist suddenly keen for a philosophical 'supplement of soul' has become an unavoidable burlesque act of our modernity. The conclusion, in the 'advice to the young' style, even becomes a literary genre: keep away from 'philosophers'! Of course, it's a question of fleeing the 'real' ones, all those magnificent thugs of thought who tremble neither before the sacred nor before science. Bite with white teeth into the fine apple of the 'post-metaphysical era', the era of democratic exchange between the cybervirgins who populate the contemporary campus and pool their expertise to arouse admiration at this post-adolescent pabulum.

Unfortunately this credulity sometimes turns into populist vinegar, suspecting of parasitism every activity that does not immediately manifest a certain 'operational visibility'. This is the famous 'defeat of Plato', the supposed triumph in what is nothing but an envious war against all fundamental theoretical activities judged too 'contemplative', incapable of proving their rapid adaptation to the social order, and of which, in these times of struggle for economic survival, it is convenient to rid ourselves, like courtesans of insolent luxury. The mercantile empiricist bellows: 'it is time to requisition science and religion and demand some contribution from all those scholars who don't do anything, and all those priests who play the guerilla! All the same, the Universe must have started somewhere!' There are certain respondents to this appeal already, above all in the us: 'Don't worry, there is no zero! It is indeed God who has diffused his secret melody since the big bang....' The Carpentras pharmacist can sleep soundly: 'Phew! Everything is still in order! The Universe has a meaning, a place and a date, it isn't wandering just anywhere, anyhow! What's more, a great French biologist has proved that thought is localised, wisely, in the brain; and that by counting enough sheep, one can become a mathematician...Ah! If only we could find the Great Formula to

manufacture good people and Einsteins like sausages.’

The Great Army understands very well how to subdue those intellectual troublemakers who have no respect for anything, neither modernity nor market democracy! No indulgence should be shown toward this ‘aristocratic tradition in Western Europe’s cultural world’, toward these ‘romantic figures who naturally get a position of prominence through a sort of aristocratic exaltation’ and who hope to find redemption in their moral crises by pursuing an ‘arrogant radical criticism’ that barely masks their ‘[r]itualism and self-pity’.¹⁸

We must take up the challenge posed by the troublemakers, by the intellectuals and related groups who affirm their disgust for corruption, for materialism and for the ineffectiveness of market democracy, who denounce the submission of democratic governments to monopoly capitalism, thus contributing to provoking ‘a breakdown of traditional means of social control, a delegitimation of political and other forms of authority’.¹⁹

Yet we must not despair, for intellectuals as guardians of values, ‘value-oriented intellectuals’, have not disappeared: ‘They find new and rapidly-developing openings in the fields of communications....’²⁰ As for the others, all those who don’t know how to rally to the epoch of the Great Army and the generalized offensive of management and the managerial spirit—that spirit of which Deleuze wrote: ‘The family, school, army, factory, are [...] transmutable or transformable coded configurations of a single business where the only people left are administrators’²¹—they don’t even deserve our pity; they have to learn that History gives no second chances, and that they ought to have recycled themselves as ‘politologists’, well-versed in roundtable dialogues, privileged interlocutors of thermostat-citizens, deftly assisting in the forgetting of their former obscure status as ‘researcher’ in electoral sociology, marrying the austerity of the scientist to the foppish casualness of the Sciences-Po graduate.

NOTES

1. [Léon Walras, nineteenth-century French mathematical economist, first formulated the marginal theory of value and pioneered general equilibrium theory—trans.]

2. On neoclassical economics, see B. Guerrien, *L’Économie néoclassique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996). On the questions of imperfect information of the market, derivative products, speculative bubbles, systemic risk, see the fine book by M. Aglietta and A. Orléan, *Violence de la monnaie* (Paris: PUF, 1982) and these clarifying articles: M.-A. Kleinpeter, ‘Liquidités des actifs et procès d’évaluation’,

Revue d'économie financière 28 (1994), 133–61; H. Minsky, *FRDNY Quarterly Review*, Spring 1992–93; and especially M. Aglietta, *Macro-Économie financière* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995).

[3.](#) 'We aren't born to sweat but to command' — *Henry II*, I, 1, 197.

[4.](#) See chapter 5.

[5.](#) The role of politics is to explain the economic decisions taken by the markets.

[6.](#) [*La veuve de Carpentras* is a stock character standing for the uninformed and risk-averse investor who wishes to assure themselves, for example, of a retirement income—trans.]

[7.](#) See the commentary of a predator trader in *Le Monde diplomatique*, May 1995, 20: 'Predators are a necessary stimulant...In a game reserve without predators, animals just end up dying...That's what would happen in business if one eliminated the predators....'

[8.](#) One of George Soros's declarations.

[9.](#) See chapter 5, note 25.

[10.](#) Parameters supposed to represent the 'real' economy in principle guaranteed by the flux of real goods and services.

[11.](#) Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 157.

[12.](#) Ultimate guarantee: everything always ends up falling back on the state, and therefore on the taxpayer-suckers. See M. Aglietta, *Macroéconomie financière* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995), 88.

[13.](#) See S.M. Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 214–17, and Macpherson's commentaries, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 87–9.

[14.](#) See A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), chapters 8 and 12.

[15.](#) E. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Horace Livewright, 1928), 47, 9, 31 (Italics ours); See also 'The Engineering of Consent', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 250 (1947), 113. On these questions, see also Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

[16.](#) J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* [1943] (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 262, 264.

[17](#). See the interview with M. Gauchet and B. Kriegel (*Le Monde*, July 12, 1994), some extracts of which are given below. Note in particular the commentary on the association of logical positivism and legal positivism, which is ‘along the right lines’:

Legal positivism, associated with logical positivism, is along the right lines. It does not change the structure of the law, it does not concern itself with knowledge of good and evil. This is why it has been antitotalitarian, where the Augustinian philosophies of the triumph of the will set the tone for radical antilegalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. If we wish to provide a foundation for the philosophy of human rights today, we must look elsewhere, and set out from the seventeenth-century philosophy of natural rights. [...] The idea of natural law, which is at the foundation of human rights, is simple: human nature comprises norms, laws. This reverses the Augustinian vision of a nature destined to evil and sin. It is all the more possible to speak of natural law and of human nature outside of a theologico-political context once it is realised that, for the classical thinkers, natural law is simply Reason. Today it is possible to rethink Nature, since the natural sciences, political sciences and human sciences converge to discover the universal character of the code, of the norm and of rights. Thus, anthropology sees the prohibition of incest as a general structure of human nature. It is no longer necessary to denaturalize right to save it from a nature that is supposedly essentially evil, nor to inscribe it in the decision of a subject or an individual. [...] On the contrary, we must think right within nature.

Recall that Marx discussed this problem of human rights in *The Jewish Question*:

What constitutes liberty?

Article 6. ‘Liberty is the power which man has to do everything which does not harm the rights of others.’

Liberty is, therefore, the right to do everything which does not harm others. The limits within which each individual can act without harming others are determined by the law, just as the boundary between two fields is marked by a stake. It is a question of the liberty of man regarded as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself. [...]

None of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond the egoistic man, man as he is, as a member of civil society; that is, an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice. Man is far from being considered, in the rights of man, as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself—society—appears as a system which is external to the individual and as a limitation of his original independence. The only bond between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic persons.

[18](#). The quotations are from Michel Crozier’s article in *The Crisis of Democracy*, the report of the Trilateral Commission, Crozier-Huntington-Watanuki (New York: NYU Press, 1975), 31–32.

[19](#). *Ibid.*, 8.

[20](#). Ibid., 32.

[21](#). G. Deleuze, 'Postscript on Control Societies', in *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177–82: 181.

12. Towards the End or the Beginning of History: Middle Class Yoghurt-Maker or Heroism of the Anyone?

The opium of the people in the present world is perhaps not so much religion as it is accepted boredom. Such a world is at the mercy, it must be known, of those who provide at least the semblance of an escape from boredom. Human life aspires to the passions, and again encounters its exigencies.

GEORGES BATAILLE

Meanwhile, the Great Army needs a great deal of eloquence to make us forget that there will soon be seven billion victims of the curse which, nearly two centuries ago, scandalised Burke: 'The more wealth is produced, the more poor there are!' The cybernetic revolution, the famous 'third wave' that promised to liberate us, often seems to be synonymous with poverty for the most deprived and intellectual indigence for the most privileged.

Work is split between the indentured labour of survival and the performance-work of the Overclass. But this misses the fact that only patience-work entails an unprecedented amplification of freedom—both in extension, by developing each person's power of acting, and in intensity, through the discovery of a plasticity proper to human individuation.

Here we touch on perhaps the most sensitive point of what is usually called the 'contemporary crisis' or the 'failure of modernity': that it leaves patience-work—the true creator of riches—to degrade in favour of the indentured labour of survival and performance-work enslaved to impatience. Here we are at the nadir of the paradox: the unprecedented expansion in technical augmentations of the body, which is supposed to raise humanity above the abjection of 'natural necessities', leads, on the scale of the entire planet, to situations of total poverty much worse than that of the Amazon Indians—who, from the point of view of the 'rare resources' so dear to the economist, are also at the limits of survival....

To promote a work without its own temporality, totally indentured to the social order—whether it comes from the whip and from hunger for indentured labour, or from the mutilated psychology of the cyberzombie for the Overclass—a work that cannot be articulated with

an intensification of individuation for the great mass of humanity; in short, to content oneself with proliferating particular cases of a species: is this all that we can now hope for from humanity?

In any case, boredom reigns.... The Penates—the little units of domestic freedom—here betray their great weakness: they can do nothing but pile up, incapable of leaping beyond themselves as only the fragments of Athena can.

We dread the painful moment when the Turbo-Bécassines and Cyber-Gideons yawn between two badly-digested meals, their heads nodding this way and that like Buridan's Ass: 'I can't decide between this and that, but basically it's the same thing.' We must therefore inject some Difference into permanence, and the accursed lands of the South fortunately know how to produce something other than the seeds of terrorism, drugs, or flesh for the paedophile. Respecting the thresholds of tolerance, they contribute zealously to the service of Difference, for 'the North needs the creators of the South to enrich societies of the centre with exotic music, images, cultures, and cuisines'.²

The consensual elite itself does not escape these moments of despair; it has succeeded all too well in dismembering the 'generic population', draining all energy out of it: the vote-fodder doesn't even bother getting up to vote. One despairs: where is the Santa Claus who will make a 'great project' emerge? Of course, the state still 'functions', but a function has never given birth to a project! The state is no longer anything but 'the state of necessity and of the understanding',³ a nightwatchman incapable of rousing thermostat-citizens mired in their 'pragmatism'.

For global fluidity, global distress! There is no way that states will remain the sole project managers of the sanitary Magna Carta of the mental that is emerging here. Each country's ministers for the struggle of Good against Evil could no doubt take charge of the indigenous outsourcing of Just Causes, but it seems that only multinational superstitious sects—like the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, etc.—are able to respond to the formidable demand of the Great Market of anguish that emerges along with the cybercattle of neurocracy, who are crying out for rudimentary epics and 'strong and simple messages'. What's more, their recycling of junkies has already allowed them to promote techniques for the mutilation and disarticulation of syntax designed to export postures and modes of being for billions of 'individuals'.

The thermo-civil society cannot keep its promises: the tyranny and mediocrity of socio-economic demand have vanquished what was supposed to incarnate the dynamism and the legitimacy of a new postmodern micropolitics.

It has indeed given birth to an 'equilibrium', but it is not a living unity, it is but a 'general equilibrium', an immense, inert Sargasso sea. Wiener's 'background noise' is making headway, but enthusiasm is at low tide. The spirit of enterprise goes out with a whimper: Keynes joins Bataille and...Hölderlin, who knows that 'if enthusiasm dies, the gods also die...', when he writes:

A large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation, whether moral or hedonistic or economic. Most, probably, of our decisions to do something positive, the full consequences of which will be drawn out over many days to come, can only be taken as a result of animal spirits—of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities. Enterprise only pretends to itself to be mainly actuated by the statements in its own prospectus, however candid and sincere. Only a little more than an expedition to the South Pole, is it based on an exact calculation of benefits to come. Thus if the animal spirits are dimmed and the spontaneous optimism falters, leaving us to depend on nothing but a mathematical expectation, enterprise will fade and die;—though fears of loss may have a basis no more reasonable than hopes of profit had before.

It is safe to say that enterprise which depends on hopes stretching into the future benefits the community as a whole. But individual initiative will only be adequate when reasonable calculation is supplemented and supported by animal spirits, so that the thought of ultimate loss which often overtakes pioneers, as experience undoubtedly tells us and them, is put aside as a healthy man puts aside the expectation of death.⁴

Incapable of understanding work as patience, churning out boredom, envy and resentment like sausages, has consensual engineering vanquished politics forever? Was Pareto right? Do the phases of History swing back and forth like the oscillations of a pendulum: youth, maturity, decadence, elites succeeding one another like the cycle of thin cows and fat cows, their cadavers accumulating like fossils? Is History just a graveyard of aristocracies,⁵ an interminable chronicle of triumphs as ephemeral and derisory as the perpetual pugilism of the Great Natural Banquet in which the species gobble each other up?

To the mediocrity of the 'average man', incapable of enthusiasm and wallowing in pluralism (that anaesthetised multiple), we should oppose the anyone [*l'homme quelconque*], capable of awakening the political gesture that surpasses all routine and every anticipated possibility. For there is a heroism of the anyone, of that anyone who, at once singular and innocent, might be the vehicle of an exception that, as Carl Schmitt says, 'thinks the general with intense passion'.⁶

It is precisely this exception that manifests the excellence of politics as such, as that which, according to Hegel, is essentially linked with the heroic and the superfluous, as the site of decisions foreign to 'natural'

approaches, to statistical considerations and to the anticipations of crowd psychology. Exceptions abound in market democracies, but the Consensual Elite confiscates them as celebrities, or as a 'rare resource' or, worst of all, as a nostalgic residue of the 'extreme', the complement of the territory of the 'average man'.

But although the exceptional does not 'emerge out of' a Chaos of possibles, it cannot for all that be defined in opposition to the 'average man'. The exceptional is not a privilege reserved for 'big names': the anyone-hero may be a Leveller, a Sans-culotte or an anonymous member of the resistance, but is one who knows that freedom strikes as a deed, and cannot be reduced to a 'choice'. The anyone-hero does not hide behind a deduction or an optimization; with this hero we are far from the piloting of the Invisible Hand, from 'step by step' decisions emerging painfully from the speculations of lobby groups. Only the heroism of the anyone can save civil society from its laziness and egoism; it does not manage coalitions of completed individuals—however spiced up with the 'chaotic' they may be—but propels new individuations into the collective. This is why it possesses the capacity to absolutely startle us—who can forget the sailors of the *Potemkin* or the railwaymen of the Battle of the Rails?—to amplify our possibilities, to save us from the squalid condition of a 'human species' with no God to turn to, and thus to prevent History from being just the sum of conquests of 'ecological niches' assuring the optimal proliferation of tribes.

So it is anyone-heroism that saves the democratic principle and makes it impossible to reduce it to a 'choice of society', to one form chosen amongst others because it seems the lesser evil.² Democracy is not deduced from an optimization of preexisting possibilities but emerges through a wager, infinitely more generous and thus infinitely more risky, on the excellence of the multitude's virtualities and its ability to distribute them. This wager is linked to the principle of the innocence of the exception: no individual, no lobby, no community, no party possesses the privileged vocation to the exercise of power. Thus there is no democracy without the democratic production of an elite!

Democracy is 'worthwhile' because it leaves open a chance for this anyone-heroism of which, so far, History has tolerated only the first stammerings.

What if we finally decided to understand otherwise the Great Amoeba of the billion men? To do so it would not be enough to optimise the profits and caprices of cybernomads. We should have to amplify and deepen democracy by revealing a more subtle affinity between the individual and the collective. This new dimension would leap beyond 'predictions', 'reversible choices' and 'opinions', the cheap

trinkets of Diversity and private life. This highest point of freedom would call for the most irreversible decisions. No point in sounding the Sargasso sea to seize this dimension zero, this heart wherein palpitate all ambiguities and all powers.

What if the horoscope of 'great tendencies' has got it wrong? What if the cybercattle were to become a people once more, with its songs and its hearty appetites, a giant vibrating membrane, a pulp-humanity from which all flesh would unfold? This would perhaps be a modern definition of communism: 'To each according to his singularity!' One thing is for sure, we shall have our work cut out for us, for we shall have to triumph where Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche did not.

NOTES

1. 'The Sacred Conspiracy', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1985).
2. Attali, *Millennium*, 78.
3. Hegel, *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*, 221 (§183).
4. Keynes, *General Theory*, 161–2 (Italics ours).
5. An expression of Pareto's.
6. C. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, tr. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 15.
7. See Winston Churchill's unfortunate definition: 'Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried.'

Glossary for the Reader

Uninitiated in Political Economy

ANARCHO-MERCANTILISM (SEE ALSO: LIBERTARIANS)

An intellectual current which, often subtly and even playfully, presents submission to the market as the incarnation of liberatory ideas brought to maturity. The market therefore appears as the victory of a type of anarchist ruse on the part of History, completing a peaceful synthesis of all social relations (economic, political, cultural, etc...) understood solely in terms of the particular individual (see methodological individualism). Leading the way in this current: Milton Friedman, James M. Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Friedrich von Hayek—considered to be the great inspiration behind the ‘American Conservative Revolution’—or what we call the Neoliberal Counter-Reformation.

ANARCHO-PLUTOCRACY

See *anarcho-mercantilism* and *libertarians*, and chapter 3 on the cybermercantile order.

BURIDAN, JEAN

Fifteenth-century scholastic philosopher (logician and commentator on Aristotle), well known for his studies on freedom. To him is (apparently falsely) attributed the fable of an ass who is equally hungry and thirsty, and finds itself equidistant from a bushel of oats and a pail of water. Buridan thus sought to illustrate the existence of the freedom of indifference.

BURKE, EDMUND

Conservative man of politics known for his eloquence, his lucidity, and above all his fierce hostility to the French Revolution (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790).

METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM

Methodological individualism claims to ‘set out’ from the lone individual in order to understand social life. The already-formed

individual with his knowledge and beliefs is supposed to be the basic self-evident unit susceptible to a 'non-ideological' approach. This 'self-evidence' leads to a privileging of particularisation to the detriment of individuation, which takes account of the genesis and the surpassing of the individual. Methodological individualism is one of the founding pillars of anarcho-mercantilism: ego-particularities are supposed to construct—through the device of their interactions, which form a market—a higher harmony. The mercantile empiricist, a character introduced in chapter 3, is naturally a fanatical methodological individualist. According to him, the socius can be reduced to facts of language—a language, what's more, that is instrumentalized into binarizable, digitizable signifying chains, designed for the transparent communication demanded by the market-democracy: Language will be honest and digital or will not be at all.

We propose several set pieces here whose description is borrowed either from J.M. Buchanan or from J.-P. Dupuy, and which will allow freshman readers to initiate themselves into the cybernetic vaudeville of methodological individualism:

—*The Watermelon-Seller and the Professor* (see Buchanan's text, chapter 3, note 8).

—*Robinson and Friday's Pre-Mercantile Conjugalinity* (see Buchanan, *Limits of Liberty*, 10).

—*The Prisoner's Dilemma* (Dupuy, *Logique des phénomènes collectifs*, 53; we have followed the text...with a few modifications!):

Consider the following game: Two condemned prisoners, in their respective cells, await the day of their execution. One fine day, they receive a message from the Grand Vizier: he has decided to pardon them. The next morning, they will be set free. However, they can, if they wish, ask that their sentence be commuted to a penalty of ten years in prison. If they decide to do so, they must address their request to the Grand Vizier on that very day, before midnight: it will immediately be agreed to. But they must know then that their companion in misfortune will be executed the very next day, and not pardoned—unless he also requested to 'benefit' from ten years in prison. The prisoners have no means of communication. Each of the two prisoners has the choice between two strategies: to do nothing, or to write to the Vizier. The first is a strategy of cooperation, the second a strategy of desertion—since by asking for ten years in prison, one risks condemning the other to death—a desertion which on first sight appears to offer no advantage to he who is guilty of it. No problem here, then.

—*Postmodern conjugalinity: Turbo-Bécassine's Hairdryer*:

Turbo-Bécassine's hairdryer is broken. She wants Cyber-Gideon to repair it but she does not want to ask him directly. She comes up with the following scene: She takes apart the hairdryer and scatters the pieces all around her. But she makes sure that Cyber-Gideon knows that it's a set-up scene. Her intention is indeed to let Cyber-Gideon know that she needs his help, and the means she finds to transmit this information is to make it evident to Cyber-Gideon that she intends to inform him. However, this second-level intention—the intention to make it obvious that one has the intention to inform—must remain hidden from Cyber-Gideon. This is the essential difference from an open communication, in which Turbo-Bécassine would directly ask Cyber-Gideon to help her. Before analysing more precisely what this difference consists in, let us see the implications for the relationship between Turbo-Bécassine and Cyber-Gideon. These implications are considerable. Turbo-Bécassine does not want to owe Cyber-Gideon anything, but neither does she want to be rejected by him. In addressing herself openly to him, she would risk both. Her scene-setting enables her to totally avoid the risk. If Cyber-Gideon does the work, it is of his own volition; Turbo-Bécassine, who has not asked for anything, owes him nothing. But Cyber-Gideon may very well do nothing: after all, he may not necessarily interpret Turbo-Bécassine's little game as a call for help. Turbo-Bécassine has given him a way out: it would not be a matter of a rude refusal, but of mere inattentiveness.

—*Newcomb's Paradox* (or *the evil box of Mr. Strumpf the Predictor*, Dupuy, *Logique des phénomènes collectifs*, 98):

Take two boxes, one transparent and containing a thousand francs, the other opaque and either containing a million francs or empty. The agent's choice is therefore:

A1: Take only the contents of the opaque box, or

A2: Take the contents of both boxes.

At the moment the problem is put to the agent, Strumpf the Predictor will already have placed a million francs in the opaque box if and only if he predicts that the agent will choose A1. The agent knows all of this and he has great confidence in the predictive capacities of Strumpf the predictor. What should he do?

The reader will most likely be astonished at the pathetic puerility of all these psychological games which are supposed to be endowed with a 'perplexity' manifestly concocted for game theory and suitable for the approval of specialists in methodological individualism. We can now grasp better economist Alfred Marshall's regret: 'If I had another life, I would dedicate it to psychology.' It can never be repeated enough that neoclassical economics was founded by amateurs (and not particularly talented ones) in psychology. Some of them even thought that the heart

of the economic problem was psychology. Which is true...if the latter is reduced to a shopkeeper's calculations or a boarding-school prank. To be more modern, to seduce the Cyber-Gideons, the Turbo-Bécassines, and other postmodern Topazes, naturally it must be spiced up with econometry and game theory.

LIBERTARIANS

Certainly the most playful faction of the great anarcho-mercantilist family. Leader: Robert Nozick.

The great trick here is to present oneself as 'radical' and even as 'struggling against' the conservative anarcho-mercantilists allergic to liberalising abortion laws and controlled legalization of drugs (on these points, libertarians are far more advanced than many classical progressives...).

The libertarians know very well how to play on the seductive side of their role as festive neobourgeoises, so as to hide their cynical legitimation of the status quo and even dramatic accentuation of inequality. Basically they push the principle of 'anything goes', and defend the idea of a maximal private liberty that can be attained, according to them, only within the framework of a market economy, associated with a minimal ('nightwatchman') state whose function, at most, is to ensure order and justice so as to eliminate violence and protect property rights.

Thus it is in particular a matter of holding to the ultraconservative principle—inspired by Pareto—of seeking a social distribution of wealth subject to one express condition: do no harm to anyone (and above all not to the two thousand inhabitants of the planet who possess as much as the other two billion put together).

This principle, so it seems, worried the head of the Mitterrand administration who, at the end of his life, would declare: 'Perhaps I failed. But I meant well—I wanted to improve the life of each person without harming anybody.'

NOUVEAUX PHILOSOPHES

See *post-philosophers*.

POSTMODERN

This tendency ('movement'?) could also be called post-industrial-post-cynicism, or really, at this point, post-anything. It is defined as that which sees modernity as 'behind it', or as that which shuffles the cards

of modernity, as Henri Meschonnic says quite rightly in his brilliant essay *Modernité, modernité*.

Let us note how the principle that governs anarchomercantilist (*qv*) tartuffery: 'Do good without harming anyone' agrees very well with the tartuffery of postmodernism—'Make vogues without making any waves'—which, along with its 'language games', its microdecisions, its 'yes-no-perhaps', its 'rightly or wrongly', always ends up sitting idly by. Let us not forget that anarchomercantilism is at its keenest when spiced up with a bit of 'creativity' and a pinch of the 'tragic'. This is where two old buddies of postmodernism come in: Chaos and Radical Evil.

This is perhaps why, in his book (see p222) Henri Meschonnic does not hesitate to say of one of the master thinkers of postmodernity that he attributes 'total wars, totalitarianisms, the growing gap between north and south, unemployment and the new poverty, general loss of culture and the education crisis' all to 'techno-scientific, artistic, economic and political development'. With the final word: 'One name signs the end of the modern ideal: Auschwitz.'

Let's close with Félix Guattari's excellent commentary:

A certain conception of progress and of modernity has gone bankrupt, compromising in its collapse collective confidence in the very idea of emancipatory social practice. In parallel, a sort of glaciation has taken over social relations: hierarchies and segregations have rigidified, poverty and unemployment tend to be accepted today as inevitable evils [...] It is not surprising, after all that, if the ideologies that once claimed to serve as a guide to rebuilding society on a less unjust, less unequal basis have lost their credibility. [...]

And I think that it is for want of the capacity to face up to this prodigious mutation appropriately that collective subjectivity has given in to the absurd wave of conservatism that we are currently experiencing. [...]

Are we not, therefore, at the centre of what Jean-François Lyotard calls the postmodern condition, which (unlike this author) I understand to be the paradigm of all the submissions, all the compromises with the status quo? As a result of the collapse of what he calls the master narratives of legitimation (the discourse of the Enlightenment, for example, that of Hegel on the accomplishment of the Spirit, or that of the Marxists on the emancipation of the workers), it would be suitable—still according to Jean-François Lyotard—to be suspicious of the slightest impulse to concerted social action. All consensual values, he explains to us, have become outdated and suspect. Only the little narratives of legitimation, in other words, the multiple, heterogeneous 'pragmatics of language particles' (whose performativity must have spatio-temporal limits) can still save some of the values of justice and freedom. Here, Jean-François Lyotard joins other theorists, such as Jean Baudrillard, for whom the social and the political have only ever been traps, 'semblances' from which it would be a good idea to free oneself as quickly as possible.

'No waves! Just vogues.' Whether they are painters, architects or philosophers, the heroes of postmodernity share an assessment that the

crises the artistic and social practices are experiencing today can no longer lead into anything other than irrevocable refusal of any collective projectuality of any scale. Let's tend to our garden then, and preferably in conformity with the habits and customs of our contemporaries. No waves! Just vogues, modulated on the markets of art and opinion by means of publicity campaigns and opinion polls. [...]

But where, for that matter, do they get the idea from that the *socius* can thus be reduced to the facts of language, and these latter in turn to binarizable, 'digitizable' signifying chains? On this point the postmoderns have hardly innovated! They are directly inscribed in the very modernist tradition of structuralism, whose influence on the human sciences it seems must have been relayed, in the worst conditions, by Anglo-Saxon systemism. The secret link between all these doctrines, it seems to me, derives from their having been marked by the reductionist ideas conveyed in the immediate post-war period by information theory and the first cybernetic research. The references that they continued trying to extract from the new communication and information technologies were so hasty, so badly mastered, that they projected us way back behind the phenomenological research that had preceded them.

One must come back to the simple obvious fact—but how heavy in consequences—namely that concrete social Assemblages, which should not be confused with the 'primary groups' of American sociology (which still only arise from opinion) call into question many other things than linguistic performances: ethological and ecological dimensions, economic, aesthetic, corporeal, phantasmatic semiotic components that are irreducible to the semiology of language, a multitude of incorporeal Universes of reference, which do not willingly becoming integrated into the coordinates of the dominant empiricity. [...]

However much postmodern philosophers flutter around research in pragmatics, they remain faithful to a structuralist conception of speech and language that will never allow them to articulate subjective facts with the formations of the unconscious, aesthetic and micropolitical problematics. To say it without beating about the bush, I believe that this philosophy is not one: it is only an ambient state of mind, a 'condition' of opinion, which takes its truths from the trends of the day. Why would it go to the bother of elaborating serious speculative support for its thesis relative to the inconsistency of the *socius*? Don't the currently all-powerful media amply complement the demonstration that effectively no matter what social link can lend itself, with no apparent resistance, to the desingularizing and infantilizing reduction of capitalistic productions of the signifier? An old adage of Lacan's, according to which 'a signifier represents the subject for another signifier' could be the epigraph for this new ethic of disengagement. Because in effect that is what it has come to! Only there really is nothing to be proud of, in the way the postmodernists are. The whole question is rather one of knowing how it is possible to get out of such an impasse!¹

Recall also that Bill Clinton was saluted by *Time* magazine in October 1996 as the first 'postmodern' president.

POST-PHILOSOPHERS

Cartel of media interventionists, audacious enough to have succeeded in selling the bearskin without even having killed the bear (see their cult book: *Marx is Dead*) and in convincing people that the status of turncoat can be parlayed into an excellent legacy. Played a determining role in the creation of the French reign of the Suckers of Consensus, rapidly recognized as the most effective of the sects born of the Liberal Counter-Reformation.

NOTES

[1.](#) F. Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, tr. A. Goffey (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 36–40.