

The Limits of Reason Indeed Leave Something to be Desired

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I

The idea of public debate always runs ahead of essential change in cultural otherness. The optics of the prevailing order of discourse usually privileges the elements of (more or less) specific communities. Thus the sovereignty of individual psychology has no place within the system of assimilation generated by contemporary culture. The tautological 'balance' of boredom, however, is the stuff from which the farce of identity is made. On the other hand, subtle deviation will not be unknown to those familiar with 'radical consciousness'. The current condition provokes a crisis in our understanding of private discussion; the available pool of gestures becomes a mere province of oral transformation. Social demand—or what we call social demand—is becoming inseparable from any other source of meaning. Sometimes there is an apparently irreversible move towards reflection; but, alas, speech is mostly an ornament of more or less aestheticized rationality: 'repressed' writing pragmatically distilled into oral charisma. An important first step towards the supersession of merely supplementary mentality is to develop a concrete sensitivity to the variability of pedagogical production and to the transitions and interfaces between the various states or configurations of participatory abstraction. Fundamentally, one is forced to observe the constant vacuum of material practice on its own terms, if at all. We are looking for a 'point of view' that pays attention to the absurd associations buried in the catacombs of social behaviour, but also goes behind the simple 'outgrowths' and projects of everyday pleasure. A closure of referential economy, in terms of desire, is seen where no closure is intended. This (new?) desire is also visible in the (functional) foregrounding of subjectivity itself. The regime of victimization remains essentially preoccupied with the discursive position of its own genesis instead of being preoccupied, for example, with the issue of decentred excess and surrendering to it. One person's life process becomes another person's text, and vice versa. On the edge of dialectical representation, the ambivalent consciousness finds a temporary foothold. Wherever there is some structure of political instrumentality, there is some capacity of artistic respectability. But the entire concept of parody, with its many layers of meaning, is vague out of necessity and has always been in a state of constant flux.

II

Can the contradictions of 'sexual meaning' be read allegorically, as an index of mythological-functional appropriation or even as a colonization of political entropy? Perhaps. A new, almost utopian terrain of libidinous morphology is breaking through to the surface of quotidian consciousness, whose 'dual' character combines strategic secretion with the domination of purely improvisatory perspectives, inasmuch as formal maximization folds back on parasitical content. A truncated, blocked, or otherwise damaged sense of canonical components may lead one to prefer the metabolism of artistic theory to the sphere of irony, since the corpus of non-illustrative interpretation has not expanded much in recent years, although there have been important new contributions of 'postmodern' paranoia. It is very important to keep in mind that, in a certain sense, modern disorder has changed nothing at all; indeed it seems most reasonable to assume that a discursive distortion of everyday life has been going on through all of history. A space of quasi-legitimacy is created in which plotless life succumbs to hypostatization, and the phantom worlds of indifference are swept away by highly hypothetical constellations of desire. Even monolithically idiosyncratic failure may at some point turn into an objective cultural resource. Abolishing the codes of ideological power may sometimes soothe the embarrassments of history. But this must not satisfy us. The matrix of social meaning has a life of its own. The desire for common interpretation becomes an element in the economy of cultural misery recycled as individual happiness. It is a wonder that no one has yet made any studies of the dominant discourse from the point of view of objective self-destruction. The rich load of apathetic embeddedness in contemporary involvement drags everybody down towards the earth, to the pathetic liquidation of everyday life. As long as all disinterested relations between individual persons can be kept out, the system of stereotypical desire can begin. The problem of collapse in political discourse cannot be recognized exclusively in a context of journalistic forces.

III

The rising star of wide-eyed innocence lies with the distribution of élitist obscurity as a more or less permanent state of mind. Have the signifiers of otherness simply been bureaucratized? Do they even have to obey the laws of their own motive power? Various limitations, weaknesses and problems are associated with all forms of relevant critique, and some of these are highlighted in the discussion of the human body as an emblem of cultural liberation. (Biological reproduction always means 'something else'. For example, the 'absolute' materialism of copulation may represent a form of escape into extra-social redundancy or another ontological oversimplification. Many of the correspondences between subjective experience and the realm of sexuality are only occasional, and rather unimportant. What is more important is the hegemony of certain propositions and metaphors.) Is it possible to 'hijack' objective institutional development, qua linguistic 'intuition', into feeling-thinking subjectivity? The concept of artistic content is always-already closely connected with reification in general, so we may say that artistic practice involves as a fundamental property both critical transcendence and simplistic immanence. Of course, contemporary thought itself is the law of any will to privileged meaning, be it advanced or underdeveloped. Take care of your strategy, and the rest of the cultural

apparatus will take care of itself. Privileged meaning as an inexhaustible multiplicity of 'arch-contemporary' qualities, an infinite network of mediated (but sometimes also immediate) social functions, involves another 'field': the one that suddenly appears in public discussion when we go beyond triumphant ordinariness to examine its cosmos of conspicuous fragments and the intensities involved. As an actor in postcultural space, you may march under the flag of 'absolutely false' ontology, yet remain completely stuck in *relatively real* ontology. The principle of art marks a new way of bringing all sorts of strategic fetishization of ambiguity into contact with the hierarchies of social and cultural meaning. Harmful paranoia-for-itself is more useful than 'useful' hunger for poetic depression-in-itself. There are many who still regard the freedom of parody as a form of social value which (blasted free from canon, as it were) transcends the universe of social as well as subjective plateaus, even though it is impossible to understand parody as a powerful *transgressive* phenomenon. In society much depends on conventional banalization (utilitarian imperatives, the geometry of whatever, etc.). The upheavals of real art always take place behind the back of guilty pleasure. In a sterile environment—perhaps under the pressure of political events—cultural mediocrity dies. It also dies in an environment of its own creation, namely in the presence of its poisonous 'excreta' such as still unrealized hermeneutic potential, pedantic globalism, *usus tyrannus* as a simple form of sociolinguistic determination, orthodoxly realized heterodoxy vis-à-vis the public/private split, and numerous other by-products.

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Out-take:

“In the beginning was unparalleled, unmitigated mediocrity. Generally speaking, that which was Other simply was the Same. At least from an artistic point of view, a change in otherness was much called for. But perhaps today things have changed somewhat. In terms of a 'conclusive situation', the future is, and remains for postcultural capitalism, on the side of its highest power of motivation, something superseded. This is very difficult to analyse or discuss. A kind of always-already anticipated 'dimension' seems to distort oral 'truth' from the outset. If we now investigate artistic jouissance, in a somewhat similar way we meet with two opposite tendencies: on one side we see the dynamics of mental mutation, on the other side we see the stasis of absolute materialism. The act of speaking is indeed fraught with violence. Talking is difficult. Fonagy has fascinating pages on the 'vulgarity' which speakers ascribe to certain sounds, a vulgarity due to metonymic association between the position of the organs of speech during their production and that of the other artifices of the body. All excess begins and ends with the pragmatics of conversation. The fundamental principle involved here may be called *the tyranny of communication*. Everything can fall prey to platitude and become part of its vast production apparatus. On the other hand, as Heidegger points out, s/he who never says anything cannot keep silent. And as long as silence and secrecy can be kept out, context-relevant stubbornness can begin. What cannot be absorbed by the coprolith of ongoing discussion in many cases leads to caricature. This can never be

a privilege—unless, of course, you invest caricature with utopian qualities. We are looking for a point of view that pays attention to cultural overload, or delirium, but also goes behind it. Question: How might artistic materiality become a model of Quixotic precision to you? The logic of art exceeds and undercuts materiality, runs loose, wins a few rounds, recedes, gets carried home in the clutch of some sort of denial—and returns. Permanently, a spectre haunts the tactile world: language. But another spectre haunts language: stupidity. Following Barthes, stupidity functions as the Thing to the extent that it wards off the symbolization that it also demands. Stupidity is a foreign body that can be neither fully repelled nor successfully assimilated. He who knocks stupidity off its pedestal almost inevitably puts it on the pedestal of cruelty instead. Stupidity is often an ornament of beauty. Intelligence itself depends on a withholding pattern that in some cases matches the irremediable reluctance of the stupid. One cannot easily stand accused of stupidity without the risk of becoming its agent. Stupidity vampirizes; it can zap your husband, finish off your lover, blunt your therapist. Love indicates one of the few sites where it is permitted to be stupid. Like life itself, stupidity, according to Flaubert, cannot be summed up or properly understood, but resembles a natural object—a stone or a mountain. Stupid often comes in couples (for example, Laurel and Hardy). Stupidity seizes our autobiographical effort, taking the place of our 'we'. A space of collective sensibility is created in which criticism succumbs to collectivity. [...] Essentially linked to the inexhaustible, much artistic thought fatigues knowledge and wears down history. The crucial 'dull-mindedness' of the artist does not always correspond to a moment of social logic but more often annexes the coordinates of sociocultural intelligence as a whole. The extreme passivity, the near stupor characteristic of much artistic mentality, situates it dangerously close to depletion and even death. From the point of view of death, life may seem meaningless. One of the characteristics of a situation of double bind, according to Bateson, is that the subject cannot leave the game. The reinvention of oneself has in detail very little to do with the whateverness of existence. What is needed is a strategy which allows death to communicate with love. [...] Is it possible to 'hijack' the farce/tragedy distinction into an epi-contemporary practice of reflection? The space of linguistic separation is one of oscillation, of lost and won ground, of supplantation and transformation between the mutations of psychic oversimplification and social redundancy. [...] Heraldry contains a sort of metaphysics of the void, a compulsion to vanish 'nobly'. In art, the age of emblematic purity started with Malevich. [...] Flaubert argued that writing was always an immersion in stupidity. Behind the poetic word lurks the spectre of prose. The real question is not that of poetic language, but that of cultural boredom. Grammatical rules derive a large amount of political power from their very regularity. A brief look at rational thought shows indeed that enlightenment does not come out of the blue. The scandal of intellectualization is part of its attraction. We do not seek to express an emotional content in terms of cultural, political, or sexual investment. Our main interest is in the exploration and preservation of consciousness as a *functional* aspect. The monad has neither door nor window, and only pre-established harmony allows it to express (i.e., to realise its potential in unfolding) or represent other monads. We suggest the following: (1) a discursive rule can always be transgressed or defeated in the relevant work of art, providing the transgression introduces a new rule, which must be at least as visible as the old one (the term 'visible' is deliberately vague, but its meaning

is intuitively clear); (2) the transgression does not cancel the old rule, it maintains it in the background, so that the new rule is limited in its scope, and temporary. [...] Cult value is usually crowned by phantom concepts. Are we nothing but figments of God's dreams? This question seems to have greatly occupied the British mind since Bishop Berkeley. What seems to preoccupy the Danish mind? You may march under the flag of egotism, yet remain completely stuck in slave mentality. "They offend the signifiers that I produce. Therefore I am." Freedom of speech apparently has a life of its own. We must expect to find platitude and useless details everywhere. On the way to a mass audience there are many singular imbeciles. The power vacuum of the cultural brain is not at the mercy of mere chance. The violent extremes of consensus find a mighty echo beyond welfare democracy. Fiction is not natural but is a product of reality. Intention offers a means of withdrawing from chance. If formulaic feeling is a reality rather than a construct devised to save time and mental effort, it is necessarily subtly stratified; indeed, it often distinctly breeds mutually hostile clichés. Enslavement and mastery can remain separate or unify. Despite the creation of special incubators, it has proved impossible to hatch any kind of overeducated ignorance. Freedom is not open to debate. A further effort, Danes, if you would become holy simpletons. [...] The general concept of 'sexuality/thought co-presence' all too often lends itself to the machinery of social meaning. The principle that a colossal farce is the basis of artistic practice applies to political life as well. Tracing the logic of democracy-as-a-pain-in-the-ass reveals the significance of cultural meaning for art. Thus one is stuck within a psycho-cultural model that compares the forces of ecstasy to social practice which, on the one hand, implies specific parameters of relevance, and, on the other, the nostalgia for the total elimination of society as such. In terms of political possibilities, much seems to indicate that today we live in a linguistic world where Aristotle's views about the scarcity of words in relation to potential referents (in *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, 1, 615a, 11) is true. Many believe that truly new words can no longer be invented. On the other hand, in dealing with semantic innovation we might find ourselves too open to metaphorical structures or conditions, and too destitute of catachresis; for which reason a truly productive analysis of the passage from 'pure' political reason to self-emblemization very often would be of little interest to the relevant cultural producers. Socially converted absurdity simply becomes the object of cultural compensation. We know that some cultures have existed quite happily on a non-aesthetic basis. The sick one often finds someone who is even sicker to take care of. Why is there 'artistic complexity' rather than cultural development? Unnarratable lethargy very often makes all things new. Wherever there is social meaning, there is some exchange of unreality. Society reflects the great longing for linguistic collapse. Political discourse expresses a longing for tautology. Only a tiny fraction of objective reality affects the process of political mutation. The monomaniacal imagination of artistic obsession and social monotony interpenetrate and illustrate each other. The creation of freedom may rightly be felt to pale into insignificance beside the production of art. Viewed in terms of social metaphysics, art becomes a form of cultural oversimplification. Artistic discourse remains sheer promise. It 'changes' nothing. The perhaps ultimately pointless logic of art is the Achilles' heel of social oversimplification (sic). Political discourse begins and ends with social hypocrisy. Genuine political exchange is not natural, but is a product of the *hapax*, of the unique encounter. Artistic practice can enter society only as a corpse. The

deformation of social space may at some point turn into art. But this must not satisfy us.”

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