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Postmodernity and its Discontents
ZYGMUNT BAUMAN
Polity Press

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Introduction: Discontents - Modern and Postmodern

In 1930 a book called first Das Unglück in der Kultur, and later renamed Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, appeared in Vienna. Its author was Sigmund Freud. Almost simultaneously, the English translation appeared -- for which Freud suggested a title Man's Discomfort in Civilization. As Freud's English editor James Strachey informs us, Joan Riviere, the book's English translator, played instead for a time with the concept of malaise, but chose finally the title Civilization and its Discontents. It is under this title that Freud's provocative challenge to the folklore of modernity entered our collective consciousness and in the end framed our thinking about the consequences -- both intended and unintended -- of the modern adventure. (We know now that it was the story of modernity which the book told, even if its author preferred to speak of Kultur or civilization only modern society thought of itself as an activity of culture or civilization, and acted on such self-knowledge, with the results Freud set out to explore; the phrase 'modern civilization' is, for this reason, a pleonasm.)

You gain something, but usually you lose something in exchange: so went Freud's message. As 'culture' or 'civilization', modernity is about beauty ('this useless thing which we expect civilization to value'), cleanliness ('dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization') and order ('Order is a form), purity and order are gains not to be played down and certainly not likely to be given up without an outcry, breast-beating and remorse. But neither are they to be had without paying a heavy price. Nothing predisposes humans 'naturally' to seek or preserve beauty, to keep clean and to observe the routine called order. (If they seem here and there to display such an 'instinct', it must be a contrived and acquired, trained inclination, the surest sign of a civilization at work.) Humans need be forced to respect

and appreciate harmony, cleanliness and order. Their freedom to act on their own impulses must be trimmed. Constraint is painful: defence against suffering generates sufferings of its own.

'Civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct.' In particular -- so Freud tells us -- civilization (read: modernity) 'imposes great sacrifices' on man's sexuality and aggressivity. 'The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization or against civilization altogether.' And it cannot be otherwise. The pleasures of civilized life come in a package deal, so Freud insists, with sufferings, satisfaction with discontents, submission with rebellion. Civilization -- the order imposed upon naturally disorderly humanity -- is a compromise, a trade-off, continually challenged and forever nudged to be renegotiated. The pleasure principle is here cut down to the measure of the reality principle and the rules spell out that reality which is the measure of the realistic. 'Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security.'

However well justified and realistic may be our attempts to improve on specific flaws of the present-day solutions, 'perhaps we may also familiarize ourselves with the idea that there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform'.

Of that order which was the pride of modernity and the cornerstone of all its other accomplishments (whether appearing under the same rubric of order or hiding under the code-names of beauty and cleanliness), Freud spoke in terms of 'compulsion', 'regulation', 'suppression' or forced renunciation. Those discontents which were the trade-mark of modernity arose from the 'excess of order' and its inseparable companion -- the dearth of freedom. Security from the triple threat hidden in the frail body, the untamed world and the aggressive neighbours called for the sacrifice of freedom; first and foremost, the individual's freedom to seek pleasure. Within the framework of a civilization bent on security, more freedom meant less discontent. Within the framework of a civilization that chose to limit freedom in the name of security, more order meant more discontent.

Ours, however, is the time of deregulation. The reality principle has today to defend itself in the court of justice in which the pleasure principle is the presiding judge. 'The idea that there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform' seems to have lost its pristine obviousness. Compulsion and forced renunciation has turned from an irritating necessity into an unwarranted assault launched against individual freedom.
Sixty-five years after *Civilization and its Discontents* was written and published, individual freedom rules supreme; it is the value by which all other values came to be evaluated, and the benchmark against which the wisdom of all supra-individual rules and resolutions are to be measured. This does not mean, though, that the ideals of beauty, purity and order which sent men and women on their modern voyage of discovery have been forsaken, or lost any of their original lustre. Now, however, they are to be pursued -- and fulfilled -- through individual spontaneity, will and effort. In its present, postmodern version, modernity seems to have found the philosophers' stone which Freud dismissed as a naive and harmful fantasy: it set out to smelt the precious metals of clean order and orderly cleanliness straight from the ore of the human, all-too-human bid for pleasure, ever more pleasure and ever more pleasurable pleasure -- a bid once decried as base and condemned as self-destructive. As if unscathed, perhaps even strengthened, by two centuries of concentrated efforts to keep it in the iron glove of reason-dictated rules and regulations, the 'invisible hand' regained trust and is once more in favour. Individual freedom, once a liability and a problem (perhaps the problem) for all order-builders, became the major asset and resource in the perpetual self-creation of the human universe.

You gain something, you lose something else in exchange: the old rule holds as true today as it was true then. Only the gains and the losses have changed places: *postmodern men and women exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness*. The discontents of modernity arose from a kind of security which tolerated too little freedom in the pursuit of individual happiness. The discontents of postmodernity arise from a kind of freedom of pleasure-seeking which tolerates too little individual security.

Any value is a value (as Georg Simmel long ago observed) only thanks to the loss of other values one must suffer in order to obtain it. But you need most what you lack most. The splendours of freedom are at their brightest when freedom is sacrificed at the altar of security. When it is the turn of security to be sacrificed in the temple of individual freedom, it steals much of the shine of its former victim. If dull and humdrum days haunted the seekers of security, sleepless nights are the curse of the free. In both cases, happiness goes by the board. Listen to Freud again: 'We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things.' Why? Because 'what we call happiness ... comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon'. And so: freedom without security assures no more steady a supply of happiness than security without freedom. A different arrangement of human affairs is not necessarily a step forward on the road to greater happiness -- it only seems to be such at the moment it is being made. Re-evaluation of all values is a happy, exhilarating moment, but the re-evaluated values do not necessarily guarantee a state of bliss.

There are no gains without losses, and the hope of a wondrous purification of gains from losses is as futile as the proverbial dream of a free lunch -- but the gains and losses specific to any arrangement of human cohabitation need to be carefully counted, so that the optimal balance between the two can be sought even if (or rather because) the hard-won sobriety and wisdom prevents us, postmodern men and women, from indulging in a daydream about a balance sheet that has only a credit side.

This book is intended as a collection of small, and partial, contributions to this task.

This book has a special significance for me, since for the first time in the last quarter of a century some of its chapters were originally written in Polish, my native language, and presented to, as well as discussed with, Polish academics and students. My links with my Alma Mater, the University of Warsaw, have been restored. And so too has been the enlightening and stimulating exchange with my friends and colleagues, Polish sociologists and philosophers, all insightful and perceptive, sharp and challenging, too numerous to be mentioned by name, to whom I am in debt for clarifying and polishing many of the ideas this book contains.

My special thanks go to Anthony Giddens: without his continuous interest in my work, his gentle yet relentless, friendly yet determined pressure, this book would never have been put together.

And, as with each successive work of mine for ten years now, I wish to thank my editor, David Roberts. I guess no author could wish for a better understanding with his editor; we both struggle for the same purpose -- which, as Roberts himself put it, is to produce a text 'demanding that the reader should look at things s/he would rather leave unexamined, the role of the editor being 'to remove unnecessary impediments to the reader's understanding without depriving the author of his individual voice'. And no one I know makes these words into flesh more capably than David Roberts.
1: The Dream of Purity

Great crimes often start from great ideas. Few great ideas prove completely innocent when their inspired followers try to make the word flesh -- but some can hardly ever be embraced without the teeth being bared and daggers sharpened. Among this class of ideas, pride of place belongs to the vision of purity.

'The German Final Solution', observed the American writer Cynthia Ozick, 'was an aesthetic solution; it was a job of editing, it was the artist's finger removing a smudge; it simply annihilated what was considered not harmonious.' The German psychologist Klaus Dörner calls his readers 'die Nazis auch als Bänder zu sehen, die genauso wie die Bände vor und nach, ihre Antwort auf die Soziale Frage gesucht haben' -- the 'social question' to which they sought the answer being the question of 'pollution', of the stubborn presence of people who 'did not fit', who were 'out of place', who 'spoiled the picture' -- and otherwise offended the aesthetically gratifying and morally reassuring sense of harmony. In the early years of the modern era, as Michel Foucault reminded us, madmen were rounded up by the city authorities, loaded into Narrenschiffen and sent to sea; madmen stood for 'a dark disorder, a moving chaos ... which opposes the mind's luminous and adult stability'; and the sea stood for water, which 'carries off, but does more: it purifies'.

Purity is an ideal; a vision of the condition which needs yet to be created, or such as needs to be diligently protected against the genuine or imagined odds. Without such a vision, neither the concept of purity makes sense, nor the distinction between purity and impurity can be sensibly drawn. A forest, a mountain range, a meadow, an ocean ('nature' in general, as distinguished from culture, the human product) is neither pure nor impure -- that is, until it is sputtered with the leftovers of a Sunday picnic or infused with the waste of chemical factories. Human intervention does not just soil nature and make it filthy; it introduces into nature the very distinction between purity and filth, it creates the very possibility of a given part of the natural world being 'clean' or 'dirty'.

Purity is a vision of things put in places different from those they would occupy if not prompted to move elsewhere, pushed, pulled or goaded; and it is a vision of order -- that is, of a situation in which each thing is in its rightful place and nowhere else. There is no way of thinking about purity without having an image of 'order', without assigning to things their 'rightful', 'proper' places -- which happen to be such places as they would not fill 'naturally', of their own accord. The opposite of 'purity' -- the dirt, the filth, 'polluting agents' -- are things 'out of place'. It is not the intrinsic quality of things which makes them into 'dirt', but solely their location; more precisely, their location in the order of things envisaged by the purity-seekers. Things which are 'dirt' in one context may become pure just by being put in another place -- and vice versa. Beautifully polished, shining shoes become dirt when put on the dining table; returned to the shoe-stack, they recover their pristine purity. An omelette, a mouth-watering work of culinary art when on the dinner plate, becomes a nasty stain when dropped on the pillow.

There are, however, things for which the 'right place' has not been reserved in any fragment of man-made order. They are 'out of place' everywhere; that is, in all places for which the model of purity has been designed. The world of the purity-seekers is simply too small to accommodate them. It won't be enough to move them to another place; one needs to get rid of them once and for all -- to burn them out, poison them, shatter them in pieces, put them to the sword. More often than not these are mobile things, things that will not stick to their assigned place, that change places of their own accord. The trouble with such things is that they will cross boundaries whether invited to or not. They control their own location, and thus deride the purity-seekers' efforts to 'put things in their place', and in the end lay bare the incurable fragility and shakiness of all placements. Cockroaches, flies, spiders or mice, which at any time may decide to share a home with its legal (human) residents without asking the owners' permission, are for that reason always, potentially, unwanted guests, and so cannot be incorporated into any imaginable scheme of purity.

The situation becomes yet more threatening and calls for yet more vigilance in the case of things which do not just move of their own accord, but do it moreover without drawing attention to themselves; they defy not just the model of purity, but the very effort of its protection, since without being aware of the invasion one does not know that the time of action has arrived, and one can be easily lulled into the illusion of security. Carpet mites, bacteria and viruses belong to that category of things from which nothing is safe, including the pursuit of safety itself. The writers of advertising copy for washing powders and detergent products sense the difference very well -- promising future customers that they will be able to smother and destroy 'the dirt you see and the germs you don't'.

We may gather from what has been said thus far that the interest in purity, and the associated interest in 'hygiene' (that is, keeping the dirt away) has more
from one time to another, from one culture to another — but each time and each culture has a certain model of purity and a certain ideal pattern to be kept intact and unscathed against the odds. Also, all concerns with purity and cleaning emerge from that analysis as essentially alike. Sweeping the floor and stigmatizing traitors or banishing strangers appear to stem from the same motive of the preservation of order, of making or keeping the environment understandable and hospitable to sensible action. This may well be so; but the explanation in such universal, extratemporal and species-wide terms does not go far towards evaluating various forms of purity-pursuits from the point of view of their social and political significance and the gravity of their consequences for human cohabitation.

If we focus our attention on the latter, we will immediately note that among the numerous incarnations of the pattern-sapping ‘dirt’ one case, sociologically speaking, is of a very special, indeed unique, importance: namely, the case of when it is other human beings who are conceived of as an obstacle to the proper ‘organization of environment’ — when, in other words, it is other people, or more specifically a certain category of other people, who become ‘dirt’ and are treated as such.

The founder of phenomenological sociology, Alfred Schütz, made us aware of the characteristics of human life which seem obvious the moment they are pointed out: that if we humans may ‘find our bearings within our natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it’, it is thanks to the fact that this environment has been ‘preselected and preinterpreted... by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life’. Each of us, in our daily activities, and without much thinking about it, uses a tremendous number of products of that preselection and preinterpretation, which combine into what Schütz calls the ‘stock of knowledge at hand’. Without such knowledge, living in the world would be inconceivable. None of us is able to build the world of significations and meanings from scratch; each of us enters a ‘prefabricated’ world, in which certain things are important and others are not; in which the established relevances bring certain things into focus and leave others in the shadow. Above all, we enter a world in which an awful lot of aspects are obvious to the point of not being consciously noticed any more and in need of no active effort, not even spelling them out, to be invisibly, yet tangibly present in everything we do — and thereby endowing our actions, and the things we act upon, with the solidarity of ‘reality’.

Among the tacit, yet indispensable ingredients of the ‘stock of knowledge at hand’, that commonsensical wisdom which all of us receive, to use Schützian terms, as a gift from the ‘intersubjective world of culture’,

from that ‘treasure house of ready-made pre-constituted types’ — pride of place belongs to the assumption of ‘reciprocal perspectives’. What we believe without thinking (and, above all, as long as we do not think about it) is that our experiences are typical — that is, that whoever looks at the object ‘out there’ sees ‘the same’ as we do, and that whoever acts, follows ‘the same’ motives which we know from introspection. We also believe in the ‘interchangeability of standpoints’; to wit, if we put ourselves in another person's place, we will see and feel exactly ‘the same’ as he or she sees and feels in his or her present position — and that this feat of empathy may be reciprocated. This assumption seems pretty straightforward and innocent; perhaps even deeply moral in its consequences, since it postulates the essential similarity of human beings and assigns to the others the qualities of subjects just like our own subjectivity. And yet, to hold fast, this assumption of ‘reciprocal perspectives’ must rest on a still deeper presupposition: that it is not just me who assumes reciprocity of perspective and behaves accordingly — but that this assumption of reciprocity is itself reciprocated. If a suspicion arises that the latter is not the case then the rock-solid construction of daily security falls to pieces. ’I am able to understand other people's acts’, says Schütz, ‘only if I can imagine that I myself would perform analogous acts if I were in the same situation, directed by the same because motives, or oriented by the same in-order- to motives -- all these terms understood in the same restricted sense of the “typical” analogy, the “typical” sameness.” The undetachable corollary of this ability to imagine myself in the situation of the other is, of course, the ability to imagine the other in my own position: the expectation that, if cast in my situation, the other would think and behave just as I do. In other words, the idea of the essential unity between me and the other, which the assumption of our reciprocity of standpoints ostensibly promotes, precedes rather than follows this assumption. I must first be able to accept unproblematically our mutual similarity, the readiness of the other to think and behave along lines identical with my own, for the assumption of our reciprocity of standpoints to hold. The recipes attached to routine situations I am likely to encounter in the course of daily life combine in what Max Scheler called the relativ-natürliche Weltanschauung. Armed with these recipes, I feel secure. For most things I do, and all things I do routinely, they offer a reliable and sufficient guidance. They have all ‘the appearance of a sufficient coherence, clarity, and consistency to give anybody a reasonable chance of understanding and of being understood’. But they boast this salutary and wondrous quality only because they are ‘evident’, accepted matter of
factly, without much reflection -- and this happy-go-lucky situation may exist only as long as no one around begins to question them, ask about their grounds and reasons, points out the discrepancies, lays bare their arbitrariness. This is why the arrival of a Stranger has the impact of an earthquake... The Stranger shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests. He comes from afar; he does not share the local assumptions -- and so 'becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group'. 1 He 'has to' commit this damaging and deplorable act because he has no status within the approached group which would make the pattern of that group look 'natural' to him, and because even if he tried his best, and successfully, to behave outwardly in the fashion that pattern requires, he would not be accorded by the group the credit of reciprocating the group's standpoint.

If 'dirt' is an element which defies the purpose of the ordering efforts, and the self-acting, self-moving and self-directing dirt is an element which defies the very possibility of effective efforts, then the Stranger is the very epitome of the latter. No wonder the locals of all times and places, in their frenzied efforts to separate, confine, exile or destroy the strangers compared the objects of their exertions to vermin and bacteria. No wonder either, that they compared the meaning of their own action to hygienic routines; they fought the 'strangers', convinced that they defended health against the carriers of disease.

This is what 'the locals' (who, to be sure, could think of themselves as 'locals' and constitute themselves into 'locals' only as far as they opposed themselves to the 'strangers' -- that is, to some other people who were not 'locals') did, let me repeat, at all times and places. But in certain situations the preoccupation with Strangers assumed a particularly important role among many activities involved in the daily care of purity, the daily reproduction of inherited and received, order; in which 'being' means a perpetual new beginning. What was 'totalitarian' about totalitarian political programmes, themselves thoroughly modern phenomena, was more than anything else the comprehensiveness of the order they promised, the determination to leave nothing to chance, the simplicity of the cleaning prescriptions, and the redundancy of the dirt-eliminating routine, as the prevention of an occasional, unusual interruption of the routine, that reaches the level of consciousness and arouses attention. The care for purity focuses not so much on fighting the 'primary dirt', as on the fight against the 'meta-dirt' -- against slackening, or altogether neglecting, the effort to keep things as they are... The situation changes drastically, though, when ordering means the dismantling of the extant order and replacing it with a new model of purity. Now, keeping purity cannot be reduced to the maintenance of daily routine; worse still, the routine itself has the awesome tendency to turn into 'dirt' which needs to be stamped out in the name of the new purity. All in all, the state of 'perpetual beginning' generates ever new, 'improved' targets of purity and with each new target cuts out new categories of 'dirt' -- an unheard-of dirt and an unprecedented dirt. A new condition appears, in which even ordinary, boringly familiar things may turn into dirt at short notice or without notice. With models of purity changing too fast for the purifying skills to catch on, nothing seems secure any more; uncertainty and suspicion rule the day.

Each order has its own disorders; each model of purity has its own dirt that needs to be swept away. But in a durable, lasting order which preempts the future and also involves, among other prerequisites, the prohibition of change, even the cleaning and sweeping pursuits are parts of order. They belong to the daily routine, and like everything routine they tend to be repeated monotonously, in a thoroughly habitualized fashion that renders reflection redundant. It is not so much the dirt-eliminating routine, as the prevention of an occasional, unusual interruption of the routine, that reaches the level of consciousness and arouses attention. The care for purity focuses not so much on fighting the 'primary dirt', as on the fight against the 'meta-dirt' -- against slackening, or altogether neglecting, the effort to keep things as they are... The situation changes drastically, though, when ordering means the dismantling of the extant order and replacing it with a new model of purity. Now, keeping purity cannot be reduced to the maintenance of daily routine; worse still, the routine itself has the awesome tendency to turn into 'dirt' which needs to be stamped out in the name of the new purity. All in all, the state of 'perpetual beginning' generates ever new, 'improved' targets of purity and with each new target cuts out new categories of 'dirt' -- an unheard-of dirt and an unprecedented dirt. A new condition appears, in which even ordinary, boringly familiar things may turn into dirt at short notice or without notice. With models of purity changing too fast for the purifying skills to catch on, nothing seems secure any more; uncertainty and suspicion rule the day.

We may go a step further and say that the 'order-making' now becomes indistinguishable from announcing ever new 'abnormalities', drawing ever new dividing lines, identifying and setting apart ever new 'strangers'. Thoroughly familiar and unproblematic 'neighbours next door' may turn overnight into terrifying strangers once a new order is envisaged; a new game is devised which the neighbours-of-yesterday are unlikely to play placidly for the simple reason that the new order is about making them into strangers and the new game is about eliminating them -- 'cleansing the site'. Doing something about the strangers moves into the very centre of ordering concerns. Strangers are no longer routine, and thus the routine ways of keeping things pure do not suffice. In a world constantly on the move the anxiety which condensed into the fear of strangers saturates the totality of daily life -- fills every nook and cranny of the human condition.

In the modern world, notoriously unstable and constant solely in its hostility to everything constant, the temptation to arrest the movement, to bring the perpetual change to a halt, to install an order secure against all further challenges, becomes overwhelming and very difficult to resist.

Almost all modern fantasies of a 'good world' were deep down antimodern, in that they visualized the end of history understood as a process of change. Walter Benjamin said of modernity that it was born under the sign of suicide; Sigmund Freud suggested that it was driven by Thanatos -- the instinct of death. Modern utopias differed in many of their detailed prescriptions, but they all agreed that the 'perfect world' would be one remaining forever identical with itself, a world in which the wisdom learnt today will remain wise tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and in which the life skills acquired will retain their usefulness forever. The utopias was indeed, according to a secular understanding, in which nothing dark or impenetrable stood in the way of the eye; a world with nothing spoiling the harmony; nothing 'out of place'; a world without 'dirt'; a world without strangers.

No wonder that throughout the modern era there was a strict correlation between the scale and radicality of the 'new and final order' imagined, dreamt of and tried in practice, and the passion with which the 'problem of strangers' was approached, as well as the severity of treatment reserved for the strangers. What was 'totalitarian' about totalitarian political programmes, themselves thoroughly modern phenomena, was more than anything else the comprehensiveness of the order they promised, the determination to leave nothing to chance, the simplicity of the cleaning prescriptions, and the thoroughness with which they approached the task of removing anything that collided with the postulate of purity. Totalitarian ideologies were remarkable for their proclivity to condense the diffuse, pinpoint the elusive, make the uncontrollable into a target within reach and, so to speak, within bullet-range; the dispersed and ubiquitous anxiety exhale by equally dispersed and ubiquitous threats to comprehension and to the sense of order were thereby squeezed and compressed so that they could be 'handled', and dealt with wholesale in a single, straightforward procedure. Nazism and communism excelled in pushing the totalitarian tendency to its radical extreme -- the first by condensing the complexity of the 'purity' problem in its modern form into that of the purity of race, the second into that of the purity of class. Yet totalitarian cravings and leanings made their presence visible, albeit in a slightly less radical form, also in the tendency of the modern nation-state as such to underpin and reinforce the uniformity of state citizenship with the universality and comprehensiveness of national membership.

For reasons which I have analysed elsewhere 2 and which are too complex and numerous to be spelled out here, the tendency to collectivize and centralize the 'cleansing' activities aimed at the preservation of purity, while by no means extinct or exhausted, tends in our time to be
ever more often replaced with the strategies of deregulation and privatization. On the one hand, we note in many places a growing indifference of the state to its past task of promoting a singular as well as a comprehensive model of order, and the unprecedented equanimity with which the co-presence of a variety of such models is contemplated by the powers that be. On the other hand, one can discern the waning of the ‘forward push’ so crucial to the modern spirit, the relaxation of the modern war of attrition waged against received tradition, the lack of enthusiasm for (even resentment of) all-embracing schemes of decreed order that promise to put and fix everything in its place -- and, indeed, the appearance of sui generis vested interest in the continuing diversification, under-determination, ‘messiness’ of the world. An ever growing number of postmodern men and women, while by no means immune to the fear of being lost and ever so often carried away by the recurring waves of ‘homesickness’, find the open-endlessness of their situation attractive enough to outweigh the anguish of uncertainty. They revel in the pursuit of new and untested experience, are willingly seduced by offers of adventure, and on the whole prefer keeping options open to all fixity of commitment. In this change of mood they are aided and abetted by a market organized entirely around consumer demand and vitally interested in keeping that demand permanently unsatisfied and thus preventing the ossification of any acquired habits and whipping up the consumers’ appetite for ever more intense sensations and ever new experience.

The consequence of that sea-change, most relevant to our topic, has been well captured by Georges Balandier: ‘Aujourd'hui, tout se brouille, les frontières se déplacent, les catégories deviennent confuses. Les définitions perdent leur encadrement; elles se multiplient, elles se trouvent presque à l'abandon, disponibles pour la composition de nouvelles configurations, mouvantes, combinaison maniables.’

Differences pile up one upon the other, distinctions previously not considered relevant to the overall scheme of things and therefore invisible now force themselves upon the canvas of the Lebenschwelt. Differences once accepted as non-negotiable are thrown unexpectedly into the melting pot or become objects of contention. Competitive charts overlap or clash, barring all chance of an ‘official’ and universally binding Ordnance Survey map. Yet since each scheme of purity generates its own dirt and each order generates its own strangers, making up the stranger in its own likeness and measure -- the stranger is now as resistant to fixation as the social space itself: ‘L’Autre se révèle multiple, localisable par tout, changé selon les circonstances.’

Does this augur the end of the Stranger's victimization and martyrdom

in the service of purity? Not necessarily, contrary to many enthusiastic eulogies of the new postmodern tolerance, or even its assumed love of difference. In the postmodern world of freely competing styles and life patterns there is still one stern test of purity which whoever applies for admission is required to pass: one needs to be capable of being seduced by the infinite possibility and constant renewal promoted by the consumer market, of rejoicing in the chance of putting on and taking off identities, of spending one's life in the never ending chase after ever more intense sensations and even more exhilarating experience. Not everybody can pass that test. Those who do not are the ‘dirt’ of postmodern purity.

Since the criterion of purity is the ability to partake in the consumerist game, those left outside as a ‘problem’, as the ‘dirt’ which needs to be ‘disposed of’, are flawed consumers -- people unable to respond to the enticements of the consumer market because they lack the required resources, people unable to be ‘free individuals’ according to the sense of ‘freedom’ as denoted in terms of consumer choice. They are the new ‘impure’, who do not fit into the new scheme of purity. Looked at from the now dominant perspective of the consumer market, they are redundant -- truly ‘objects out of place’.

The job of separating and eliminating that waste of consumerism is, like everything else in the postmodern world, deregulated and privatized. The shopping malls and supermarkets, the temples of the new consumerist creed and the stadiums where the game of consumerism is played, bar entry to the flawed consumers at their own expense, surrounding themselves with surveillance cameras, electronic alarms and heavily armed guards; so do the neighbourhoods where lucky and happy consumers live and enjoy their new freedoms; so do the individual consumers, viewing their homes and their cars as ramparts of permanently besieged fortresses.

These deregulated, privatized, diffuse concerns with guarding the purity of consumerist life also come together in two contradictory, yet mutually reinforcing political demands directed towards the state. One is the demand to further enhance consumer freedoms of free consumers: to privatize the use of resources by ‘rolling back’ all collective intervention in private affairs, dismantling politically imposed constraints, cutting taxes and public expenditure. Another demand is to deal more energetically with the consequences of the first demand: surfacing in the public discourse under the name of ‘law and order’, this second demand is about the prevention of the equally deregulated and privatized protest of the victims of deregulation and privatization. Those whom the expansion of consumer freedom deprived of consumer skills and powers need to

be checked and kept at bay; being a drain on public funds, and therefore indirectly on ‘taxpayers’ money’ and the freedom of free consumers, they need to be checked and kept at bay at the least possible cost. If wastedisposal proves to be less costly than waste-recycling, it should be given priority; if it is cheaper to exclude and incarcerate the flawed consumers to keep them from mischief, this is preferable to the restoration of their consumer status through democratic, and under the strict control of the legal institutions. The worst nightmare will never materialize. The dangerous population will not be exterminated, except for those killed by capital punishment. But the risks are great that those seen as core members of the dangerous population may be confined, warehoused, stored away, and forced to live their most active years as consumers of control. It can be done democratically, and under the strict control of the legal institutions.

‘And the theoreticians in criminology and law’, Christie observes gloomily, ‘are there with a helping hand. Nobody believes in treatment any more, but incapacitation has been a favourite...’ The present-day concern with the purity of postmodern enjoyment expresses itself in the ever more pronounced tendency to criminalize its socially produced problems.

That every order tends to criminalize resistance to itself and outlaw its assumed or genuine enemies is evident to the point of triviality. What is less obvious, yet seems to emerge from our brief survey of the forms which the pursuit of purity has taken in modern and postmodern times, is that the object of particularly zealous and intense outlawing flurry are the radical consequences of the order’s own constitutive principles. Modernity lived in a state of permanent war against tradition, legitimized by the urge to collectivize human destiny on a new and higher level, to substitute a new, better order for the old, jaded and outlawed. It had
therefore to purify itself of those who threatened to turn its inherent irreverence against its own principles. One of the most vexing 'impurities' in the modern version of purity was the revolutionaries, which the modern spirit could not but generate: revolutionaries were, after all, nothing but zealots of modernity, the most faithful among the believers in modern revelation, eager to draw the most radical lessons from the message, and push the order-making effort beyond the boundary of what the order-making mechanism was able to sustain. Postmodernity, on the other hand, lives in a state of permanent pressure towards dismantling of all collective interference into individual fate, towards deregulation and privatization. It tends to fortify itself therefore against those who -- following its inherent tendency to disengagement, indifference and free-for-all -- threaten to expose the suicidal potential of the strategy by pushing its implementation to the logical extreme. The most obnoxious 'impurity' of the postmodern version of purity is not revolutionaries, but those who either disregard the law or take the law into their own hands -- muggers, robbers, car-thieves and shoplifters, as well as their alter egos -- the vigilantes and the terrorists. Again, they are but the zealots of postmodernity, avid learners and pious believers in the postmodern revelation, keen to bring the life-recipes which the lesson suggests to their radical conclusion.

The pursuit of modern purity expressed itself daily in punitive action against dangerous classes; the pursuit of postmodern purity expresses itself daily in punitive action against the residents of mean streets and no-go urban areas, vagabonds and layabouts. In both cases, the 'impurity' at the focus of the punitive action is the extremity of the form promoted as pure; the stretching to the limits of what should have been, but could not be, kept in bounds; the waste-product that is but a disqualified mutation of the product passed as meeting the standards.

1: The Dream of Purity


Note: 7. See Alfred Schütz, 'The stranger: an essay in social psychology', _Studies in Social Theory_, vol. 2, pp. 95ff.


2: The Making and Unmaking of Strangers

All societies produce strangers; but each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way. If the strangers are the people who do not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world -- one of these maps, two or all three; if they, therefore, by their sheer presence, make obscure what ought to be transparent, confuse what ought to be a straightforward recipe for action, and/or prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying; if they pollute the joy with anxiety while making the forbidden fruit alluring; if, in other words, they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen; if, having done all this, they gestate uncertainty, which in its turn breeds the discomfort of feeling lost -- then each society produces such strangers. While drawing its borders and charting its cognitive, aesthetic and moral maps, it cannot but gestate people who conceal borderlines deemed crucial to its orderly and/or meaningful life and so are accused of causing the discomfort experience as the most painful and the least bearable.

The most oppressive of nightmares that has haunted our century, notorious for its horrors and terrors, gory deeds and dreary premonitions, was best captured in George Orwell's memorable image of the jackboot trampling a human face. No face was secure -- as everyone was prone to be charged with the crime of trespassing or transgressing. And since humanity bears ill all confinement while the humans who transgress the boundaries turn into strangers -- everyone had reasons to fear the jackboot made to trample the strange face in the dust, squeeze the strange out of the human and keep those not-yet-trampled-but-about-to-be-trampled away from the mischief of illegal frontier-crossing.

Jackboots are parts of uniforms. Elias Canetti wrote of 'murderous uniforms'. At some point of our century it became common knowledge that men in uniforms are to be feared most. Uniforms were the insignia of the servants of the State, that source of all power, and above all the coercive power aided and abetted by the absolving-from-inhumanity power; wearing uniforms, men become that power in action; wearing

jackboots, they trample, and trample on behest and in the name of the State. The State which dressed men in uniforms so that they might be allowed and instructed to trample and absorbed in advance from the guilt of trampling, was the State which saw itself as the fount, the guardian and the sole guarantee of orderly life: the dam protecting order from chaos. It was the State that knew what the order should look like, and which had enough strength and arrogance not only to proclaim all other states of affairs to be disorder and chaos, but also force them to live down to such a condition. This was, in other words, the modern state -- one which legislated order into existence and defined order as the clarity of binding divisions, classifications, allocations and boundaries.

The typical modern strangers were the waste of the State's ordering zeal. What the modern strangers did not fit was the vision of order. When you draw dividing lines and set apart the so divided, everything that blurs the lines and spans the divisions undermines your work and mangles its products. The semantic under- and/or over-determination of the strangers corrupted neat divisions and marred the signposts. Merely by being around they interfered with the work which the State swore to accomplish, and undid its efforts to accomplish it. The strangers exhaled uncertainty where certainty and clarity should have ruled. In the harmonious, rational order about to be built there was no room -- there could be no room -- for 'neither-nors', for the sitting astride, for the cognitively ambivalent. Order-building was a war of attrition waged against the strangers and the strange.

In this war (to borrow LĂȘvi-Strauss's concepts) two alternative, but also complementary strategies were intermittently deployed. One was anthropopagic: annihilating the strangers by devouring them and then metabolically transforming into a tissue indistinguishable from one's own. This was the strategy of assimilation: making the different similar; smothering of cultural or linguistic distinctions; forbidding all traditions and loyalties except those meant to feed the conformity to the new and all-embracing order; promoting and enforcing one and only one measure of conformity. The other strategy was anthropopoemic: vomiting the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside. This was the strategy of exclusion -- confining the strangers within the visible walls of the ghettos or behind the invisible, yet no less tangible, prohibitions of commensality, connubium and commercium; 'cleansing' -- expelling the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory; or, when neither of the two measures was feasible -- destroying the strangers physically.

The most common expression of the two strategies was the notorious
of birth -- that predetermined, stronger-than-human-choice diversity will fade away. Not so -- objected the nationalist/racist mind. Cultural remaking has limits which no human effort could transcend. Certain people will never be converted into something else than they are. They are, so to speak, beyond repair. One cannot rid them of their faults; one can only get rid of them themselves, complete with their inborn and eternal oddities and evils.

In the modern society and under the aegis of the modern state, cultural and/or physical annihilation of strangers and of the strange was a creative destruction; demolishing, but building at the same time; mutilating, but also straightening up... It was part and parcel of the ongoing order-building, nation-building, state-building effort, its necessary condition and accomplishment. And, obversely, whenever building-order- by-design is on the agenda, certain inhabitants of the territory to be made orderly in the new way turn into strangers that need to be eliminated.

Under the pressure of the modern order-building urge, the strangers lived, so to speak, in a state of suspended extinction. The strangers were, by definition, an anomaly to be rectified. Their presence was defined a priori as temporary, much as the current/fleeting stage in the prehistory of the order yet to come. A permanent coexistence with the stranger and the strange, and the pragmatics of living with strangers, did not need to be faced point-blank as a serious prospect. And it would not need, as long as modern life remained a life-towards-a-project, as long as that project remained collectivized into a vision of a new and comprehensive order, and as long as the construction of such an order remained in the hands of a State ambitious and resourceful enough to pursue the task. Not everywhere do these conditions seem to be holding today, however: at a time when Anthony Giddens calls 'late modernity', Ulrich Beck 'reflexive modernity', George Balandier 'surmodernity', and I have (together with many others) chosen to call 'postmodern': the time we live now, in our part of the world (or, rather -- living in such a time defines what we see as 'our part of the world').

From disembedding to setting afloat

In its order-building pursuits, the modern State set about discrediting, disavowing and uprooting les pouvoirs internes of communities and traditions. If accomplished, the task would 'disembed' (Giddens) or 'disencumber' (Machttye) the individuals, give them the benefit of an absolute beginning, set them free to choose the kind of life they wish to live and to monitor and manage its living in the framework of legal rules spelled out by the sole legitimate legislating powers -- those of the State. The modern project promised to free the individual from inherited identity. Yet it did not take a stand against identity as such, against having an identity, even a solid, resilient and immutable identity. It only transformed the identity from the matter of ascription into the achievement -- thus making it an individual task and the individual's responsibility.

Much like that global order which collectively undertook individual life-efforts, the orderly (comprehensive, cohesive, consistent and continuous) identity of the individual was cast as a project, the life project (as Jean-Paul Sartre, with wisdom fast becoming retrospective, articulated it). Identity was to be erected systematically, level by level and brick by brick, following a blueprint compiled before the work started. The construction called for a clear vision of the final shape, careful calculation of the steps leading towards it, long-term planning and seeing through the consequences of every move. And so there was a tight and irrevocable bond between social order as a project and the individual life as a project; the latter was unthinkable without the former. Were it not for the collective efforts to secure a reliable, lasting, stable, predictable setting for individual actions and choices -- constructing a clear and lasting identity and living one's life towards such an identity would be all but impossible.

Settings appear reliable (1) if their calculated life-expectancy is more or less commensurate with the duration of the individual identity-building process; and (2) if their shape is seen as immune to the vagaries of fads and foibles promoted singly or severally (in sociological jargon -- if the 'macro-level' is relatively independent of what goes on at the 'micro-level'), so that individual projects can be sensibly inscribed in a tough, trustworthy, unyielding external frame. This was the case, by and large, through most of modern history, the notorious modern acceleration of change notwithstanding. 'Structures' (from physical neighbourhoods to currencies) appeared to be endowed with enough resilience and solidity to withstand all inroads of individual endeavours and survive all individual choice, so that the individual could measure himself against the rock-hard and finite set of opportunities (that is, convinced that his choices can be, in principle, rationally calculated and objectively evaluated). When compared to the biologically limited span of individual life, the institutions embodying collective life and the powers guaranteeing their authority appeared truly immortal. Professions, occupations and related skills did not age quicker than their carriers. Neither did the principles of success: delaying gratifications paid off in the long run, and the savings book epitomized the prudence and wisdom of long-term planning. In the modern society which engaged its members primarily in the role of producers/soldiers, adjustment and adaptation pointed one way only: it was the fickle individual choice which needed to take stock as well as notice of the 'functional prerequisites' of the whole -- which in more than one sense it had to perceive, to use Durkheim's apt phrase, as 'greater than itself'.

If these are indeed the conditions of the reliability of settings, or of the appearance of the settings as reliable -- the context of postmodern life does not pass the test. The individual life-projects find no stable ground in which to lodge an anchor, and individual identity-building efforts cannot rectify the consequences of 'disembedding' and arrest the floating and drifting self. Some authors (notably Giddens) point to the widely fashionable efforts of 're-embedding'; being, however, postulated, rather than pre-given, and sustained solely by the notoriously erratic supplies of emotional energy, the sites of the sought 're-embedding' are plagued with the same unreadiness and eccentricity which prompts the disembedded selves to seek them in the first place.

The image of the world daily generated by present-day life concerns is devoid of genuine or assumed solidity and continuity which used to be the trade-mark of modern 'structures'. The dominant sentiment is now the feeling of a new type of uncertainty -- not limited to one's own luck and talents, but concerning as well the future shape of the world, the way right of living in it, and the criteria by which to judge the rights and wrongs of the way of living. What is also new about the postmodern rendition of uncertainty (by itself not exactly a newcomer in a world with the modern past) is that it is no longer seen as a mere temporary nuisance, which with due effort may be either mollified or altogether overcome. The postmodern world is bracing itself for life under a condition of uncertainty which is permanent and irreducible.

Dimensions of the present uncertainty

Many a feature of contemporary living contributes to the overwhelming feeling of uncertainty: to the view of the future of the 'world as such' and the 'world within reach' as essentially undecided, uncontrollable and hence frightening, and of the gnawing doubt whether the present contextual constants of action will remain constant long enough to enable reasonable calculation of its effects... We live today, to borrow the felicitous expression coined by Marcus Doel and David Clarke, in the atmosphere of ambient fear. Let us name just a few of the factors responsible.

1 The new world disorder. After half a century of clear-cut divisions, obvious stakes and indubitable political purposes and strategies came the world devoid of visible structure and any -- however sinister -- logic. Power-bloc politics, which not so long ago dominated the world, frightened by the awesomeness of its possibilities; whatever came to replace it frightens however by its lack of consistency and direction -- and so by the boundlessness
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by individual skills and with the use of indigenous resources tends to be mediated now by technological tools purchasable in the market. In pragmatics is good at, it cannot generate lasting bonds, and most certainly not the bonds which possibilities it forebodes. Hans Magnus Erzensberger of Germany fears the impending era of the civil war (he has counted about forty such wars being waged today from Bosnia through Afghanistan to Bougainville). In France, Alain Mine writes of the coming of New Dark Ages. In Britain, Norman Stone asks whether we are not back in the medieval world of beggars, plagues, conflagrations and superstititions. Whether this is or is not the tendency of our time remains, of course, an open question, which only the future will answer -- but what truly matters now is that auguries like these can be publicly made from the most prestigious sites of contemporary intellectual life, listened to, pondered and debated.

The 'Second World' is no more; its former member countries woke up, to use Clause O'Fell's felicitous phrase, to the 'tunnel at the end of the light'. But with the demise of the Second World, the 'Third World' too, once in the Bandung era constituting itself as the third force, a force in opposition to both power blocs and to the very principle of power-bloc politics (and proving to be such a force through playing up the fears and inanities of the two power-greedy world empires), quit the world political stage. Today twenty or so wealthy, but worried and unself-assured, countries confront the rest of the world which is no longer inclined to look up to their definitions of progress and happiness, yet grows by the day ever more dependent on them for preserving whatever happiness or merely survival it can scrape together by its own means. Perhaps the concept of the 'secondary barbarization' best sums up the overall impact of the present-day metropoly on the world periphery.

2 The universal deregulation -- the unquestionable and unequalled priority awarded to the irrationality and moral blindness of market competition, the unbound freedom granted to capital and finance at the expense of all other freedoms, the tearing up of the socially woven and

societally maintained safety nets, and the disavowal of all but economic reasons, gave a new push to the relentless process of polarization, once halted (only temporarily, as it now transpires) by the legal frameworks of the welfare state, trade union bargaining rights, labour legislation, and -- on a global scale (though in this case much less convincingly) -- by the initial effects of world agencies charged with the redistribution of capital. Inequality -- intercontinental, inter-state, and most seminally the inner societal (regardless of the level of the GNP boasted or bewailed by the country) reaches once more proportions which the yesteryear world confident of its ability to self-regulate and self-correct seemed to have left behind once for all. By cautious and, if anything, conservative calculations, rich Europe counts among its citizens about three million homeless, twenty million evicted from the labour market, thirty million living below the poverty line. The switch from the project of community as the guardian of the universal right to decent and dignified life, to the promotion of the market as the sufficient guarantee of the universal chance of self-enrichment, deepens further the suffering of the new poor -- adding insult to their injury, glossing poverty with humiliation and with denial of consumer freedom, now identified with humanity.

The psychological effects, though, reach far beyond the swelling ranks of the dispossessed and the redundant. Only the few powerful enough to blackmail the other powerfuls into the obligation of a golden handshake can be sure that their home, however prosperous and imposing it may seem today, is not haunted by the spectre of tomorrow's downfall. No jobs are guaranteed, no positions are foolproof, no skills are of lasting utility, experience and know-how turn into liability as soon as they become assets, seductive careers all too often prove to be suicide tracks. In their present rendering, human rights do not entail the acquisition of the right to a job, however well performed, or -- more generally -- the right to care and consideration for the sake of past merits. Livelihood, social position, acknowledgment of usefulness and the entitlement to self-dignity may all vanish together, overnight and without notice.

3 The other safety nets, self-woven and self-maintained, these second lines of trenches once offered by the neighbourhood or the family, where one could withdraw to heal the bruises left by the marketplace skirmishes -- if they have not fallen apart, then they have at least been considerably weakened. The changing pragmatics of interpersonal relations (the new style of 'life polities', as described with great conviction by Anthony Giddens), now permeated by the ruling spirit of consumerism and thus casting the other as the potential source of pleasurable experience, is partly to blame: whatever else the new pragmatics is good at, it cannot generate lasting bonds, and most certainly not the bonds which

are presumed as lasting and treated as such. The bonds which it does generate in profusion have in-built until-further-notice and unilateral- withdrawal-at-will clauses and promise neither the granting nor the acquisition of rights and obligations.

The slow yet relentless dissipation and induced forgetting of social skills bears another part of the blame. What used to be put together and kept together by individual skills and with the use of indigenous resources tends to be mediated now by technologically produced tools purchasable in the market. In the absence of such tools partnerships and groups disintegrate (if they had the chance to emerge in the first place). Not just the satisfaction of individual needs, but the presence and resilience of teams and collectivities become to an ever greater extent market-dependent, and so duly reflect the capriciousness and erraticism of the marketplace.

4 As David Bennett recently observed, 2 radical uncertainty about the material and social worlds we inhabit and our modes of political agency within them... is what the image-industry offers us...'. Indeed, the message conveyed today with great power of persuasion by the most ubiquitously effective cultural media (and, let us add, easily read out by the recipients against the background of their own experience, aided and abetted by the logic of consumer freedom) is a message of the essential indeterminacy and softness of the world: in this world, everything may happen and everything can be done, but nothing can be done once for all -- and whatever happens comes unannounced and goes away without notice. In this world, bonds are disassembled into successive encounters, identities into successively worn masks, life-history into a series of episodes whose sole lasting importance is their equally ephemeral memory. Nothing can be known for sure, and anything which is known can be known in a different way -- one way of knowing is as good, or as bad (and certainly as volatile and precarious) as any other. Betting is now the rule where certainty was once sought, while taking risks replaces the stubborn pursuit of goals. And thus there is little in the world which one could consider solid and reliable, nothing reminiscent of a tough canvas in which one could weave one's own life itinerary.

Like everything else, the self-image splits into a collection of snapshots, each having to conjure up, carry and express its own meaning, more often than not without reference to other snapshots. Instead of constructing one's identity, gradually and patiently, as one builds a house -- through the slow accretion of ceilings, floors, rooms, connecting passages -- a series of 'new beginnings', experimenting with instantly assembled yet easily dismantled shapes, painted one over the other; a

palimpsest identity. This is the kind of identity which fits the world in which the art of forgetting is an asset no less, if no more, important than the art of memorizing, in which forgetting rather than learning is the condition of continuous fitness, in which ever new things and people enter and exist without much rhyme or reason the field of vision of the stationary camera of attention, and where the memory itself is like videotape, always ready to be wiped clean in order to admit new images, and boasting a life-long guarantee only thanks to that wondrous ability of endless self-effacing.

These are some, certainly not all, of the dimensions of postmodern uncertainty. Living under conditions of overwhelming and self-perpetuating
uncertainty is an experience altogether different from a life subordinated to the task of identity-building and lived in a world bent on the building of order. The oppositions which in that other experience underlay and endorsed the meaning of the world, and of life lived in it, lose in the new experience much of their meaning and most of their heuristic and pragmatic potency. Baudrillard has written profusely about this implosion of the sense-giving oppositions.

Yet alongside the collapse of the opposition between reality and its simulation, truth and its representation -- comes the blurring and the watering down of the difference between the normal and the abnormal, the expectable and the unexpected, the ordinary and the bizarre, domesticated and wild -- the familiar and the strange, 'us' and the strangers. The strangers are no longer authoritatively preselected, defined and set apart, as they used to be in times of the state-managed, consistent and durable programmes of order-building. They are now as unsteady and protean as one's own identity; as poorly founded, as erratic and volatile. *L'ipséité*, that difference which sets the self apart from the non-self, and 'us' apart from 'them', is no longer given by the pre-ordained shape of the world, nor by command from on high. It needs to be constructed, and reconstructed, and constructed once more, and reconstructed again, on both sides at the same time, neither of the sides boasting more durability, or just 'givenness', than the other. Today's strangers are by-products, but also the means of production, in the incessant, because never conclusive, process of identity building.

**Freedom, uncertainty, and freedom from uncertainty**

What makes certain people 'strangers' and therefore vexing, unnerving, off-putting and otherwise a 'problem', is -- let us repeat -- their tendency to befog and eclipse boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen. At different times and in different social situations, different boundaries

ought to be seen more clearly than others. In our postmodern times, for reasons spelled out above, the boundaries which tend to be simultaneously most strongly desired and most acutely missed are those of a *rightful and secure position in society*, of a space unquestionably one's own, where one can plan one's life with the minimum of interference, play one's role in a game in which the rules do not change overnight and without notice, act reasonably and hope for the better. As we have seen, it is the widespread characteristic of contemporary men and women in our type of society that they live perpetually with the 'identity problem' unsolved. They suffer, one might say, from a chronic absence of resources with which they could build a truly solid and lasting identity, anchor it and stop it from drifting.

Or one can go yet further and point out a more incapacitating feature of their life situation, a genuine double-bind, which defies the most ardent efforts to make identity clear-cut and reliable. *While making oneself an identity is a strongly felt need and an activity eloquently encouraged by all authoritative cultural media -- having an identity solidly founded and resistant to cross-waves*, having it 'for life', proves a handicap rather than an asset for such people as do not sufficiently control the circumstances of their life itinerary; a burden that constrains the movement, a ballast which they must throw out in order to stay afloat. This, we can say, is a universal feature of our times -- and hence the anxiety related to the problems of identity and the disposition to be concerned with everything 'strange', on which anxiety may be focused and by being focused made sense of, is potentially universal. But the specific gravity of that feature is not the same for everybody; the feature affects different people to a different degree and brings consequences with varying importance for their life-pursuits.

In her eye-opening study of *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas taught us that what we perceive as uncleanness or dirt and busy ourselves scrubbing and wiping out is that anomaly or ambiguity 'which must not be included if the pattern is to be maintained'. She added a sociological perspective to Jean-Paul Sartre's brilliant and memorable analysis of le visqueux, 'the slimy'. 5 The slimy, says Sartre, is docile -- or so it seems to be.

Only at the very moment when I believe that I possess it, behold it, by a curious reversal, it possesses me... If an object which I hold in my hands is solid, I can let go when I please; its inertia symbolizes for me my total power... Yet here is the slimy reversing the terms; [my self] is suddenly *compromised*, I open my hands, I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me, it sucks at me... I am no longer the master... The slime is like a liquid seen in a nightmare, where all its properties are animated by a sort of life and turn back against me...

If I dive into the water, if I plunge into it, if I let myself sink in it, I experience no discomfort, for I do not have any fear whatsoever that I may dissolve in it; I remain a solid in its liquidity. If I sink in the slimy, I feel that I am going to be lost in it... To touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved in sliminess.

Feeling the alterity of the water in which I swim (if I know how to swim, that is, and if the waves are not too strong for my skills and muscles) is not only freedom from fear; it is positively pleasurable. The joy obtained from an uncommon or rare sensual experience is unclouded by the apprehension that something important to me and more lasting than the pleasure may be given up as a result. If anything, immersing myself in the lake or the sea reasserts my power to keep my shape intact, my control over my body, my freedom and mastery: at any time I may come back if I wish, dry myself, not for a moment dreading the compromise, the discreditation of my being myself, being what I think/want myself to be. But imagine taking a bath in a barrelful of resin, tar, honey or treacle... Unlike water, the substance will stick, cling to my skin, would not let go. Rather than exuberantly invading a foreign, novel element -- I feel invaded and conquered by an element from which there is no escape. I am no longer in control, no longer a master of myself. I have lost my freedom.

Thus the sliminess stands for the loss of freedom, or for the fear that freedom is under threat and may be lost. But, let us note, freedom is a *relation* -- a power relation. I am free if and only if I can act according to my will and reach the results I intend to reach; this means, though, that some other people will be inevitably restricted in their choices by the actions I have taken, and that they will fail to reach the results they wished. In fact, I cannot measure my own freedom in absolute terms -- I can measure it only *relatively*, comparing it with other people's ability to get it their way. Thus, ultimately, freedom depends on who is stronger -- on the distribution of the skills and material resources which the effective action requires. What follows is that the 'sliminess' (stickiness, stubbornness, resilience, potency of compromising, of transforming possession into being possessed, mastery into dependency) of another substance (and this includes, more than anything else, other people) is a *function of my own skills and resources*. What seems slimy resin to some, may be fresh, pleasant, exhilarating sea-water to some others. And the purer of waters may act the 'slimy style' against a person ignorant of the art of swimming, but also a person too weak to defy the powerful element, to withstand the torrent, to steer safely through the rapids, to stay on course among the eddies and tidal waves. One is tempted to say that, much as beauty is in the eye of beholder, the sliminess of the slimy is in the muscles (or in the wallet?) of the actor.

The stranger is hateful and feared the way the slimy is, and for the same reasons (not everywhere, to be sure, and not at all times; as Max Frisch caustically observed in his essay 'Foreignization 1', musing on our feelings about foreigners coming to stay in our cities, 'there are just too many of them -- not at the construction sites and not in the factories and not in the stable and not in the kitchen, but during after-hours. Especially on Sunday there are suddenly too many of them'). If this is so, then the same relativity principle which rules the constitution of 'sliminess' regulates the constitution of

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The stranger is hateful and feared the way the slimy is, and for the same reasons (not everywhere, to be sure, and not at all times; as Max Frisch caustically observed in his essay 'Foreignization 1', musing on our feelings about foreigners coming to stay in our cities, 'there are just too many of them -- not at the construction sites and not in the factories and not in the stable and not in the kitchen, but during after-hours. Especially on Sunday there are suddenly too many of them'). If this is so, then the same relativity principle which rules the constitution of 'sliminess' regulates the constitution of
resented strangers, strangers as people to be resented: the acuity of strangeness, and the intensity of its resentment, grow up with the relative powerlessness and diminish with the growth of relative freedom. One can expect that the less people control and can control their lives and their life- founding identities, the more they will perceive others as slimy, and the more frantically they will try to disentangle, detach themselves from the strangers they experience as an enveloping, suffocating, sucking-in, formless substance. In the postmodern city, the strangers mean one thing to those for whom ‘no-go area’ (the ‘mean streets’, the ‘rough districts’) means ‘I won't go in’, and those to whom ‘no go’ means ‘I can't go out'.

For some residents of the modern city, secure in their burglar-proof homes in leafy suburbs, fortified offices in the heavily policed business centres, and cars bespattered with security gadgets to take them from homes to offices and back, the ‘stranger’ as is pleasurable as the surfing beach, and not at all slimy. The strangers run restaurants promising unusual, exciting experiences to the taste-buds, sell curious-looking, mysterious objects suitable as talking points at the next party, offer services other people would not stoop or deign to offer, dangle morsels of wisdom refreshingly different from the routine and boring. The strangers are people whom you pay for the services they render and for the right to terminate their services once they no longer bring pleasure. At no point do the strangers compromise the freedom of the consumer of their services. As the tourist, the patron, the client, the consumer of services is always in charge: s/he demands, sets the rules, and above all decides when the encounter starts and when it ends. Unambiguously, the strangers are purveyors of pleasures. Their presence is a break in the tedium. One should thank God that they are here. So what is all that uproar and outcry for?

The uproar and the outcry comes, let there be no mistake, from other areas of the city, which the pleasure-seeking consumers never visit, let alone live in. Those areas are populated by people unable to choose whom they meet and for how long, or to pay for having their choices respected; powerless people, experiencing the world as a trap, not as an adventure park; incarcerated in a territory from which there is no exit for them, but which others may enter or leave at will. Since the only tokens for securing the freedom of choice which is a legal tender in the consumer society are in short supply or are denied them altogether, they need to resort to the only resources they possess in quantities large enough to impress; they defend the territory under siege through (to use Dick Heddige's pithy description) ‘rituals, dressing strangely, striking bizarre attitudes, breaking rules, breaking bottles, windows, heads, issuing rhetorical challenges to the law’. They react in a wild, rabid, distraught and flustered fashion, as one reacts to the incapacitating pulling/dissolving power of the slimy. The sliminess of strangers, let us repeat, is the reflection of their own powerlessness. It is their own lack of power that crystallizes in their eyes as the awesome might of the strangers. The weak meet and confront the weak; but both feel like Davids fighting Goliaths. Each is ‘slimy’ to the other; but each fights the sliminess of the other in the name of the purity of its own ideas, and the words which convey them, change the meaning they travel – and travelling between the homes of the satisfied consumers and the dwellings of the powerless is a long-distance voyage. If the contented and the secure wax lyrical about the beauty of nationhood, the New Jerusalem, the glory of heritage and the dignity of tradition -- the insecure and hounded bewail the defilement and humiliation of the race. If the first rejoice in the variety of guests and pride themselves on their open minds and open doors, the second gnash their teeth at the thought of lost purity. The benign patriotism of the first rebounds as the racism of the second.

Nothing spurs into action as frenzied, licentious and disorderly as the fear of the disassembly of order, embodied in the figure of the slimy. For the sensation-gatherers or experience-collectors as at least the better-off today seem to accept this. One may say: a new theoretical/ideological consensus is emerging, to replace another one, more than a century old. If the left among us are, concerned (or, more exactly, forced to be concerned) with flexibility and openness, rather than with fixity and self-closure, difference comes at a premium. There is a resonance and a harmony between the way we go about our identity problems and plurality and differentiation of the world in which the identity problems are dealt with, or which we conjure up in the process of that dealing. It is not just that we need the strangers around, because, due to the way we are culturally shaped, we would miss precious life-enhancing values in a uniform, monotonous and homogeneous world; more than that – such a world without difference could not, by any stretch of the imagination, evolve out of the way in which our lives are shaped and carried on. The question is no longer how to get rid of the strangers and the strange once and for all, or declare human variety but a momentary inconvenience, but how to live with alterity -- daily and permanently. Whatever realistic strategy of coping with the unknown, the uncertain and the confusing can be thought of -- it needs to start from recognizing this fact.

And, indeed, all intellectually conceived strategies still in competition today seem to accept this. One may say: a new theoretical/ideological consensus is emerging, to replace another one, more than a century old. If the left and right, the progressivists and the reactionary of the modern period agreed that strangeness is abnormal and regrettable, and that the superior (because homogenous) order of the future would have no room for the strangers, postmodern times are marked by an almost universal agreement that difference is not merely unavoidable, but good, precious and in need of protection and cultivation. In the words of that towering figure of the postmodern intellectual
right, Alain de Benoist: "We see reasons for hope only in the affirmation of collective singularities, the spiritual reappropriation of heritages, the clear awareness of roots and specific cultures." The spiritual guide of the Italian neo-fascist movement, Julius Evola, is yet more blunt: "The racists recognize difference and want difference." Pierre-André Taguieff sums up the process of the postmodern rearticulation of the racist discourse, coining the term 'differentalist racism'.

Note that these self-admittedly right-wing, even fascist, professions of faith, unlike their precursors, no longer propose that differences between people are immune to cultural interference and that it is beyond human power to make someone into someone else. Yes, they say, differences -- our differences as much as the differences of the others -- are all human products, culturally produced. But, they say, different cultures make their members in different shapes and colours -- and this is good. Thou shalt not tie together what cultures, in their wisdom, have set apart. Let us, rather, help cultures -- any culture -- to go their own separate and, better still, inimitable ways. The world will be so much richer then ...

The striking thing, of course, is that a reader unaware that the author of the first quotation was Benoist could be forgiven for mistaking it for a left programmatic statement; and that Evola's sentence would lose none of its conviction if the word 'racist' were replaced by 'progressive', 'liberal', or -- for that matter -- 'socialist'. Are we not all bona fide 'differentialists' today? Multiculturalists? Pluralists?

And so it happens that both right and left agree today that the preferable mode of living with strangers is to keep apart... Though perhaps for different reasons, both resent and publicly denigrate the universalist/imperialist/assimilationist ambitions of the modern state, now debunked as innately proto-totalitarian. Disenchanted or repelled by the idea of legislated uniformity, the left, which -- being left -- cannot live without hope, turns its eyes towards 'community', hailed and eulogized as the long-lost, now rediscovered, true home of humanity. To be a born-again communitarian is widely considered today as the sign of a critical standpoint, leftist and progress. Come back community, from the

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exile to which the modern state confined you; all is forgiven and forgotten -- the oppressiveness of parochiality, the genocidal propensity of collective narcissism, the tyranny of communal pressures and the pugnacity and despotism of communal discipline. It is, of course, a nuisance that one finds in this bed some unwelcome and thoroughly repulsive fellows... How to keep the bed to oneself, how to prove that the unwelcome fellows have no right to be in it? This seems to be the question...

I propose that the racist bedfellows in the bed of communitarianism are perhaps a nuisance for its new occupants, but not at all a surprise. They were there first, and it is their birthright to be there. Both sets of occupants, the old ones and the new, have been lured into that bed by the same promise and the same desire -- of 're-embedding' of what has been 'disembeded', of the release from the formidable task of individual self-construction, and from even more awesome and burdensome individual responsibility for its results.

The old racism turned its back on the emancipatory chance entailed in the modern project. I propose that, true to its nature, it turns its back now on the emancipatory chance which the changed, postmodern context of life holds. Only now, for the reason of curious amnesia or myopia, it is not alone in doing so. It sings in chorus with the lyrical voices of a growing number of social scientists and moral philosophers, who extol the warmth of the communal home and bewail the trials and tribulations of the unencumbered, homeless self.

This is a type of critique of the emancipatory failure of modernity which itself does not hold hope for emancipation: this is a misdirected, and -- I would say -- retrograde critique of the modern project, as it only proposes the shifting of the site of disablement and subordination from the universalist state to the particularist tribe. It only replaces one 'essentialism', already discredited, by another, not yet fully unmasked in all its disempowering potential. True, communal self-determination may assist the initial stages of the long process of re-empowerment of human subjects -- their resolve to resist the disciplinary pressures currently experienced as the most obvious and overwhelming. But there is a dangerous, and easily overlooked point, where re-empowerment turns into a new disempowerment, and emancipation into a new oppression. Once on this road, it is difficult to sense where to stop, and as a rule it is too late to stop once the point has been recognized after the fact. We would all be well advised to heed the recent reminder of Richard Stevers: 2

Martin Luther King Jr. understood perfectly well that racial and ethnic relations would deteriorate markedly if the cultural value of integration

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declined. Indeed, this is precisely what has happened in the United States. The various gender, racial and ethnic groups have almost come to occupy mutually exclusive social spaces... [T]he struggle for equality becomes a struggle for power -- but power left to itself does not recognize equality.

But there is a genuine emancipatory chance in postmodernity, the chance of laying down arms, suspending border skirmishes waged to keep the stranger away, taking apart the daily erected mini-Berlin Walls meant to maintain distance and to separate. This chance does not lie in the celebration of born-again ethnicity and in genuine or invented tribal tradition -- but in bringing to its conclusion the 'disembeding' work of modernity, through focusing on the right to choose one's identity as the sole universality of the citizen/human, on the ultimate, inalienable individual responsibility for the choice -- and through laying bare the complex state- or tribe-managed mechanisms aimed at depriving the individual of that freedom of choice and that responsibility. The chance of human togetherness depends on the rights of the stranger, not on the question who -- the state or the tribe -- is entitled to decide who the strangers are.

Interviewed by Robert Maggiori for Libération on 24 November 1994, Jacques Derrida appealed for rethinking rather than abandoning the modern idea of humanism. The 'human right', as we begin to see it today, but above all as we may and ought to see it, is not the product of legislation, but precisely the opposite: it is what sets the limit 'to force, declared laws, political discourse' and 'founded' rights (regardless of who has, or demands, or usurps the prerogative to 'found' them authoritatively). 'The human' of the traditional humanist philosophy, including the Kantian subject, is -- so suggests Derrida -- 'still too "fraternal", subliminally virile, familial, ethnic, national etc.' What -- as I suggest -- follows from here, is that the modern theorizing of human essence and human rights erred on the side of too leaving much, rather than too little, of the 'encumbered' or 'embedded' element in its idea of the human -- and it is for this fault, rather than for siding too uncritically with the homogenizing ambitions of the modern state and hence placing the 'encumbering' or 'embedding' authority on the wrong site, that it ought to be subjected to critical scrutiny and reassessment.

That reassessment is a philosophical task. But saving the possibility of emancipation from being stillborn sets, besides the philosophical, also a political task. We have noted that the odious 'sliminess' of the stranger progresses as the freedom of the individuals faced with the duty of self-assertion declines. We have also noted that the postmodern setting does not so much increase the total volume of individual freedom, as redistribute it in an increasingly polarized fashion: intensifies it among the

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joyfully and willingly seduced, while tapering it almost beyond existence among the deprived and panoptically regulated. With this polarization
uncurbed, one can expect the present duality of the socially produced status of strangers to continue unabated. At one pole, strangehood (and difference in general) will go on being constructed as the source of pleasurable experience and aesthetic satisfaction; at the other, as the terrifying incarnation of the unstoppably rising sliminess of the human condition -- as the effigy for all future ritual burning of its horrors. And power politics will offer its usual share of opportunities for short-circuiting the poles: to protect their own emancipation-through-seduction, those close to the first pole would seek domination-though-fear over those to the second pole, and so would aid and abet their cottage industry of horrors.

The sliminess of strangers and the politics of exclusion stem from the logic of polarization -- from the increasingly 'two nations, mark two' condition; and this is the case because the polarization arrests the process of individualization, of genuine and radical 'disembedding' for the 'other nation' -- for the oppressed who have been denied the resources for identity-building and so (for all practical intents and purposes) also the tools of citizenship. It is not merely income and wealth, life expectation and life conditions, but also -- and perhaps most seminally -- the right to individuality, that is being increasingly polarized. And as long as it stays this way, there is little chance for the desliming of the strangers.

2: The Making and Unmaking of Strangers

Note: 1. See the chapter 'A catalogue of postmodern fears' in my Life in Fragments (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
3: The Strangers of the Consumer Era: from the Welfare State to Prison

In 1981, 2.9 million criminal offences were recorded in England and Wales. In 1993, 5.5 million. In the last three years, the prison population has risen from 40,606 to 51,243. Between 1971 and 1993, public expenditure on the police rose from £2.8 billion to £7.7 billion. From 1984 to 1994, the number of practising solicitors went up from 44,837 to 63,628, and of practising barristers from 5,203 to 8,093.

In 1994, 5.6 million people in Britain claimed income support. 2,700,000 drew unemployment benefit; but by other accounts, than official governmental ones, the numbers of those who needed employment but had been barred by legal rules from claiming unemployment benefit (and thus from the official statistics of the unemployed) were twice as many.

For the last quarter of a century the population of prison inmates and all those who derive their livelihood from the prison industry -- the police, the lawyers, the suppliers of prison equipment -- has grown steadily. So has the population of the indolent -- deprived, left behind, cast outside economic and social life. And so, expectedly, grew the popular feeling of insecurity: 85 per cent of the population of Britain today think that it was safe to walk the streets at night thirty years ago, but 95 per cent think that it is not safe now.

Those last thirty years or so were indeed fateful and seminal years in the history of the way in which the 'Western' -- industrial, capitalist, democratic, modern -- society was shaped and maintained. It is that way which determines the names people tend to give to their fears and anxieties, and to the spots where they suspect the threat to their security to lie. And that way -- let me repeat -- underwent a most profound change.

The very term 'unemployed' by which those unable to make their living used to be (and still are -- though now misleadingly) described, made them into the proverbial exception that confirms the rule -- obliquely reasserting the principle that 'being employed' is the norm which the state of 'being out of work' violates. The 'unemployed' were the 'reserve army of labour'. Temporarily out of job for reason of health, infirmity or current economic trouble, they were to be groomed to resume employment when fit -- and grooming them was, by and large, the recognized task and the explicit or tacit undertaking of political powers.

This is no longer the case. Except in the nostalgic and increasingly demagogic copies of electoral commercials, those out of work have ceased being a 'reserve army of labour'. Economic upturns no longer signal the end to unemployment. 'Rationalizing' now means cutting not creating jobs, and technological and managerial progress is measured by 'slimming down' the work force, closing down branches and staff reductions. Updating the fashion in which business is run consists in making work 'flexible' -- shedding labour and abandoning production lines and production sites at a moment's notice, whenever greener grass is sighted elsewhere: whenever more profitable commercial possibilities, or more docile and less costly labour, beckon from afar. Once tied down to steel and concrete, to heavy factory buildings and unwieldy machinery, capital has itself already become the embodiment of flexibility; it has mastered the tricks of pulling itself, like a rabbit, out of the hat or vanishing without a trace -- with the information super-highway playing the role of the magic wand. Yet some people's meat being some other people's poison, changes which mean rationalization and flexibility for capital rebound at the receiving end as catastrophes -- as inexplicable, as beyond human power; and as the stiffening of opportunities into the solid wall of fate. Jobs for life are no more. As a matter of fact jobs as such, as we once understood them, are no more. Without them, there is little room for life-lived-as-a-project, for long-term planning and farreaching hopes. Be grateful for the bread you eat today and do not think too far ahead ... The symbol of wisdom is no longer the savings book; it is now, at least for those able to afford being wise, the credit cards, and a walletful of them.

Few of us remember now that the Welfare State was originally conceived as a state-wielded tool to groom back the temporarily unfit into fitness and to encourage those who were fit to try harder, by saving them from fear of losing their fitness in the process ... Welfare provisions were seen then as a safety net, drawn by the community as a whole, under every one of its members -- giving everyone the courage to face the challenge of life; so that fewer and fewer members would ever need to use it, and those who did would use it less and less often. The community took it upon itself to make sure that the unemployed would have enough health and skills to become employed again, and to insure them against the temporary hiccups and vagaries of the ups and downs of fortune. The Welfare State was conceived not as charity, but a citizen's right, and not as the provision of individual handouts, but a form of collective insurance. (Who considers the payment from a life- or property-insurance company as charity or a handout?!) As I said, few of us remember this now...

This was the case -- this could be the case -- in those times when industry provided work, living and the insurance, for the majority of the population. The
Welfare State had to reach where industry did not; it had to bear the marginal costs of capital's race for profit, to make the leftbehind labour employable again -- an effort which capital itself would not or could not undertake. Today, with a growing sector of the population never likely to enter production again, and thus being of no present or prospective interest to those who run the economy, the 'margin' is no longer marginal, and the collapse of capital's interest makes it seem yet less marginal -- bigger and more awkward and cumbersome -- than it is. This new perspective is expressed in the fashionable phrase: 'Welfare State? We can no longer afford it'...

As a result, welfare provisions have been transformed from the exercise of citizens' rights into the stigma of the impotent and the improvident. 'Focused on those who need it', subject to ever stricter and ever more humiliating means tests, vilified for being a drain on 'taxpayers' money', associated in the public mind with sponging, reprehensible negligence, sexual laxity or drug abuse -- they turn ever more into the contemporary version of the wages of sin; and wages of sin which we not only 'cannot afford', but for which there is no moral reason why we should try to do so. The sins for which the original Welfare State was meant to pay were the sins of the capitalist economy and market competition, of capital which could not stay solvent without enormous social costs in shackled existences and broken lives -- the costs which it refused, however, to pay, or could not pay under the threat of insolvency. It was that damage for which the Welfare State promised to identify the present victims and to insure the prospective ones. If we hear now that we, the 'taxpayers', 'cannot afford this any more', it only means that the state, the community, does not see it fit or desirable any more to countersign the social, human costs of economic solvency (which under market conditions is equivalent to profitability). Instead, it shifts the payment to the victims themselves, present and future. It refuses the responsibility for their ill fate -- just as it has abandoned the old task of the 'recommodification' of labour.

No more collective insurance against the risks; the task of coping with the collectively produced risks has been privatized.

Every type of social order produces some visions of the dangers which threaten its identity. But each society spawns visions made to its own measure -- to the measure of the kind of social order it struggles to be. On the whole, these visions tend to be mirror images of the society which spawns them, while the image of the threat tends to be a self-portrait of the society with a minus sign. Or, to put this in psychoanalytical terms, the threat is a projection of the inner ambivalence of the society about its own ways and means; about the fashion in which it lives and perpetuates its living. The society unsure of the survival of its order develops the mentality of a besieged fortress; but the enemies who had laid siege to its walls are its own, its very own 'inner enemies' -- the suppressed, ambient fears which permeate its daily life, its 'normality', yet which, in order to make daily reality endurable, must be squashed and squeezed out of the lived-through quotidianity and moulded into an alien body: into a tangible enemy whom one can fight, and fight again, and even hope to conquer.

In line with this rule, the danger which haunted the classic modern state was that of the revolution. The enemies were the revolutionaries or all-too-radical reformists, the subversive forces trying to replace the extant state-managed order with another state-managed order, with a counter-order reversing upside down each and any principle by which the current order lived or aimed to live. As Michel Foucault has shown, the classic modern state, firmly in charge of the daily order-making efforts, collectivized and 'demographized' its tasks; the order-making was, above all, the job of generalizing, classifying, defining and setting apart categories. From that perspective, the counter-order could appear only as another, opposing classification and a reversal of categorial hierarchy. Those bent on doing the reversal could be seen only as aspiring alternative classifiers and legislators of categories. The 'inner demon', thus exorcized and reincarnated in the body of the revolutionary conspiracy, was the self-destructive tendency of the state's own legislating effort: the discontent, dissent and heresy which that effort could not but spawn in an ever growing volume among those cast at the receiving end of the present-day classifications.

If the state no longer presides over the reproduction of systemic order, having now left the task to the deregulated, and thus no longer politically accountable, market forces, the point of gravity in the process of order-making has shifted away from the legislating/generalizing/classifying/categorizing activities. Gradually yet steadily, fears related to the precariousness of order cease to be state-centred. Political power, the question of who rules the state and who makes the laws of the land, ceases to be the main bone of contention. The enemy is no longer the revolutionary conspiracy of the would-be state administrators. Since no tangible, well-defined

agency seems to be in charge of the present order, it is difficult, nay impossible, to imagine any not-yet-existing power which would cure the ills of the current order in the future by replacing it with another order -- placing it under, so to speak, 'new management'. When the American politologist Peter Drucker declared 'no more salvation by society', this was a programmatic, ideological statement; but it was also, even if not self-consciously, a product of stock-taking, an assertion of new realism. 'No more salvation by society' means that there are no visible collective, joint agencies in charge of the global societal order. The care for the human plight has been privatized, and the tools and practices of care deregulated. One comprehensive and universal categorial grid has fallen apart. Self-aggrandizement is replacing socially sponsored improvement, and self-assertion takes the place of the collective cure for class deprivation. It is now individual wit and muscle that must be stretched in the daily struggle for survival and improvement.

When it managed the disciplined conduct of its members through their productive roles, society prompted joining forces and the search for advancement through collective efforts. The society which obtains order-stabilizing behavioural patterns from its members who have been evicted or are about to be evicted from their statuses as producers and defined instead as, first and foremost, consumers, discourages the anchoring of hope in collective actions. Thoughts emerging within the cognitive horizon framed by the daily practices of the consumers invariably enhance the acute interest in the consumer market and extend its seductive powers. Unlike production, consumption is a thoroughly individual activity: it also sets individuals at cross purposes, often at each other's throats.

The 'inner demons' of this type of society are born out of the seductive powers of the consumer market. The society of consumers can no more do without that seduction than the society of producers could do without thanks to the enforcement of normative regulation. For this very reason it cannot afford to declare a war, even less to wage a war, against the market tendency to beef up consumer dreams and desires to a state of frenzy and to raise them sky-high -- however detrimental such a tendency may prove to the form of order in which it is rooted.

And detrimental to order it is -- as much as it is indispensable to it; there is no novelty in this paradox -- as, since the moment when order turned into a task to be performed, any strategy of order-making proved to be charged with the same incurable ambivalence. What is, however, novel is the type of order and the method it needs for its own smooth functioning and perpetuation. The method is new, and so are the discontents it breeds and the risks it incubates. As the feasibility of a

socially initiated redistribution of consumer desirables is fading, even those who cannot partake of the consumer feast, and thus are not properly regulated by the powers of market seduction, have only one course of action left to take in order to attain the standards the consumer society promotes: to reach for the ends directly, without first deploying the means. After all, one cannot deploy what one does not possess...

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Whatever has been registered in recent years as *rising criminality* (a process, let us note, parallel to the falling of the membership of the communist or other radical parties of 'alternative order') is not a product of malfunctioning or neglect -- let alone of factors external to society itself (though this is how it is ever more often depicted -- when, typically, the correlation between criminality and immigration, the influx of strangers, of foreign races or cultures, is spied out or declared). It is, instead, the consumer society's own product, logically (if not legally) legitimate; and what is more -- also an *inescapable* product. The higher the 'consumer demand' (that is, the more effective the market seduction), the more the consumer society is safe and prosperous. Yet, simultaneously, the wider and deeper is the gap between those who desire and those who can satisfy their desires, or between those who have been seduced and proceed to act in the way the state of being seduced prompts them to act, and those who have been seduced yet are unable to act in the way the seduced are expected to act. Market seduction is, simultaneously, the great equalizer and the great divider. Seductive impulses, to be effective, must be transmitted in all directions and addressed indiscriminately to everybody who will listen. But there are more of those who can listen than of those who can respond in the fashion which the seductive message was meant to elicit. Those who cannot act on the desires so induced are treated daily to the dazzling spectacle of those who can. Lavish consumption, they are told and shown, is the sign of success and a highway leading straight to public applause and fame. They also learn that possessing and consuming certain objects and practising certain lifestyles is the necessary condition of happiness; perhaps even of human dignity.

If consumption is the measure of a successful life, of happiness and even of human decency, then the lid has been taken off the human desires; no amount of acquirements and exciting sensations is ever likely to bring satisfaction in the way the 'keeping up to the standards' once promised: there are no standards to keep up to -- the finishing line moves forward together with the runner; the goals keep forever distant as one tries to reach them. Far ahead, records keep being broken. Dazzled and baffled, people learn that in the newly privatized, and thus 'liberated', companies, which they remember as public institutions that were austere

and constantly famished for cash, the present managers draw salaries measured in millions, while those sacked from their managerial chairs are indemnified, again in millions of pounds, for their botched and sloppy work. From all places, through all communication channels, the message comes loud and clear: there are no standards except those of *grabbing more*, and no rules, except the imperative of 'playing one's cards right'.

In no card game are hands even, so the advice to play one's cards right suggests one should use whatever resources one can muster. From the point of view of the casino owners some resources -- those which they themselves allocate or circulate -- are legal tender; all other resources, though -- those beyond their control -- are prohibited. The line dividing the fair from the unfair does not look the same, however, from the side of the players; and particularly from the side of the would-be, *aspiring* players; and most particularly, from the side of the *incapacitated* aspiring players, who do not have access to the legal tender. They must resort to the resources they do have, whether recognized as legal or declared illegal -- or opt out of the game altogether. That latter move, however, has been made by the seductive force of the market all but impossible to contemplate.

The disarming, disempowering and suppressing of unfulfilled players is therefore an indispensable supplement of the integration-through-seduction in a market-led society of consumers. The impotent, indolent players are to be kept outside the game. They are the waste-product of the game, but a product the game cannot stop sedimenting without grinding to a halt and calling in the receivers. Also, the game would not benefit from halting the production of waste for another reason: those who stay in the game need to be shown the horrifying sights of (as they are told) the only alternative -- in order to be able to endure the hardships and the tensions which life lived as play gestates.

Given the nature of the game now played, the hardships and misery of those left out of it, once treated as a *collectively caused* blight which needs to be dealt with by *collective means*, can be only redefined as an *individual crime*. The 'dangerous classes' are thus redefined as classes of criminals. And so the prisons now fully and truly deputize for the fading welfare institutions.

The growing volume of behaviour classified as criminal is not an obstacle on the road to the fully fledged and all-embracing consumerist society; on the contrary, it is its natural accompaniment and prerequisite. This is so, admittedly, for a number of reasons; but I propose that the main reason among them is the fact that those 'left out of the game' (the *flawed consumers* -- the unfulfilled consumers, those whose means do

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not measure up to the desires, and those refused the chance of winning while playing the game by its official rules) are precisely the embodiment of the 'inner demons' specific to the consumer life. Their ghettoization and criminalization, the severity of the sufferers administered to them, the cruelty of the fate visited upon them, are all -- metaphorically speaking -- the ways of exorcizing such inner demons and burning them in effigy. The criminalized margins serve as the sewers into which the inevitable, but excessive and poisonous, effluvia of consumerist seduction are consolingly channelled, so that the seduced are expected to act. Market seduction is, simultaneously, the great equalizer and the great divider. Seductive impulses, to be effective, must

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not measure up to the desires, and those refused the chance of winning while playing the game by its official rules) are precisely the embodiment of the 'inner demons' specific to the consumer life. Their ghettoization and criminalization, the severity of the sufferers administered to them, the cruelty of the fate visited upon them, are all -- metaphorically speaking -- the ways of exorcizing such inner demons and burning them in effigy. The criminalized margins serve as the sewers into which the inevitable, but excessive and poisonous, effluvia of consumerist seduction are consolingly channelled, so that the seduced are expected to act. Market seduction is, simultaneously, the great equalizer and the great divider. Seductive impulses, to be effective, must
death row planned to hold 120 convicts was built at the US penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana. At the beginning of 1994, altogether 2,802 people were awaiting execution in American prisons. Of these, 1,102 were Afro-American, while thirty-three were sentenced to death when juveniles. The overwhelming majority of the death row inmates comes from the so-called ‘underclass’, that huge and growing warehouse where the failures and the rejects of consumer society are stored. As Linebaugh suggests, the spectacle of execution is ‘cynically used by politicians to terrorize a growing underclass’. But in demanding the terrorization of the underclass, the silent American majority attempts to terrorize its own inner terrors...

The restoration of the death penalty is perhaps the most drastic, yet not the only symptom of the changing role of criminality – and the changed symbolic message it conveys. Blood, not just sweat, tends to be drawn from the incarcerated part of the ‘underclass’. In Dead Man Walking, Sister Helen Prejean, Chairperson of the National Coalition against the Death Penalty, describes the ‘plasma plant’ run by Angola Prison, in which blood ‘donations' were collected, with payments dropping by March 1994 from the original $12 to $4 per donation. Meanwhile, Dr Jack Kevorkian, the front-line advocate of euthanasia, campaigns for the inclusion of compulsory organ ‘donations' in the execution procedure. These few facts signal the new casting of the poor in its new version of the ‘underclass’, or the ‘class beyond the classes’: no longer is it the ‘reserve army of labour’, but fully and truly the ‘redundant population’. What is it good for? For the supply of spare parts to repair other human bodies?

Each year a million and a half Americans populate American prisons; about four and a half million American adults are under some form of judicial control. As Richard Freeman, an economist from Harvard, puts it, ‘If the long-term unemployed in Europe are paid compensation -- in the USA we put them in prisons.’ Increasingly, being poor is seen as crime; becoming poor, as the product of criminal predispositions or intentions -- abuse of alcohol, gambling, drugs, truancy and vagabondage. The poor, far from meriting care and assistance, deserve hate and condemnation --

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as the very incarnation of sin. In this respect, there is little to distinguish between Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich, vying as they are with each other to capture the mood of the ‘silent majority’. As the New York Herald Tribune put it on 25 December 1994, the Americans -- conservatives, moderate, Republican -- consider it their right to blame the poor for their fate and simultaneously condemn millions of their children to poverty, hunger and despair.

‘The Welfare State is dead’, announced a leading spokesman of the American right which claims to be, and increasingly looks like, the American majority -- one of the directors of the Progress and Freedom Foundation, established in 1993 to supply ideas for the Republican majority in the Congress. ‘We need to pick up the corpse and bury it before the stench gets unbearable.’ This turns out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dismantling -- not just of the welfare provision, but of everything that remained of the American New Deal -- is today in full swing. On the one hand, the new congressional majority wants young single mothers to be deprived of their $377 of monthly benefit and have their children sent into orphanages -- symbolically confirming the criminality and the social unfairness of the mothers. On the other, high on the agenda of legal reform is the abolition of the last constraints put on banking activities, the introduction of ‘flexibility' into the anti-pollution laws, making appeal against company actions more difficult. The radical privatization of human fate goes along with apace with the radical deregulation of industry and finances.

I wonder what Willem Adriaan Bonger would make of this, had he not chosen death over life under the Nazis -- those other, past promoters of ‘radical solutions', who, as Klaus DÄ¶rner pointed out in his eye-opening book Tödliche Mitleid, should be also seen as BA¨rger, who like all ordinary folk before and after sought answers to whatever irritated them as ‘social problems'. Unfortunately, Bonger is not here to tell us -- he did not live long enough to see the birth of the Brave New World of deregulation, privatization, consumer choice -- and of the criminalization of those unable to choose. We need to make sense of this world without his help.

I am not suggesting that here in Europe we have already found ourselves in the American situation. I am not suggesting either, that the present of the US necessarily displays the future of Europe. But I think that the signal it sends is clear enough: there is overwhelming evidence of the intimate link between the universal tendency towards a radical freedom of the market and the progressive dismantling of the Welfare State, as well as between the decomposition of the Welfare State and the tendency to criminalize poverty. I sincerely hope that the American

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evidence will serve us as a warning, not as an example. I wish, though, that my hopes were better founded. Ibrahim Warde of Berkeley wrote recently (Le Monde diplomatique of May 1995) of the advancing tyranny of the ‘economically correct'. Indeed, gradually yet relentlessly it becomes an axiom of public discourse that whatever 'makes sense' economically does not need the support of any other sense and does not need to apologize for the absence of any other sense -- political, social or downright human. In a world in which the principal actors are no longer democratically controlled nation states, but non-elected, unbound and radically disembedded financial conglomerates -- the question of greater profitability and competitiveness invalidates and delegitimizes all other questions before one has the time and will to ask them... One dreads to think of what may happen in Europe, frightened by rising structural unemployment and the fast-growing ‘unproductive' sector of the population, if the present trend in America continues unabated; and if it is recognized as 'economically correct' thanks to the advances in profits and competitive capacity...

(The text of the Willem Bonger Lecture, delivered at the University of Amsterdam in May 1995.)
4: Morality Begins at Home: Or the Rocky Road to Justice

Levinas's moral world stretches between I and the Other. It is this space which Levinas visits again and again throughout his ethical writings, exploring it with an uncanny determination and patience. It is inside this space that he finds the birthplace of ethics and all the food the ethical self needs to stay alive: the silent challenge of the Other and my dedicated yet selfless responsibility. This is a vast space, as far as ethics goes: large enough to accommodate the ethical self in its full flight, scaling the highest peaks of saintliness, and all the underwater reefs of moral life, the traps that must be avoided by the self on its way to ethical life -- to the assumption of uneasy responsibility for its responsibility. But this is a narrow, tightly circumscribed space as far as the human-being-in-the-world goes. It has room for no more than two actors. The moral drama is always played at the moral party of two: 'The Other' or 'The Face' are generic names, but in every moral encounter these names stand for just one, only one being -- one Another, one Face; neither name may appear in the plural without losing its ethical status, its moral significance. This leaves aside most of the things that fill the daily life of every human: the pursuit of survival and self-aggrandizement, the rational consideration of ends and means, the calculation of gains and losses, pleasure seeking, power, politics, economics... Above all, entering this moral space means taking time off from daily business, leaving outside its mundane rules and conventions. At the moral party of two I and the Other arrive disrobed of our social trappings, stripped of status, social distinctions, handicaps or roles, being neither rich nor poor, high or lowly, mighty or disempowered -- reduced to the bare essentiality of our common humanity.

The moral self constituted inside such a space cannot but feel uncomfortable the moment the moral party of two is broken into by the Third. But can it survive such an intrusion? Does it not rather remind one of the deep-water fish which bursts when drawn out of its element and brought to the surface, its inner pressure no more bearable in the rarefied atmosphere of the 'average' and 'normal'?

It is not just the moral self which feels uncomfortable. So does its painter -- Levinas himself. No better proof of his discomfort is needed than the obsessive, almost compulsive urgency with which he returns in his late writings and interviews to the 'problem of the Third' and the possibility of salvaging the validity of his life-long description of the ethical relationship in the 'presence of the Third party' -- that is, under the conditions of ordinary mundane life. There is a remarkable similarity between this late Levinasian effort to bring back what he struggled, with such astonishing zeal and success, to exclude, and the ageing Husserl's attempts to return to intersubjectivity from the transcendental subjectivity he spent his life purifying of all 'inter-bound contamination -- never to anybody's, and above all to his own, satisfaction. We know what followed Husserl's eager, yet inconclusive, attempts: Heidegger's decision to cut the Gordian knot rather than to try in vain to untie it, his bold proclamation that Sein is *ursprünglich Mitsein*, 'being with', and thus the understanding of being and all its works cannot but start from this Mitsein (intersubjective, Husserl would say) condition. But this was the kind of solution to Husserl's troubles which all but invalidated, made null and void the significance of Husserl's 'purifying' effort for the understanding of understanding. The question is: is it necessary to cut the Gordian knot also in the case of Levinasian ethics? Can the ethics, born and grown in the greenhouse of the twosome encounter, withstand the assault by the Third party? And -- more to the point -- can the moral capacity made to the measure of the responsibility for the Other as the Face be strong enough, or potent enough, or vigorous enough to carry an entirely different burden of responsibility for the 'Other as such', the Other without a Face?

Before the strange world, inhospitable to ethics, that includes the Third had turned into his major, obsessive preoccupation, Levinas visited it but briefly and gingerly, without much curiosity or enthusiasm, and seldom on his own initiative unprompted by impatient interviewers. And once visiting it, he trod the ground hesitantly, as one tends to do in an unfamiliar landscape one suspects of being full of unspeakable, and above all unreadable, dangers. He did not stop long enough to count the trees in the forest. And his travel reports show that he felt out of his element there: premonitions of threats prevail over all other impressions.

In Le Moi et la totalité (1954) Levinas signals an essential discontinuity between the self's relation to the Other, made fully out of respect for the Other's freedom and integrity, and the relation towards the 'concept of the human being' so extended that it falls under the spell of impersonal reason. In that second case, the case of totalité, the Other -- now transformed into the Third -- is 'a free being to whom I may do harm by violating his liberty'. 'Totality', sadly concludes Levinas, 'cannot constitute itself without injustice.' What is more, someone must ask me to account for my action, before I become aware of injustice done and visualize the possibility of justice. Very much in the Husserlian spirit, Levinas suggests that 'Justice does not result from the normal play of injustices. It comes from the outside, "through the door", from beyond the mAtâlêce -- it appears as a principle external to history.' It comes in defiance of the 'theories of justice which are forged in the course of social struggles, in which moral ideas express the needs of one society or one class'; it appeals to the 'ideal of justice', which requires that all needs -- all of them, after all, but relative -- are abandoned on 'approach to the absolute'. Justice comes, therefore, not out of history, but
as a judgement pronounced on history: 'Human is the world in which it is possible to judge history' -- which, in turn, is the world of 'rationalism'. In relation to daily charity and cruelty, those dual works of the self struggling toward responsible morality, justice able to conquer the inborn injustice of social totality may arrive only as Deus ex machina. Reason, first expelled from the primal moral scene, is called back from its exile to take care of humanity which the morality of the self is too smaller and finespun to carry.

Almost thirty years later, in La Souffrance inutile (1982), the last motif is repeated: 'interhumanity in the proper sense lies in one's non-indifference towards the others, one's reponsibility for the others, but before the reciprocity of such responsibility is inscribed into the impersonal law.' For this reason, 'the interhuman perspective may survive, but may be also lost in the political order of the City or in the Law which establishes mutual obligations of the citizens'. There are -- so it seems -- two mutually independent, perhaps even unconnected orders, political and ethical.

Political order -- whether pre- or post-ethical -- which inaugurates the 'social contract' is neither the sufficient condition nor the necessary outcome of ethics. In the ethical position 'I' is distinct from the citizen and from that individual who, in his natural selfishness, precedes all order, yet from whom political philosophy, from Hobbes on, tried to derive -- or derived -- the social and political order of the City.

Such a philosophical strategy is declared mistaken and therefore vain; but what is there to replace it, given the separation and, indeed, virtual absence of communication between the two orders?

In the same year (1982) an interview with Levinas appeared under the title Philosophie, justice et amour. Pressed by the questions put to him by R. Fornet and A. Gomez, Levinas allows for a certain mutual dependency between the political and the ethical order. Without the order of justice,

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says Levinas here, would be no limit to my responsibility and thus cohabitation with Others as generalized citizens would not be possible. But -- he insists immediately -- 'only departing from my relation to the Face, from me in front of the Other, one may speak of the State's legitimacy or illegitimacy'. The principle of justice does not come after all, contrary to what he suggested thirty years before, from a cause 'external to ethics', from reason; it is the ethics that now claims the right to pass judgement on the politically construed justice, that demands the obedience of the State to its own, ethical, rules. And then, in response to the straightforward question 'Do you think that such a (just) State is possible?", comes equally the straightforward answer: 'Yes, an agreement between the ethics and the State is possible. The just State will be the work of just people and the saints, rather than of propaganda and preaching... Charity is impossible without justice, but justice without charity is divorced.'

De l'unicité appeared in 1986. Here an attempt is made to represent the difference between the ethical and the 'formal', the legal, in a systematic way -- focusing the story on the radical dissolution of the uniqueness of the ethical Other in the commonality/similarity of the individual as citizen. This dissolution -- the loss of uniqueness -- is a foregone conclusion since the appearance of the 'Third' -- other than the one close to me (mon prochain), but at the same time close to the one close to me and moreover close to me in his own right -- an 'also close'. Now there are 'they'. They, those various others, do things to each other, may harm each other, make each other suffer. 'This is the hour of justice.' The uniqueness of the Other, incomparable when constituted by moral responsibility, will not help much now; one needs to appeal to a force one could do without before, to Reason -- that allows one, first, to 'compare the incomparable', and -- second -- to 'impose a measure upon the extravagance of the infinite generosity of the "for the Other"'. And yet this recourse to Reason feels necessary precisely thanks to the memory of the 'uniqueness' of the Other, which was originally experienced in the ethical relationship; it is because each of the 'multiple others' is unique in his challenge to my responsibility, in its claim on my 'being for', that it postulates judgement and thus objectivity, objectivation, thematization, synthesis. One needs arbitrating institutions and political power that sustains them. Justice requires the foundation of the State. In this lies the necessity of the reduction of human uniqueness to the particularity of a human individual, to the condition of the citizen.' That latter particularity reduces, impoverishes, dissolves, waters down the splendour of ethically formed uniqueness; but without that already ethically experienced uniqueness it would itself be inconceivable; it would never come to pass...

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Justice is in many ways disloyal to its ethical origins, unable to preserve its heritage in all its inner richness -- but it cannot forget its origins without ceasing to be itself, justice. 'It cannot abandon that uniqueness to political history, which itself subjected to the determinism of power, reason of the State and seduction of the totalitarian temptations.' It must, instead, measure itself over and over again by the standards of original uniqueness, however unattainable such standards may be among the multiplicity of citizens. Hence the indelible trait of all justice is its dissatisfaction with itself: Justice means constant revision of justice, expectation of a better justice.' Justice, one may say, must exist perpetually in a condition of noch nicht geworden, setting itself standards higher than those already practised.

The same themes return at length in the extensive conversations with Francois Poirié (Emmanuel Lévinas: Qui Àtes-vous? (Lyon: Editions la Manufacture, 1987)). In the presence of the Third, says Levinas, 'we leave what I call the order of ethics, or the order of saintliness or the order of mercy, or the order of love, or the order of charity -- where the other human concerns me regardless the place he occupies in the multitude of humans, and even regardless our shared quality of individuals of the human species; he concerns me as one close to me, as the first to come. He is unique. Beyond this order stretches the realm of choice, proportion, judgement -- and comparison. Comparison already entails the first act of violence: the defiance of uniqueness. This violence cannot be avoided, since among the multiplicity of others certain divisions (assignment to classes, to categories) are necessary - they are 'justified divisions'. Ethics demands, one may say, a certain self-limitation; so that the ethical demand may be fulfilled, certain sacred axioms of ethics must be sacrificed... The liberal state, says Levinas -- the state grounded on the principle of human rights, is the implementation, and conspicuous manifestation, of that contradiction. Its function is nothing less than to 'limit the original mercy from which justice originated'. But the internal contradiction of the liberal state finds its expression in perceiving, 'above and beyond all justice already incorporated in the regime, a justice more just... 'Justice in the liberal state is never definitive.' 'Justice is awakened by charity -- such charity which is before justice but also after it.' 'Concern with human rights is not the function of the State. It is a non-state institution inside the State -- an appeal to humanity which the State has not accomplished yet.' The concern with human rights is an appeal to the 'surplus of charity'. One may say: to something larger than any letter of Law, than anything that the State has done so far. State-administered justice is born of charity gestated and groomed within the primary ethical situation; yet justice may be administered only if it never stops being prompted by its original spiritus movens; if it knows of itself as of a never ending chase of a forever elusive goal -- the re-creation among the individuals/citizens of the uniqueness of the Other as Face... If it knows that it cannot match the kindness which gave it birth and keeps it alive' (L'Autre, Utopie et justice, 1988) -- but that it cannot ever stop trying to do just that.

Just what can one learn from Levinas's exploration of the 'world of the Third', the 'world of the multiplicity of others -- the social world? One can learn, to put it in a nutshell, that this world of the social is, simultaneously, the legitimate offspring and a distortion of the moral world. The idea of justice is conceived at the moment of encounter between the experience of uniqueness (as given in the moral responsibility for the Other) and the experience of...
multitude of others (as given in social life). It cannot be conceived under any other circumstances; it needs both parents and to both it is genetically related, even if the genes, though being complementary, contain also contradictory genetic messages.

If it were not for the memory of the uniqueness of the Face, there would be no idea of generalized, 'impersonal' justice. And this is the case in spite of the fact that impersonality means the defiance and the denial of personhood – of the selfsame value which is to be cherished and groomed and defended and preserved in moral relationship. (Moral responsibility is taken up in the name of exactly such a preservation.) Thus, paradoxically, morality is the school of justice – even if the category of justice is alien to it and redundant within the moral relationship. (Justice comes into its own together with comparison, but there is nothing to compare when the Other is encountered as unique.) The 'primal scene' of ethics is thereby also the primal, ancestral scene of social justice.

Another paradox: justice becomes necessary when the moral impulse, quite self-sufficient inside the moral party of two, is found to be a poor guide once it ventures beyond the boundaries of that party. The infinity of the moral responsibility, the unlimitedness (even the silence!) of the moral demand simply cannot be sustained when 'the Other' appears in the plural. (One may say that there is an inverse ratio between the infinity of 'being for' and the infinity of the others.) But it is that moral impulse which makes justice necessary: it resort to justice in the name of self-preservation, though while doing it it risks being cut down, trimmed, maimed or diluted... In the Dialogue sur le penser-À l'Autre (1987) the interviewer asked Levinas:

As far as I am an ethical subject, I am responsible for everything in everybody; my responsibility is infinite. Is not it so that such a situation is

unlivable for me, and for the other, whom I risk terrorizing with my ethical voluntarism? Does not it follow that ethics is impotent in its will to do good?

To which Levinas gave the following answer:

I do not know whether such a situation is unlivable. Certainly, such a situation is not what one would call agreeable, pleasant to live with, but it is good. What is extremely important -- and I can assert this without being myself a saint, and without pretending to be a saint – is to be able to say that a human truly deserving that name, in its European sense, derived from the Greeks and the Bible, is a human being who considers saintliness the ultimate value, an unassailable value.

This value is not surrendered once the stern, uncompromising ethical requirement of 'being-for' is replaced by a somewhat diluted and less stressful code of justice. It remains what it was -- the ultimate value, reserving to itself the right to invigilate, monitor and censure all deals entered into in the name of justice. Constant tension and never calmed suspicion rule in the relationship between ethics and the just State, its never sufficiently industrious plenipotentiary. Ethics is not a derivative of the State; the ethical authority does not derive from the State's powers to legislate and to enforce the Law. It precedes the State, it is the sole source of the State's legitimacy and the ultimate judge of that legitimacy. The State, one may say, is justifiable only as a vehicle or instrument of ethics.

Levinas's view of the ethical origins of justice and the State itself as an instrument of justice (and, obliquely, of the ethics itself) can be interpreted as a phenomenological insight into the meaning of justice -- or as a non-neutral (indeed, per-locutionary in the Austinian sense) 'etiological myth', setting the stage for the subordination of the State to ethical principles and subjecting it to the ethical criteria of evaluation, as well as setting limits to the State's freedom of ethical manoeuvre. It can hardly be seen, though, as a comprehensive account of the complex and convoluted process through which ethical responsibility for the other comes (or does not come, as the case may be) to be implemented on a generalized scale through the works of the State and its institution. It certainly goes a long way towards explaining the growing concern with the plight of the 'generalized other' -- the far-away Other, the Other distant in space and time; but it says little about the ways and means through which that concern may bring practical effects, and even less about the reasons for such effects falling so saliently short of needs and expectations, or not being visible at all.

Levinas's writings offer rich inspiration for the analysis of the endemic aporia of moral responsibility. They offer nothing comparable for the

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scrutiny of the aporetic nature of justice. They do not confront the possibility that -- just as in the case of assuming moral responsibility for the Other -- the work of the institutions which Levinas wishes to be dedicated to the promotion of justice may have consequences detrimental to the moral values. Neither do they allow for the possibility that such detrimental consequences may be more than just a side-effect of mistakes and neglect, being rooted instead in the very way such institutions can -- must -- operate to remain viable.

Quite a few insights into the latter issue can be found in the work of another great ethical philosopher of our times -- Hans Jonas. Unlike Levinas, Jonas puts our present moral quandary in historical perspective, representing it as an event in time, rather than an extemporal, metaphysical predicament. According to Jonas, for the greater part of human history the gap between 'micro' and 'macro' ethics did not present a problem; the short reach of the moral drive was not fraught with terminal dangers for the simple reason that the consequences of human deeds (given the technologically determined scale of human action) were equally limited. What has happened in quite recent times is the tremendous growth of the possible consequentiality of human acts unmatched by a similar expansion of human moral capacity. What we can do now may have effects on distant lands and distant generations; effects as profound and radical as they are unpredictable, transcending the power of the always time-bound and place-bound human imagination, and morally uncontrollable, stepping far beyond the issues with which human moral capacity became used to cope. Yet the awareness of responsibility for all this did not make much progress. Quite the contrary: the same development which put in the hands of humankind, powers, tools and weapons of unprecedented magnitude, requiring close normative regulation, 'eroded the foundations from which norms could be derived; it has destroyed the very idea of norm as such' (The Imperative of Responsibility (University of Chicago Press, 1984)). Both departures are the work of science which suffers no boundary to what humans can do, but neither takes gladly the argument that not all that could be done should be done; the ability of doing something is, for science and for technology, its executive arm, all the reason ever needed for doing it, be what may. New powers need new ethics, and need them badly – as a matter of our collective life and death. But the new powers undermine the very possibility of satisfying that need, by denying in theory and in practice the right of ethical consideration to interfere with, let alone arrest, their own endless and self-propelling growth.

This blind tendency must be reversed, Jonas demands. A new ethics must be called into being, made to the measure of the new human

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powers. A sort of a new categorieal imperative – like 'Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life.' This is not easy, though. First, violating such an imperative mark two, unlike in the case of the original Kantian version, entails no rational contradiction, and thus is deprived of the sole ratio to which the logic of science would accord a self-imposing and unquestionable authority. Second, it is notoriously difficult, nay impossible, to know for sure which deeds of technoscience are, and which are not, 'compatible with the permanence of genuine human life' -
- at least before the damage, often irrepairable, has been done. Even in the unlikely case of the new categorical imperative having been awarded normative authority, the vexing question of its application would still remain open: how to argue convincingly that a controversial development should be stopped, if its effects cannot be measured in advance with such a degree of precision, with that near-algorithmic certainty, which scientific reason would be inclined to respect? If a truly algorithmic calculation of the looming dangers is not on the cards, Jonas suggests, we should settle for its second-best substitute, 'heuristics of fear': to try our best to visualize the most awesome and the most durable among the consequences of a given technological action. Above all, we need to apply the principle of uncertainty: 'The prophecy of doom is to be given greater heed than the prophecy of bliss.' We need, one could say, an ethics of systematic pessimism, so that we may err, if at all, solely on the side of caution.

Kant's trust in the grip of ethical law rested on the conviction that there are arguments of reason which every reasonable person, being a reasonable person, must accept; the passage from ethical law to ethical action led through rational thought, and to smooth the passage one needed only to take care of the non-contradictory rationality of the law, counting for the rest on the endemic rational faculties of moral actors. In this respect Jonas stays faithful to Kant -- though he is the first to admit that nothing as uncontroversial as Kant's categorical imperative (that is, no principle which cannot be violated without violating simultaneously the logical law of contradiction) can be articulated in relation to the new challenge to human ethical faculties. For Jonas, as for Kant, the crux of the issue is the capacity of legislative reason; and the promotion, as well as the eventual universality, of ethical conduct is ultimately a philosophical problem and the task of philosophers. For Jonas, as for Kant, the fate of ethics is fully and truly in the hands of Reason and its alter ego -- as reason. In this scheme of things there is no room left for the possibility that reason may, even if only on occasion, militate against what is, in its name, promoted as ethical principles.

In other words, there is no room left for the logic of human interests, and the logic of social institutions -- those organized interests whose function is, in practice if not by design, to make the by-passing of ethical restrictions feasible and ethical considerations irrelevant to the action. Neither is there room left for the otherwise trivial sociological observation that for the arguments to be accepted they need to accord with interests in addition to (or instead of) being rationally flawless. There is no room either for another equally trivial phenomenon of 'unanticipated consequences' of human action -- of deeds bringing results left out of account, or unthought of at the time the action was undertaken. Nor is there room for the relatively simple guess that when interests are many and at odds with each other, any hope that a certain set of principles will eventually prevail and will be universally obeyed must seek support in a sober analysis of social and political forces capable of securing its victory.

I suggest that a mixture of all those factors -- overlooked or ignored and left out of account in Jonas's search for the new ethics -- can be blamed for the present plight of the world, in which the growing awareness of the dangers ahead goes hand in hand with a growing impotence in preventing them or alleviating the gravity of their impact. In theory, we seem to know better and better that if catastrophe is to be averted the presently unruly forces must be kept in check and controlled by factors other than endemically dispersed and diffuse, as well as shortsighted, interests. In practice, however, the consequences of human actions rebound with a blind, elemental force more reminiscent of earthquakes, floods and tornadoes than of a model of rational and self-monitored behaviour. As DanÃ¢â€šâ—¥le Sallenave has recently reminded us ('L'alibi de la compassion', in Le Monde diplomatique of July 1995), Jean-Paul Sartre could aver, just a few decades ago, that 'there are no such things as natural disasters'; but today natural disasters have turned into the prototype and model of all the miseries that afflict the world, and one could as well reverse Sartre's statement and say that 'there are no other than natural catastrophes'. Not just the dramatic changes in the degree of livability of our natural habitat (pollution of air and water, global warming, ozone holes, acid rain, salination or desiccation of the soil, etc.), but also the thoroughly human aspects of global conditions (wars, demographic explosion, mass migrations and displacements, social exclusion of large categories of the population) come unannounced, catch us unawares and seem utterly oblivious to the anguished cries for help and to the most frantic efforts to design, let alone to provide, the remedy. Obviously, these are not results one can account for by following Jonas's ethical strategy. The dearth of ethical knowledge and understanding can hardly be blamed for what is happening. No one except lunatic

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fringes certified as lunatic fringes would seriously aver that it is good and beneficial to pollute the atmosphere, to pierce the ozone layer, or for that matter to wage wars, to overpopulate the land or to make people into homeless vagabonds. Yet all this happens despite its consensual, well-nigh universal and vociferous condemnation. Some other factors than ethical ignorance must be at work if the grinding, systemic consistency of the global damage more than matches the cohesion of ethical indignation. One may sensibly surmise that those other factors are entrenched in such aspects of social reality as are either left unaffected by ethical philosophy, or are able successfully to withstand or by-pass its pressures; or better still, render ethical demands inaudible. Among such factors, the increasingly deregulated market forces, exempt from all effective political control and guided solely by the pressures of competitiveness, must be awarded pride of place. The sheer size of the main players in global markets today far exceeds the interfering capacity of most, if not all, elected state governments -- those forces amenable, at least in principle, to ethical persuasion. General Motors had in 1992 an annual turnover of $132.4 billion, Exxon of $155.7 billion, Royal Dutch/Shell of $99.6 billion, against the Gross National Product of $123.5 billion of Denmark, $112.9 billion of Norway, $83.8 billion of Poland and $33.5 billion of Egypt... The five biggest 'non-national' companies had a joint turnover just twice as big as the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

This is what Jonas's problem is about: the globally disastrous long-distance and long-term effects of the growing human potential to do things and remake the world. This is undoubtedly one of the crucial problems with which any macro-ethical reasoning must come to grips. But it is not the only problem; moreover, not one with the which Levinas was concerned with in the first place. For Levinas, the macro-ethical extension of moral responsibility for the Other reaches further than the defence against shared dangers. His postulates addressed to macro-ethics are therefore more demanding yet than everything which Jonas's 'heuristics of fear' may require. Let us recall that for Levinas the macro equivalent of moral responsibility is nothing less than justice -- a quality of human existence which obviously needs the prevention of global disasters as its preliminary condition, but on no account can be reduced to it, and which need not be provided for and satisfied even if that prevention was somehow made effective.

Unlike the disasters which can be universally recognized as detrimental and undesirable since they hit at random and pay no heed to earned or inherited privileges, justice is a notoriously contentious issue. Rarely has human ingenuity and imagination been stretched as much and as painfully as when devising the arguments meant to depict as 'justice

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being done' the state of affairs which some other people considered unjust and thus a legitimate reason for rebellion. One can sensibly expect that in a divided society, and above all a modern society, which is -- simultaneously! -- sharply unequal and dedicated to the promotion of equality as a supreme value, the contents of justice will forever remain a matter of controversy. (Levinas admitted as much, though from a somewhat different angle, when pointing out that the fate of a just society is to remain forever dissatisfied with the level of justice achieved.) Above all, the agreement as to when to assume that the postulate of justice has been satisfied, if such agreement were at all attainable, would hardly be reached through philosophical argument

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alone -- appealing as it must to extraterritorial and extemperal joint human essence, while neglecting on the whole the time-and space-bound social, cultural and political circumstances gestating the experience of injustice.

We know from the thorough and perceptive historical analysis conducted by Barrington Moore Jr that while 'the masses' (more generally, the non-philosophical part of the population) have no idea, or at best a vague one, of the abstract notion of 'justice as such', they tend to recognize unerringly a case of injustice. In opposition to what the logic of the vocabulary suggests, 'injustice' is the 'positive' notion, while 'justice' is the 'negative' one; it is injustice that seems to be the prime notion of popular ethics, 'justice' being the marked, a derivative, unit in the opposition. Justice makes sense here solely as the enemy (and postulated conqueror) of injustice, the latter being the sole 'datum' given in experience; justice means redemption, recuperation of losses, making good the damage, compensation for the suffered ills -- repairing the distortion caused by the act of injustice. In the light of Barrington Moore Jr's findings it is difficult to say under what conditions the popular perception of the human condition as just and proper will tend to grow, and it is doubtful whether such a growth, if it occurs, will be subject to any ascertainable and generalizable rules. On the other hand, one can reasonably assume that the perception of the state of affairs as unjust will tend to spread and deepen together with the intensification of the hardships already condemned as unjust and the appearance of new hardships not experienced before (whatever the starting point used to be and however well or badly it fared from the point of view of any abstract models of justice).

If this is the case, then the last three or four decades did little to enhance the perception of the world as 'just'. Quite to the contrary: virtually all indices of welfare and quality of life pointed towards growing inequality and, indeed, a rampant polarization both on the global scale

and inside almost every social/political unit taken apart: fast enrichment on the one side made all the more salient and offensive by rapid impoverishment on the other. The visibility of the process, and the likelihood of its condemnation as unjust, has been further increased by the fact that during the same period, between 1960 and 1992, literacy in the world grew from 46 to 69 per cent and life expectancy from 46.2 years to 63. The first factor, coupled with the formidable spread of worldwide communication (which made poverty, once a local plight and local 'problem', into a question of 'relative deprivation'), must have facilitated competent comparisons of jarringly unequal life standards, while the second factor must have to a large degree arrested the 'natural solutions' to the 'problems' of extreme deprivation and poverty among the 'surplus' or 'supernumerary', that is 'economically redundant', section of the population.

And the degree of polarization (and therefore also of the relative deprivation) has broken in these three decades all registered and remembered records. The top fifth of the world population was in 1960 thirty richer than the bottom fifth; in 1991 it was already sixty-one times richer. Nothing points to the likelihood in the foreseeable future of this widening of the gap being slowed down or stopped, let alone reversed. The top fifth of the world enjoyed in 1991 84.7 per cent of the world's gross product, 84.2 per cent of global trade and 85.0 per cent of internal investment, against respectively the 1.4, 0.9 and 0.9 per cent which was the share of the bottom fifth. The top fifth consumed 70 per cent of world energy, 75 per cent of metals and 85 per cent of timber. On the other hand, the debt of the economically weak countries of the 'third world' was in 1970 more or less stable at around $200 billion; it has grown tenfold since then and is today fast approaching the mind-boggling figure of $2,000 billion (see United Nations Programme for Development, 1994 edition).

This picture of rapidly growing inequality on a global scale is replicated inside virtually every single 'national society'. The gap between the rich and the poor, whether measured on the scale of global markets or on a much smaller scale of whatever passes for 'national economies' (but what is increasingly little more than administratively circumscribed units of computations), is growing unstoppably, and the prevailing feeling is that the rich are likely to become richer still, but the poor will most certainly grow poorer. That feeling is likely to be reenforced, at the receiving end, into the experience of a wrong having been done, of unfairness and injustice. It does not follow, though, that it will necessarily trigger a desire for collective vindication of wrongs. The shared plight may well be interpreted as an aggregate of individual mishaps, caused by

personal indolence or inadequacy -- and feed non-cumulative efforts of personal exit from misery and a dream of individual good luck.

That last probability is enhanced by the widely evident tendency to overlay the division between rich and poor by another division -- that between the seduced and oppressed. While the rich (presumed satisfied) enjoy a high degree of personal freedom of choice, responding keenly and joyfully to the growing range of attractive market offers, it is all too easy to redefine those who do not respond in the way expected from proper (seducible) consumers as people unfit to put their freedom of choice to good use: people who are, in the last account, unfit to be free. Moreover, the poor of today (those hopelessly flawed consumers, immune from market blandishments and unlikely to contribute to the supply-clearing demand, however alluring that supply may be) are of no evident use to consumer-oriented markets, and increasingly also to state governments, acting more and more as local bailiffs and sheriffs on behalf of extraterritorial finance and commerce. The poor of today are no longer the 'exploited people' producing the surplus product later to be transformed into capital, nor are they the 'reserve army of labour', expected to be reintegrated into that capital-producing process at the next economic upturn. Economically speaking (and today also politically elected governments speak in the language of economy), they are fully and truly redundant, useless, disposable and there is no 'rational reason' for their continuing presence... The sole rational response to that presence is the systematic effort to exclude them from 'normal' society -- that is, the society which reproduces itself through the play of consumer supply and consumer choice, mediated by allurement and seduction.

Short of being physically disposed of (pressure for such a 'solution' is manifested most conspicuously in the populist slogans demanding deportation of foreigners, that 'drain on our resources', and closing the borders to migrants, a priori defined as parasites and spongers, not creators of wealth) -- they need to be isolated, neutralized and disempowered, so that the chance of their massive, yet individually experienced, miseries and humiliations being condensed into collective (let alone effective) protest be further diminished, ideally reduced to nought. These results are sought through the two-pronged strategy of the criminalization of poverty and the brutalization of the poor.

Criminalization seems to be emerging as the consumer society's prime substitute for the fast disappearing welfare state provisions. The welfare state, that response to the poverty problem at a time when the poor were the 'reserve army of labour' and were expected to be groomed back into the productive process, is under these changed conditions no longer 'economically justifiable', and is increasingly seen as a 'luxury we cannot afford'. The 'problem' of the poor is recast as the question of law and order, and social funds once earmarked for the rehabilitation of people temporarily out of work (in economic terms, the reclassification of labour) are pumped over into the construction and technological updating of prisons and other punitive/surveillance outfits. The switch is most pronounced in the USA, where the prison population tripled between 1980 and 1993, reaching in June 1994 the number of 1,012,851 (the average growth was more than 65,000 a year), where the poorest, black part of the 'underclass' constitutes roughly half of those sentenced to one year of imprisonment and more, and where the systematic increase of expenditure on police and prisons goes hand in hand with

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systematic cuts of welfare funds and entitlements. Some observers suggest that massive incarceration, spine-chilling stories of the lengthening death-row queues and the systematic, deliberate deterioration of prison conditions (the progressive and widely advertised dehumanization of prisoners) are deployed as the principal means of ‘terrorism’ of the underclass, now presented to public opinion as -- purely, simply and unambiguously -- the enemy number one of public safety and a drain on public resources (though one may guess at another function as well -- of a deterrent to the possible rebellion of the well-off against the tensions endemic to consumer life; the horrors of the alternative to the ‘free consumer’ life render palatable and endurable even the most vexing stresses for which that life is notorious). Europe as yet stays far behind the United States, but a similar trend, albeit on a much diminished scale, is in evidence here. According to statistics offered by the Council of Europe, between 1983 and 1992 the prison population has grown by more than 50 per cent in Greece, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands, and by between 20 and 50 per cent in France, Switzerland, Ireland and Sweden; everywhere the trend was upwards.

Policing, and thereby obliviously criminalizing, the ‘global poor’ -- that is, the areas of the world afflicted with, or allocated to, endemic poverty -- is another necessary accompaniment of growing inequality, confronting the rich part of the world with a task no less urgent, yet much more complex. Police operations, military expeditions, long-term ‘pacification’ of troublesome areas are costly affairs, which the well-off taxpayer is the less willing to finance the more distant from home (and therefore less relevant to his own well-being) they appear to be. The task of keeping the ‘global poor’ at bay is thus the most suitable case for that deregulation, privatization and commercialization of punitive and surveillance activity, which is still applied only halfheartedly and gingerly in the domestic prison system. No excessive ingenuity is needed to move the task altogether from the ‘debit’ to the ‘credit’ side of the budget: supplying

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local chiefs and warlords of distant lands with sophisticated weapons may bring the double profit of financial gains and such a brutalization of life as is guaranteed to all but paralyse the protest potential of the poor. The endless, increasingly devastating and ever less ideologically motivated (or in any other way ’cause-oriented’ for that matter) civil (or simply gang) wars are from the rich countries’ point of view utterly effective, cheap and often profitable forms of policing and ‘pacifying’ the global poor. Beamed onto millions of TV screens for everybody to watch, they provide a vivid testimony of the savagery of the poor and the self-inflicted character of their misery, as well as convincing arguments for the pointlessness of aid, let alone any substantial redistribution of wealth.

The brutalization of the poor (not necessarily deliberately induced, but eagerly embraced once it appears, keenly transformed into a ‘public concern number one’ and beefed up and magnified by constantly spurred media attention) may also be seen as serving the task of policing the domestic scene. Made into the outcasts of a thriving society of seduced consumers, transformed into an underclass without a present or prospective place in society and deprived of the legally recognized tokens of access to the goods hailed as the uppermost values of the good life, the poor tend to resort to drugs, those poor man’s (and illegal) substitutes for the rich man’s (and legal) tools of consumer ecstasy. They also on occasion tend to initiate the politically neglected ‘redistribution of wealth’, attacking the nearest-to-hand private possessions and thus supplying the guardians of law and order with the most welcome statistical proof of the close link between being a ghetto-dweller and being a criminal, keenly used (the way all self-fulfilling prophecies normally are) in support of the criminalization of poverty. From time to time the outcasts of the consumer society assume the role of its Luddites -- going on the rampage, demolishing and burning down the shops, those outposts of consumerism scattered on the hostile, not-yet-conquered, perhaps unconquerable, territory; committing acts which are immediately represented as riots and thus supply a further proof, if a further proof was needed, that the question of the underclass is -- first and foremost, perhaps even solely -- the problem of law and order.

To conclude: the situation of the larger part of the present-day population, whether located in areas of the globe afflicted with endemic poverty, or placed inside relatively well-off societies boasting high GNP and a high ‘average’ level of consumption, is not just ‘comparatively bad’, but also quickly -- and thus palpably -- deteriorating. Under such conditions, one would expect a widespread feeling of injustice, with the potential to condense into a mass protest movement, if not an open

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rebellion against the system. The fact that this does not happen testifies perhaps to the effectiveness of the combined strategies of exclusion, criminalization and brutalization of potentially ‘problematic’ strata.

This, however, is not the problem most relevant to our main topic -- to the question of ‘macroethics’ as essentially one of justice as the extension of that responsibility for the Other which is induced and trained inside the ‘moral party of two’. Even if the experience of growing deprivation did lead to an effective protest of and by the poor -- this would be, by and large, a case of a forceful vindication of claims, maybe a case of redistribution of inequalities -- not necessarily heralding the rule of ethical principles in the world of economy and politics, and unlikely to promote the cause of ‘ethical politics’. If justice is to be understood, as Levinas wants, as stretching out and generalizing the narrowly applied and selective responsibility for the singular or singled-out Other -- then, like that responsibility, it needs to arise not from the demands of the Other, but from the moral impulse and concern of the moral self which assumes the responsibility for justice being done. Demanding is not by itself a moral act (only its recognition may be); awarding the right to demand, and even more the anticipation of a yet-unspoken-demand, is Moral responsibilities are asymmetrical and non-reciprocal.

The ethical question, therefore, is not so much whether the new deprived and disprivileged stand up and are counted fighting for justice, which they can only understand as rectification of the injustice done to them, as whether the well-off and, by the same token, privileged, the new ‘contented majority’ of John Kenneth Galbraith, rise above their singular or group interests and consider themselves responsible for the humanity of the Others, the less fortunate. Whether, in other words, they are ready to endorse, in thought and in deed, and before they are forced to do so, and not out of the fear of being forced, such principles of justice as could not be satisfied unless the Others are awarded the same degree of practical, positive freedom they have been enjoying themselves.

That being ready to do exactly that is the condition sine qua non of such justice as may be properly considered the ‘macro’ equivalent of the ‘micro’ moral stance is a philosophical proposition. But whether the contented majority is likely to do it is a sociological and political question. More to the point: the factors which facilitate and the factors which hamper the chances of taking up the responsibility for admittedly weaker and less outspoken Others (precisely because of their weakness and inaudibility) are not an issue which can be unpacked theoretically by philosophical analysis nor resolved practically by the normative/persuasive efforts of philosophers.

It goes without saying that the problem of justice cannot be as much

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as posited unless there is already in place a democratic regime of tolerance which guarantees in its constitution and political practice ‘human rights’ -- that is, the right to retain one’s identity and uniqueness without risking persecution. This tolerance is a necessary condition of all justice; the point is, though, that it is not its sufficient condition. By itself, the democratic regime does not promote (let alone guarantee) the transformation of tolerance into solidarity
-- that is, the recognition of other people's misery and sufferings as one's own responsibility, and the alleviation and eventually the removal of misery as one's own task. More often than not, given the present shape of political mechanism, democratic regimes translate tolerance as callousness and indifference.

Most democratic political systems move today from the parliamentary or party rule models towards the model of 'opinion poll rule', where the composition of political platforms and the making of decisions on controversial issues are guided by the advance consideration of the relative popularity of the intended move and careful calculation of the anticipated electoral gains and losses -- the number of votes a given measure may attract and the number of electors it may repel. As has been noted by political scientists, this attitude leads in practice to the rule of the 'median voter' principle: no measure is likely to be undertaken by the government of the country which is not seen as being 'in the interest' of at least half the voters plus one... With the demise of the welfare state as all-inclusive, universal entitlement to collective insurance, and its replacement with a model of administered charity for the minority who fail the 'means test' (that is, are certified as 'subnormal'), the chance of the 'median voter' approving of the larger welfare provision (now experienced by him first and foremost as an increased burden of taxation) has shrunk radically. Hence the growing electoral approval for the demotion of the welfare state and for leaving the impunecious and the destitute to their own (nonexistent or inadequate) resources. Under present conditions it is not very hard, and certainly not fanciful, to imagine the majority of voters giving their democratic approval to the total and permanent removal of people dependent for state-administered redistribution of resources from the list of public concerns.

Democracy is also a necessary condition of the free public discussion of issues -- and particularly of the issue of social justice and the ethical quality of public affairs. Without democracy, with its freedom of expression and open controversy, it is difficult to envisage a serious consideration of the shape of a good society, of the overall ends which political decision-making should promote and the principles by which its effects ought to be critically assessed, or the mature public awareness of the risks ahead and the chances of their prevention. And yet, once more, one finds that, being a necessary condition of public awareness, democracy is not the sufficient condition of a public action which such awareness would demand. Again and again one finds a growing gap, indeed a contradiction, between values promoted in the public discussion and those whose cause is served by political practice. Aversion to war, loathing of cruelty, abhorrence of massacre, rape and looting is today almost universal -- yet wars and genocides on an ever-growing scale are made possible by the saturation of present and prospective warring factions with modern weapons, the production and selling of which is keenly promoted by politicians and supported by their voters in the name of the national balance of payments and the defence of jobs. Pictures of famine and destitution arouse universal alarm and anger -- yet the destruction of the economic self-sufficiency of the afflicted peoples in the name of free trade, open markets and favourable trade balances can count on the wide support of the democratic electorate. The progressive depletion of world resources and associated mortgaging of the life conditions of future generations is unanimously bewailed and protested against -- yet politicians promising increased 'economic growth', that is a yet larger consumption of non-renewable resources, can invariably count on electoral success.

Two books have appeared recently in France (Les Conflits identitaires, by François Thual, published by Ellipses/Iris, and La Fin des territoires, by Bertrand Badie, published by Fayard) which trace the contradictions of contemporary politics, and the resulting impossibility of meeting the ends which enjoy widespread, perhaps even universal, approval, to the principle of territoriality -- the principle which was taken originally for the major tool in the modern struggle for the rule of law and order, but proved to be a major source of contemporary world disorder. The authors point to the present practical impotence of states, which, however, remain to this day the only sites and agencies for the articulation and execution of laws; devoid of all real executive power, not self-sufficient and unsustainable militarily, economically or culturally, those 'weak states', 'quasi-states', often 'imported states' (all Bertrand Badie's expressions) nevertheless claim territorial sovereignty -- capitalizing on identity wars and appealing to, or rather whipping up, dormant tribal instincts. It might be seen that the kind of sovereignty which relies on tribal sentiments alone is a natural enemy of tolerance and civilized norms of cohabitation. But the territorial fragmentation of legislative and policing power with which it is intimately associated is also a major obstacle to an effective control over forces that truly matter, and which are all or almost all global, extraterritorial in their character.

Thual's and Badie's arguments carry a lot of conviction. And yet their analysis seems to stop short of unravelling the full complexity of the present plight. Contrary to what the authors suggest, the territorial principle of political organization does not stem from tribal instincts alone, natural or contrived, and its relation to the processes of economic and cultural globalization is not simply one of the 'spoke in the wheel' kind. In fact, there seems to be an intimate kinship, a mutual conditioning and reciprocal reinforcement between the 'globalization' and 'territorialization'. Global finance, trade and information industry depend for their liberty of movement and unconstrained freedom to pursue their ends on the political fragmentation of the world scene. They have all, one may say, developed vested interests in 'weak states' -- that is, in such states as are 'weak' but nevertheless remain states. Such states can easily be reduced to the (useful) role of local police stations, securing the modicum of order required for the conduct of business, but need not be feared as effective brakes on the global companies' freedom. It is not difficult to see that the replacement of territorial 'weak states' by some sort of global legislative and policing powers would be detrimental to the extra-territorial companies' interests. And so it is easy to suspect that far from being at war with each other, political 'tribalization' and economic 'globalization' are close allies and fellow conspirators. What they conspire against are the chances of justice being done and being seen to be done; but also the chances that neighbourhood responsibilities swell, stretch and eventually grow into the consistent care for global justice -- and result in a politics effectively guided by ethical principles.

Immersed as we are in the 'primal scene of morality', in times which favour (though not necessarily guarantee) the 'remoralization' of primary human relations and the facing up to the question of responsibility for the Other (a responsibility which comes to the surface also in the act of its denial and abandonment) -- we cannot help becoming increasingly morally sensitive, and as Levinas suggested, also prone to set ourselves ethical goals that reach beyond the narrow sphere of the 'moral party of two' -- into the world ruled by the principles of justice, rather than by personal responsibility. It seems, however, that the social institutions which could conceivably serve as the vehicles of that extended ethical sensitivity bar in fact its translation into practical progress of justice. The road from the 'primal moral scene' to macro-ethics leads through political action. But is there any kind of political action in sight which may prove adequate to this task?

In a recent article ('Movements and Campaigns', Dissent, Winter 1995) Richard Rorty singles out 'movement politics' as the once dominant, and preferred, form of political action in modern times. -- 66 --

Membership in a movement requires the ability to see particular campaigns for particular goals as parts of something much bigger. This bigger thing is the course of human events described as a process of maturation... [P]olitics is no longer just politics, but rather the matrix out of which will emerge something like Paul's 'new being in Christ' or Mao's 'new socialist man' -- the mature stage of humanity, the one which will put aside... -- 64 --
current childishness...

This kind of politics assumes that things must be changed utterly, so that a new kind of beauty may be born.

To this 'movement politics' Rorty opposes the 'campaign politics', which disposes of the ideas of 'maturatation', 'growing rationality' and 'forward movement of history', without which movement politics would have had no legitimacy and would have been unable to accord sense to any of its undertakings. 'Campaigns for such goals as the unionization of migrant workers in the American Southwest, or banning big trucks from the Alp, or the overthrow (by votes or by force) of a corrupt government, or legal recognition of gay marriage, can stand on their own feet.' The turn away from the movements and toward the campaigns, Rorty suggests,

is a turn away from the transcendental question 'What are the conditions of possibility of this historical movement?' to the pragmatic question 'What are the causal conditions of replacing this present actuality with a better future actuality??... The intellectuals of our century have been distracted from campaigns by the need to 'put events in perspective,' and by the urge to organize movements around something out of sight, something located at the impossibly distant end of this perspective. But this has made the best the enemy of the better.

It is better to concentrate on the better than to chase the best, implies Rorty. The alternative, as we know now only too well, never managed to reach the best, while it did manage to sacrifice a lot of the better in the bargain. Campaign politics looks attractive precisely as a substitution for the discredited movement politics, notorious for neglecting the real present for the sake of an imaginary future, only to neglect again today's future the moment it stops being imaginary. As a replacement for movement politics, campaign politics does indeed have advantages which can hardly be dismissed; it may bring a lot of succour and genuine improvement here and there, now and then, to these or those people. Whether it will improve on the 'totality' and drag mankind as a whole to a radically better condition is another matter. But doing this was neither its intention nor its promise. Its advantages over the alternative are thus indubitable. Its own virtues though -- yet untreated -- are open to questioning.

What Rorty proposes here is a fragmented politics made to the measure of the fragmented world and fragmented human existence. His proposition squares and chimes well with the life-experience of many people with scattered, diffuse and always partial -- fragmented -- worries; with American experience better than with Serbian or Croatian, with the American Midwest better than with the American Southeast, with American Midwest academics better than with American Midwest unemployed and ghetto-dwellers. It also fits well the fleeting and fitting attention of the era of shrunk space and flattened time -- the kind of attention notorious for its inability to concentrate, to stay put, to cling to any object for longer than the attraction of novelty lasts; an attention that uses itself up before it consumes its object, shifts perpetually in the search for new attractions, acquiring in the process remarkable skating and gliding skills but shunning all deep diving and digging.

Choosing political strategies also means taking sides in political/social divisions. Fragmented politics, a politics in which campaigns do not cumulate into movements and do not count the overall improvement of life among their ends, must look flawless -- and, above all, as the sole politics needed -- to those whose worries are fragmented, do not cumulate into experience of injustice and do not sum up into the desire of changing the rules of the game or the world in which the game is played. There are many such people; as Galbraith suggested, they constitute the 'contented majority', at least inside the 'contented minority' of well-to-do countries. Is not Rorty's proposition addressed primarily to them? Does not Rorty's proposition tell them what they wish to hear: that there is not much point in worrying about justice in the world, in assuming responsibility for the unfreedom and prospectless life of those whose worries are not scattered, unfocused and peripheral as our own? That these 'big issues' of justice are best served when split and fragmented just as their own problems are, and never confronted in their genuine or imaginary entirety, as the question of 'something being wrong with that world we all share'? And, above all, that those 'big issues' have nothing to do with the fragmentariness of our own affluent worries, and with our decision to settle for 'campaigns' instead of 'movements'?

These are perhaps the reasons for which Rorty's proposition rings true and proper to us, its intended addressees. They are unlikely to be received as good news by many others, who may well spy out a Pontius Pilate gesture in this recipe for 'deconstructing' the big issue (which we have decided that we can do nothing about) into a series of little ones (which we think we can do something about without sacrificing the big and little comforts we like so much about our life). This clash of

perspectives and ensuing perceptions is, however, once more an essentially political, rather than ethical, issue. More directly relevant to our subject-matter, on the other hand, is the question of the ethical ramifications of Rorty's proposition. More particularly -- what does it augur for the feasibility of the Levinasian passage from micro- to macro-ethics, from the 'self's responsibility for the Face' to 'commonly administered justice'?

To invoke Bakhtin's famous analysis of the function of the 'carnival' in reasserting the norms through the periodical yet strictly controlled visualization of their reversal, we may say that there is a pronounced tendency in the affluent part of the world to relegate charity, compassion and brotherly sentiments (which according to Levinas underlie our desire for justice) to the carnival events -- reasserting thereby, legitimizing and 'normalizing' their absence from quotidianity. Moral impulses aroused by the sight of human misery are safely channelled into sporadic outbursts of charity in the form of Live Aid, Comic Aid or money collections for the most recent wave of refugees. Justice turns into a festive, holiday event; this helps to placate the moral conscience and to bear with the absence of justice during working days. Lack of justice becomes the norm and the daily routine,...

These seem to be valid objections and well-grounded suspicions. What they suggest is that Rorty's project of 'campaign politics' is unlikely to serve the cause of justice better than the 'movement politics' it is proposed to replace. Instead of smoothing the road from personal morality to public justice, for which movement politics is notorious, it substitutes new dangers for the old ones. The cause of justice, one may say, is not 'safe in its hands'. And yet such caveats do not invalidate Rorty's proposal. They would amount to the round condemnation of campaign politics only if the set of assumptions which sustained and validated movement politics were retained -- if it was believed that the lifting of moral sentiments to the level of public justice had not been accomplished 'as yet' to full satisfaction solely because the right, reliable and fully effective lever had not been found, but that a perfect crane to do the lifting job without fail could be construed and constructed, that designing it was but a matter of time and that historical time 'runs towards' its construction. The point is, though, that those beliefs are ever more difficult to seriously entertain. For all that we know today, history does not seem to run towards 'just society', and all attempts to force it to run in this direction tend to add new injustices to the ones they are bent on repairing. It seems more and more likely that justice is a movement, rather than a goal or any describable 'end state'; that it manifests itself in the acts of spotting and fighting injustices -- acts which

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do not necessarily add up to a linear process with a direction; and that its trademark is a perpetual self-deprecation and dissatisfaction with what has been achieved. Justice means always wanting more of itself.

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And so it looks as if we need to reconcile ourselves to less-than-perfect, less than ‘one hundred per cent effective’ means; but it also looks as if such reconciliation is not necessarily bad news for the prospects of justice; that it may well be, on the contrary, more akin to the nature of justice -- and thus, in the last account, better serve its cause. Rorty’s proposal offers just what is needed: a salutary irony that pierces through the veil of the humourless, unctuous solemnity of the ‘alternative world’ movements -- but an irony that is itself treated seriously, as all fate should be, if one wants to live it consciously, as a vocation. The weaknesses of campaign politics are simultaneously its strength. It is important not to entertain illusions and to know that partial, specific improvements are indeed partial and specific; that they settle problems, not resolve issues; that none of the improvements is likely to conclude the history of ‘humanity’s long march to justice’ and bring the progress to its victorious end; that every improvement will leave justice as wanting and as unsatisfied as it was before, as pressing for further effort, and as militating against all slow-down and let-up. Only when we know all this is the desire for justice likely to be immune to the most awesome of dangers -- that of self-contentment and of a conscience once and for all cleaned and clear.

In this crucial respect the realm of justice does not differ from the realm of moral responsibility; it retains all the essential features fully formed already at the ‘primal moral scene’. Both realms are kingdoms of ambivalence; both are conspicuously short of patented solutions, cures free of side-effects and moves free of risks; both need that uncertainty, inconclusiveness, underdetermination and ambivalence to keep the moral impulse and the desire of justice forever alive, vigilant and -- in their less-than-perfect, limited way -- effective. Both have everything to gain and nothing to lose from knowing of their endemic and incurable ambivalence and refraining from an (in the end, suicidal) anti-ambivalence crusade. And so it is in its never conclusive, never truly satisfactory, chronically imperfect form, in its state of perpetual self-indignation, that justice seems best to answer Levinas’s description as the projection of moral sentiments upon the wide screen of society. Both morality and justice (or, as some would prefer, micro- and macro-ethics) are true to their name only as open-ended conditions and projects aware of their open-endedness. They are linked by this similarity much as they are linked genetically. Let me repeat that the primal moral scene, the moral party of two, is the breeding ground of all responsibility for the

Other, and the training ground for all the ambivalence the assumption of that responsibility necessarily contains. This being the case, it seems plausible that the key to a problem as large as social justice lies in a problem as (ostensibly) small-scale as the primal moral act of taking up responsibility for the Other nearby, within reach -- for the Other as Face. It is here that moral sensitivity is born and gains strength, until it grows strong enough to carry the burden of responsibility for any instance of human suffering and misery, whatever the legal rules or empirical investigations may tell about their causal links and ‘objective’ allocation of guilt.
5: Parvenu and Pariah: The Heroes and Victims of Modernity

Socially, modernity is about standards, hope and guilt. Standards -- beckoning, alluring, or prodding; but always stretching, always a step or two ahead of the pursuers, always forging onward just a little bit quicker than their chasers. And always promising that the morrow will be better than the now. And always keeping the promise fresh and unfurled, since the morrow will forever be a day after. And always mixing the hope of reaching the promised land with the guilt of not walking fast enough. The guilt protects the hope from frustration; the hope sees to it that the guilt never dries up. 'L'homme est coupable', observed Camus, that uniquely perspicacious correspondent from the land of modernity, 'mais il l'est de n'avoir su tirer de lui-même'.

Psychically, modernity is about identity: about the truth of existence being not-yet-here, being a task, a mission, a responsibility. Like the rest of standards, identity stays stubbornly ahead: one needs to run breathlessly to reach it. And so one runs, pulled by hope and pushed by guilt, though the running, however fast, feels eerily like crawling. Surging ahead towards perpetually enticing and perpetually unfulfilled identity looks uncannily like recoiling from the flawed, illegitimate reality of the present.

Both socially and psychically, modernity is incurably self-critical: an endless, and in the end prospectless, exercise in self-cancelling and self-invalidating. Truly modern is not the readiness to delay gratification, but the impossibility of being gratified. All achievement is but a pale copy of its paragon. 'Today' is but an inchoate premonition of tomorrow; or, rather, its inferior, marred reflection. What is is cancelled in advance by what is to come. But it draws its significance and its meaning -- its only meaning -- from that cancellation.

In other words, modernity is the impossibility of staying put. To be modern means to be on the move. One does not necessarily choose to be on the move as one does not choose to be modern. One is set on the move by being cast in the kind of world torn between the beauty of the past which they struggle hard to put to sleep. But they can hardly do without the place; an aspiring resident without a residence permit. Someone reminding the older tenants of the past which they want to forget and the future they would rather wish away; someone who makes the older tenants run for shelter in hastily erected permit-issuing offices. The parvenu is told to carry the chimeric homeliness of the overnight stay; it makes the arrival feel, comfortingly, like being at home -- that is, until it also turns into an imprint to be effacing yesterday's footprints is all there is to the chimeric homeliness of the overnight stay; it makes the arrival feel, comfortingly, like being at home -- that is, until it also turns into an imprint to be denied and effaced.

The sight of tents pitched yesterday on the site of the overnight stay is reassuring: it fences off a plot of the desert so that it may feel like an oasis and give a sense of purpose to yesterday's wanderings. These tents pitched yesterday, being but tents, call, however, the bluff of self-congratulation. They prove, were proof needed, the self-deception of existence which wants to forget its nomadic past; it shows home to be but a point of arrival, and an arrival pregnant with new departure.

Wherever they come and dearly wish to stay, the nomads find themselves to be parvenus. Parvenu, arriviste; someone already in, but not quite of, the place; an aspiring resident without a residence permit. Someone reminding the older tenants of the past which they want to forget and the future they would rather wish away; someone who makes the older tenants run for shelter in hastily erected permit-issuing offices. The parvenu is told to carry the 'just arrived' label, so that all the others may trust their tents to be cut in rock. The parvenu's stay must be declared temporary, so that the stay of all the others may feel eternal.

The older tenants hate the parvenus for awaking the memories and premonitions they struggle hard to put to sleep. But they can hardly do without parvenus, without some of them being branded parvenus, set apart, charged with carrying the bacillus of restlessness in their bodies; it is thanks to such a branded part, and them only, that the whole may think that the bad dreams and the morbid premonitions are other people's tales and do not quite apply to themselves. The parvenu needs a parvenu in order not to feel a parvenu. And so nomads fight other nomads for the right to issue residence permits to each other. It is the only way they can make their own residence feel secure. The only way in which they can fix time which refuses to stay still is to mark the space and protect the marks against being effaced or moved. At least, such is their desperate hope.

In Robert Musil's incisive description, 'The train of events is a train unrolling its rails ahead of itself. The river of time is a river sweeping its banks along with it.' It was the modern 'melting of solids and profaning the sacreds' that brought about such trains and such rivers. Premodern trains ran predictably and boringly in circles, much like children's toy trains do. And premodern rivers stayed in their beds for a time long enough to feel immemorial. As Wylie Sypher observed, 'in any society where the class structure is so closed that everyone has the place and knows it -- and keeps it', there is no place for a
parvenu nor is there a purpose a parvenu could conceivably serve; but the nineteenth century produced a horde of parvenus. 2 Not that inordinately many people began to challenge their class-bound or otherwise-bound definitions and refused to heed their place; but the contours of places had been themselves washed up -- the river banks having been swept along with the rivers, and uncertainty called the new, or the better, or progress, having become the only official destination of trains. Places and their names were now to be made (and, inevitably, re-made) 'as one goes'. In Hannah Arendt's memorable phrase, man's autonomy turned into the tyranny of possibilities. The small print of the great modern Act of Emancipation carried an injunction against the restfulness of certainty.

Definitions are born with; identities are made. Definitions tell you who you are, identities allure you by what you are not yet but may yet become. Parvenus were people in frantic search of identities. They chased identities because, from the start, they had been denied definitions. It was only too easy to conclude that it was their restlessness that put paid to definitions, and charge them with the criminal act of breaking the border-signposts. Once hurled in the vast expanse of unlimited possibilities, the parvenus was an easy prey: there were no fortified places in which to hide, no trusty definitions to wear as an armour. And from all places still protected by old ramparts, and from all places that strove to build new ones, poisonous arrows were showered.

Early in his life, Goethe's Wilhelm Meister found out that only young aristocrats can count on being taken for what they are, all others would be appraised or condemned for what they do. Wilhelm Meister drew the only logical conclusion to be drawn: he joined the theatre. On the stage, he took on and took off roles. This is what he was doomed to do in life anyway, but at least on stage -- and only on stage -- everyone expected roles to be but roles and to be played, and dropped, and replaced by other roles. In life, he would be expected to do the opposite or at least pretend that he was doing it: he would be expected to be what he is, though this is precisely what he was denied the right to.

Most parvenus cannot follow Meister's choice. Life is their stage, and in life, unlike in the theatre, skilful acting is called insincerity, not finess; it is precisely to squeeze it out from the daily and the normal that acting as an honourable activity has been confined inside theatre walls. In life, roles must deny being roles and pretend to be identities, even if identities are not available in any other shape or form but that of roles. No one learns this truth better than the parvenus -- living as they do under constant, relentless pressure (to quote Hannah Arendt) 'to have to adapt their taste, their lives, their desires; who are 'denied the right to be themselves in anything and in any moment'.

Having learned the rules of the game does not mean being wiser, though. Even less does it mean being successful. There is little the parvenus can do to change their plight, however strongly they desire to do so. 'One cannot modify one's image-, neither the thought, nor freedom, lie, nausea, or disgust can help one to get out of one's proper skin.' And yet getting out of one's proper skin is exactly what one is expected to do. The other-directed, other-monitored and other- evaluated parvenus are asked to prove the legality of their presence by being self-directed, self-monitored and self-evaluating, and being seen to be such. Wilhelm Meister has prudently chosen to be an actor: his modern successors are forced to be actors -- though they risk condemnation and ridicule once they consent to their fate. A vicious circle, if there ever was one. And, if to rub salt into the wound, there is that deafening silence, that overpowering indifference, that baffling aloofness, the 'wash my hands' gesture of the Pontius Pilates who sit in judgement. As Kafka wrote in The Trial,'The court wants nothing from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go.'

The silence of the court makes the father accept into his own judge: or rather it seems to be the case. With the prosecutor abstaining from censorious speeches and no judge to brief the jury, it is up to the defendants to prove their innocence. But innocence of what? Their guilt, after all, is nothing else but the very fact of having been charged, of standing in judgement. And this is one guilt they cannot deny, however smartly they argue their innocence, and however massive is the evidence they gather to support the argument.

By the whim of French legislature, the blacks of Martinique and Guadeloupe have been appointed Frenchmen, unlike the blacks of SÀ€CnÀ©gal or CÀ¨te d'Ivoire or the Arabs of Morocco. Whatever is said or written about the rights of Frenchmen extends to them; nothing remains to be proved and thus no court summonses have been issued or need to be issued. Yet the absence of a court does not mean innocence: it only means that no final judgement will be ever passed and that innocence will be never certified. The silence of the Law means the endlessness of trial. The blacks of Martinique and Guadeloupe have to prove that their Frenchness requires no proof... Not unlike Weber's Calvinists, they must live a life of virtue (a virtue which, in their case, is called 'the Frenchness') without the trust that the virtue will be rewarded and despite the agonizing suspicion that even if it were, they would not know it anyway. All around agree that they acquit themselves of the task admirably. They excel in schools. They are the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie of the most loyal and dedicated civil servants. Louder still than their co-citizens of a paler shade of skin they demand that the French borders be closed to those alien blacks of Chad or Cameroon 'who have no right to be here'. They even join Le Pen's National Front to promote the purification of La Patrie.
of the Last Judgment, where there is one single yardstick to measure with, and the Supreme Authority sitting in court; or in the form of a conciliatory act of redeeming all those who shared in the community of endless human suffering. One could struggle for a new certitude to put paid to the uncomfortable pretensions of the present one; seek the as-yet-undiscredited authority hoped to proclaim and enforce new canons and new norms. Or one could part ways with certitudes old, new, and still to come -- and follow Adorno's injunction, that only experiments are legitimate, when certitudes are no more. Both alternatives have been embraced and tried.

The parvenu Lukács spent his life searching for the authority bold and mighty enough to dismiss the judgements of today and proclaim its own judgement as if it were the Last -- be it aesthetically perfect form or the distant alliance of proletarian sufferers with universal truth. In this he followed a long string of other parvenus, from Karl Marx -- announcing the universality of belonging imminent once universal man is stripped of humiliating and degrading parochial liversies -- through Karl Mannheim, struggling to reframe the homelessness of the itinerant sophist into the patent of judgement superior to all settled opinions -- to Husserl, making the truth-bearing subjectivity transcendental, and thus entitled to brush off the admittedly false pretensions of this-worldly subjectivities.

Benjamin's world, on the other hand, was a series of historical moments prominent with premonitions yet littered with the corpses of miscarried hopes; one moment, for that reason, is not particularly different from another. The twin dangers against which the life-work of Benjamin militates are, in Pierre V. Zima's words, 'la différences absolute et la disjonction idéologique (la position durn des deux termes)' and 'le d'Ancien au sens de (hAçgÄ©lien, marxien) vers l'affirmation, vers la position durn troisième terme sur un plan plus Acleveç'. Under Benjamin's pen, ambivalence turns into the crow's nest from which the archipelago of strangled chances can be sighted; instead of a malady to be cured, ambivalence is now the value to be cherished and protected. The angels -- Benjamin noted in his Apologies -- 'new ones each moment in countless hosts, are created so that, after they have sung their hymn before God, they cease to exist and pass away into nothingness'. And Adorno commented:

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Benjamin was one of the first to note that the individual who thinks becomes problematic to the core, yet without the existence of anything supra-individual in which the isolated subject could gain spiritual transcendence without being oppressed; it is this that he expressed in defining himself as one who left his class without, however, belonging to another'. Well, like Lukács, Benjamin was not alone on the road he has chosen. Simmel, with his uncanny flair for decomposing any, however mighty, a structure, into a bunch of human, all-too-human thoughts and emotions, was there first; and many would follow, to mention but Lévi-Strauss debunking progressive history with a pointer as one more tribal myth, Foucault with the discourses that themselves spawn all the limits which stand to confine and channel their formation, or Derrida with realities dissembled into the texts embracing each other in the never ending quadrille of interpretations.

As in so many similar cases, the modern revolution ended in parcicide -- poetically intuited by Freud in his desperate effort to penetrate the mystery of culture. The most brilliant and most faithful children of modernity could not express their filial loyalty otherwise than by becoming its gravediggers. The more they were dedicated to the construction of the artifice which modernity set about to erect, having first dethroned and legally incapacitated nature -- the more they sapped the foundations of the edifice. Modernity, one may say, was from the start pregnant with its own postmodern Aufhebung. Her children were genetically determined to be her detractors, and -- ultimately -- her demolition squad. Those cast as parvenus (those-who-have-arrived), yet refused the comfort of arrival, were bound sooner or later to decry the safety of safe havens; in the end they were bound to question the arrival itself as a plausible or desirable end of the travel.

Hence the astonishing case of a culture engrossed in a tooth-and-nail struggle with the social reality it was supposed, as all cultures should, to reflect and serve. In this disarticulation and the ensuing enmity between culture and reified existence modernity stands perhaps alone among all known societal arrangements. One can confidently define modernity as a form of life marked by such disarticulation: as a social condition under which culture cannot serve reality otherwise than through undermining it.

But hence also the uniquely tragic -- or is it schizophrenic? -- character of modern culture, the culture that feels truly at home only in its homelessness. In that culture, desire is stained with fear, while horror bears attractions difficult to resist. That culture dreams of belonging yet fears locks and barred windows; it dreads the solitude called freedom yet still more than anything else resents oaths of loyalty. At whatever

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direction it turns, that culture -- like the hungry rats of Miller and Dollard's maze -- finds itself suspended at the point of ambivalence, where the lines of falling allurements and rising repulsion cross. Walter Benjamin reproached his friend in entrapment and adversary in the search for escape, Gershom Scholem: 'I almost believe that you desire this in-between state, yet you ought to welcome any means of ending it', To which Scholem replied: 'You are endangered more by your drive for community ... than by the horror of loneliness that speaks from so many of your writings.'

In the Indian caste system, the pariah was a member of the lowest caste ot of no caste. In an untouched order of belonging, who could be more untouchable than those who did not belong anywhere? Modernity proclaimed no order untouchable, as all untouchable orders were to be replaced with a new, artificial order where roads are built that lead from the bottom to the top and so no one belongs anywhere forever. Modernity was thus the hope of the pariah. But the pariah could stop being a pariah only by becoming -- struggling to become -- a parvenu. And the parvenu, having never washed out the stain of his origin, laboured under a constant threat of deportation back to the land he tried to escape. Deportation in case he failed; deportation in case he succeeded too spectacularly for the comfort of those around. Not for a moment did the hero stop being a potential victim. Hero today, victim tomorrow -- the dividing wall between the two conditions was but paper-thin. Being on the move meant belonging nowhere. And belonging nowhere meant not to count on anybody's protection: indeed, the quintessence of the pariah existence was not to be able to count on protection. The quicker you run, the faster you stay put. The greater the frenzy with which you struggle to cut yourself off from the caste of the pariah, the more you expose yourself as the pariah of non-belonging.

It was the alluring image of a majestic artifice shimmering at the end of the tunnel that set the pariah on his journey and transformed him into the parvenu. It was the agony of the endless travel that dimmed the shine of the artifice and dented its attraction: looking back on the road travelled, the seekers of homes would dismiss their past hopes as a mirage -- and they would call their new frustrated sobriety the end of Utopia, the end of ideology, the end of modernity, or the advent of the postmodern age.

And so they would say: artificial homelands are hallucinations at best, vicious delusions at worst. No more revolutions to end all revolutions. No more stretching oneself towards the sweet future that turns bitter the moment it becomes the present. No more philosopher kings. No more salvation by society. No more dreams about identities that are not -

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dreams that spoil the enjoyment of the definitions that are. Travel has not brought redemption to the parvenu. Perhaps once there is nowhere to arrive, the sorry plight of the arriviste will be cancelled together with the travel?

With the setting of the universal sun, wrote the schoolboy Karl Marx, moths gather to the light of the domestic lamp. With the drying up of the hi-tech artificial lake of universality, yesteryear's putrescent bags of parochiality glisten invitingly as the natural havens for all who need to swim safely. No more salvation by society -- but perhaps community will make the salvation unnecessary? "We should not look for skyhooks, but only for toeholds" is how Richard Rorty sums up the mood of the bereaved, and proceeds to praise the ethnocentrism and to advise us, rather than wasting our time in the vain search for objectivity and universal standpoints, to apply ourselves to the questions. 'With what communities should you identify?'and 'What should I do with my aloteness?'[1] Isaiah Berlin, on the other hand, tells his interviewers that there is nationalism which is rapacious, intolerant, cruel and bad in many other ways, but that there is also nationalism which is warm, cosy, at peace with nature and itself and therefore also, hopefully, with its neighbours: 'le doux nationalisme', as conscientious Frenchmen, baffled by the spectacular successes of Le Pen, and desperately trying to steal a march on the sinister adversary, call it. The tired wanderer sentenced to the life of a parvenu agony still wants to belong. But he gave up the hope that belonging can be attained through universality. He believes no more in long round-about routes. He dreams now of shortcuts. Or, better still, of arriving without travelling; coming home without really ever moving out.

Whatever used to be a virtue turned into vice. And the vices of yore have been (and one hopes: not posthumously) rehabilitated. The verdict has been quashed, those who passed it condemned or dismissed as incompetent judges. What modernity set to destroy, has its day of sweet vengeance. Community, tradition, the joy of being chez soi, the love of one's own, the sticking to one's kind, the pride of being so stuck, the roots, the blood, the soil, the nationhood -- they no more stand condemned; on the contrary, it is their critics and detractors, the prophets of universal humanity, who are now challenged to prove their case and of whom it is doubted that they ever will.

Perhaps we live in a postmodern age, perhaps not. But we do live in the age of tribes and tribalism. It is tribalism, miraculously reborn, that injects juice and vigour into the eulogy of community, the acclaim of belonging, the passionate search for tradition. In this sense at least, the long roundabout of modernity has brought us to where our ancestors once started. Or so it may seem.

The end of modernity? Not necessarily. In another respect, after all, modernity is very much with us. It is with us in the form of the most defining of its defining traits: that of hope, the hope of making things better than they are -- since they are, thus far, not good enough. Vulgar preachers of undamaged tribalism and elegant philosophers of communally based forms of life alike teach us what they do in the name of changing things to the better. 'Whatever good the ideas of "objectivity" and "transcendence" have done for our culture can be attained equally well by the idea of community', says Rorty -- and this is precisely which makes that latter idea attractive for yesterday's seekers of the universal roads to a world fit for human habitation. Rational designs of artificial perfection, and the revolutions meant to imprint them on the shape of the world all failed abominably to deliver on their promise. Perhaps communities, warm and hospitable, will deliver what they, the cold abstractions, could not deliver. We still want the work to be done; we just let drop the tools which have been proved useless and reach for others -- which, who knows?, may still do the job. One may say that we still agree that marital happiness is a good thing; only we would no longer endorse Tolstoy's opinion that all happy marriages are happy in the same way.

We know quite well why we dislike the tools we have abandoned. For two centuries or so people deserving or demanding to be listened to at attention and respect told the story of a human habitat which curiously coincided with that of the political state and the realm of its legislative powers and ambitions. The human world was, in Parsons's memorable rendering, the 'principally co-ordinated' space -- the realm upholstered or about to be upholstered by uniform principles maintained by the joint efforts of the legislators and the armed or unarmed executors of their will. It was such an artificial space that was represented as a habitat which 'fits naturally' human needs and -- most importantly -- fits the need to gratify the needs. The 'principally co-ordinated', possibly rationally designed and monitored, society was to be that good society modernity set about constructing. Two centuries is a long time -- enough for all of us to learn what solitary great minds of Jeremy Bentham's type intuited from the start: that rationally designed 'principal co-ordination's fits equally well a school and a hospital as it fits a prison and a workhouse; and to find out that such a universality of application makes even the school and the hospital feel like a prison or a workhouse. That period has also shown that the wall separating the 'benign'brand of rational engineering from its malignant, genocidal variety is so rickety, slippery and porous that -- to paraphrase Bertrand Russell -- one does not know when one should start to cry .

As for the communities -- those allegedly unconstrained, naturally growing organisms, toeholds instead of skyhooks -- we do not yet know all those things we know only too well about the Grand Artifice modernity promised to build. But we may guess. We know that the modern zest for designed perfection condensed the otherwise diffuse heterophobia, and time and again channelled it, Stalin- or Hitler-style, towards genocidal outlets. We may only surmise that the messy tribalism suspicious of universal solutions would gravitate towards exilic, rather than genocidal, outlets for heterophobia. Separation rather than subjugation, confinement or annihilation. As Le Pen put it, 'I adore North Africans. But their place is in the Maghreb.'

There is no certainty -- not even a high probability -- that in the universe populated by communities no room will be left for the pariah. What seems more plausible, however, is that the parvenu's route of escape from the pariah status will be closed. Mixophobia may well be replaced with mixophobia; tolerance of difference may well be wedded to the flat refusal of solidarity; monologic discourse, rather than giving way to a dialogic one, will split into a series of soliloquies, with the speakers no more insisting on being heard, but refusing to listen into the bargain.

These are real prospects, real enough to give pause to the joyful chorus of sociologists welcoming the new soft world of communities.

Sociology has a long and distinguished record of sycophancy. Since its birth, it established itself as the principal poet-laureate of the state-centred and state-coordinated society, of the state bent on prohibiting everything which has not been first made obligatory. With the state no more interested in uniformity, losing interest in culture as a drilling routine and gladly leaving the job of social integration to variety-loving market forces, sociology is desperately seeking new courts where the skills and experience of pensioned courtiers could be gainfully employed. For many, the endemically fissiparous mini-courts of imagined communities, home ideologies and tribally invented traditions seem just the thing they need. Once more, though in a strikingly different way.
from before, one can flatter the practice with theoretical groundings by drawing elegant diagrams of messy reality. Once more one can herald a new ambivalence as a logical solution, and a definitive improvement on the old one. Courtiers' habits die hard.

In the course of the long, tortuous and convoluted march of modernity we should have learned our lesson: that the human existential predicament is ambivalent beyond cure, that good is always mixed with evil, that the line between the benign and the poisonous dose of medicine for our imperfections is impossible to draw safely. We should have learned this lesson. But we hardly did. Having discredited the medicine, we forget about the ailment it was meant to cure. Once more we announce, jubilantly, the discovery of a wonder-drug for human ills -- only this time it is the old malady which has been proclaimed to be the medicine. Once more we try, confidently, to prescribe the right dose of the cure. There is a good, enabling, progressive form of belonging -- we are told -- and this is called ethnicity, cultural tradition, nationalism. People are different, and let them stay so. Well, there is also an ugly posturing called heterophobia, or xenophobia, or racism -- a view and a practice of separating, banishing, exiling. But do the two have anything in common? Is not a small dose of the drug a foolproof antidote against its poisonous effects?

The orthodox consensus of sociology has been found guilty of aiding and abetting the all-too-often unwholesome practices of the nation-state. Some time will yet pass before the new `communalistically orientated' sociology, now relishing its honeymoon period and blithely self-congratulating, stands charged of complicity in the unprepossessing effects of the present fashions in identity-building. This, presumably, will not happen (not by common agreement at any rate) before those fashions are found, as usual in retrospect, to be wrong choices and lost chances.

5: Parvenu and Pariah: The Heroes and Victims of Modernity

Note: 2. EdmondjabÅ’s, Un Âªtranger avec; sous le bras, un livre du petit format (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 34.
Note: 6. Arendt, Rahel Varnhagen, p. 31.
6: Tourists and Vagabonds: The Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity

Inviting me to give this lecture, Professor Hunter asked me to "attempt to answer the question of how the fragmentation, deinstitutionalization, and subjectivism (among other processes) unfolding in contemporary social life are mediated within the frameworks of everyday life". He also wished me "to move beyond the abstractions and even obfuscations of "theory"... to the concrete and empirical experience of real human beings". A challenging briefing, and a challenge I could not refuse, though I cannot be sure I can rise to it... After all, the philosophers' philosophies, the synthesizers' syntheses, the theorists' theories reveal their sense (providing they have sense) only if looked upon as attempts to order the disorderly, to simplify the complex, to detemporalize the temporary -- the orderly and the simple and the extemporal being the 'theory', and the disorderly and the complex and the history-bound being the experience in which they, as the denizens of their time and place, are immersed. Theories tend to be shapely and shiny containers made to contain the oozy and muddy contents of experience. But to keep it there, their walls need to be hard; they also tend to be opaque. It is difficult to see the contents of experience through the walls of theory. Often one needs to pierce the walls -- to 'deconstruct', to 'decompose', them -- to see what do they hide inside.

There was one more reason why I found the challenge hard to refuse. Charlottesville is the home of Richard Rorty -- the great philosopher, perhaps the greatest we have.

But what is a great philosopher? It used to be common to measure the greatness of philosophers by their dexterity in tying together loose ends, in winding up discussions, in pronouncing verdicts that exuded an air of finality and otherwise bringing philosophy to an end. The meaning of such greatness was derived from the Thanatos-driven philosophy, a philosophy which, like Heideggerian Dasein, lived-towards-death and carried its life rehearsing its own demise, sure that the end was its fulfilment. After the greatest of them all, after Aristotle or Hegel, one heard the anguished cries: philosophy did reach its end, everything worth saying has been said, nothing yet unsaid is worth saying, we have all the answers but no more questions... 

I suggest that Richard Rorty is great philosopher in an altogether different sense. He is great in as far as that after Rorty one can no more philosophize the way one did before, even if what one philosophizes about is one's disagreement with Rorty's philosophy; though philosophize one must, because the impossibility to philosophize in the old fashion means precisely the impossibility of the kind of philosophy that lives-toward-death, the impossibility of philosophy ever coming to its end. Rorty's philosophical greatness is born of a different kind of philosophy -- of the Eros-driven, libidinal philosophy, one that fulfills itself in its perpetual unfulfilment and in asking such questions as fear final answers more than they dread the prospect of remaining unanswered. In terms of such philosophy Rorty is a great philosopher. The greatness of Rorty, the philosopher, fulfills itself in helping such unfulfillable philosophy to be born.

Musing on the chances of some future inhabitants of the Sahara grasping the spirit of our modern way of life, Rorty observed that it would be more helpful if they took Dickens, rather than Heidegger, for their material witness; and in spite of the fact that Heidegger spelled out in so many words what it means to be modern, while doing it never occurred to Dickens. In spite of? What Rorty really thinks about is because. The 'isness', of the society Dickens narrates is to be constantly indignant and deprecating about what it has been thus far and what it is likely to become -- to be forever at war with itself and take no 'yes', for an answer -- to be, as Bloch would have said, constantly noch nicht geworden. The 'isness', of the world Dickens narrates is the impossibility of 'isness'. And this is, Rorty says, more true about modernity than any, however refined and sophisticated, formula which the great synthesizers may put together. This does not mean that Dickens is wiser than Heidegger (even if we had a yardstick with which to measure and compare the two so distinct kinds of wisdom). But this does mean that Dickens, being a novelist, not an academic philosopher, and so trying as he did to remain faithful to the convoluted, contorted and confused experience of his contemporaries, rather than to the vocation of correcting it, straightening up and streamlining -- was in a better position to tell the true story of that experience which was indeed the experience of convolution, contortion and confusion.

What Richard Rorty does not say, and where I take exception to his way of telling the story, is that it took quite a lot of history to assign more truth-value to the Dickens style of story-telling than to that of Habermas or Heidegger, and that therefore his own discovery (or, rather, his own choice of priority) is itself an event in history. Rorty refuses to locate himself and his thought in history. And in this refusal he drifts dangerously close to that author/actor of the orthodox philosophy whom he did more than anyone else to disavow and disempower -- to that 'ascetic priest', whom he spies out so skillfully in Heidegger. To that ascetic priest who believed that the truth has lain in wait since the day of creation and that it is but a matter of his priestly skills and wits to force it out of its hiding.

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But what are we doing, when we say that the truth of the novelist is better than the truth of the philosopher? Are we stating a fact that has thus far avoided the eye of modern philosophers? A fact which they could have seen were they not, foolishly, averting their eyes? Or are we rather spotting something new, that was not there before? Or something which, if it was there, was too marginal, feeble, taciturn, or otherwise negligible to meet the eye? In other words: are we talking about a change in philosophy, or in the life experience we philosophize about?

In their traditional role as the healers of, and the legislators for, common sense, philosophers had to slice off and separate their own practices from the practices of the common man, so that the two could be set against each other. From this operation the practices of the non-philosophers emerged, naturally, as non-philosophical ones. The division was neat and tidy. On one side was philosophy, unpolluted by freak and flickery practices: on the other, raw practices unpolluted by thought -- a primal stuff not unlike the blips on the accelerator screen waiting to be given meaning by the nuclear physicists. But this division was a byproduct, or a waste-product, of the self-constitution of philosophy in the certain role it had chosen, or was chosen to play throughout the modern era. The absence of philosophy in living practices was trivially evident but for the decision to ignore its presence and/or deny its credentials.

It is trivially evident today that common experience is not at all as modern philosophy (and sociology, for that matter) painted it: not the void waiting to be filled with meaning, not the formless plasma to be given shape by professionals armed with hermeneutical know-how. That experience is rather from the start meaningful, interpreted, understood by those steeped in it -- that meaningfulness, interpretation, comprehension being its mode of being. Now, making trivially evident today the very opposite of what was trivially evident yesterday is, no doubt, a philosophical accomplishment. But the Owl of Minerva does indeed spread its wings only at dusk... A lot must have happened in the long day of life which modern men and women experience, for the philosophers to recognize, as the evening came, the evidence -- to accept the evidence as evidence.

It is quite likely, but largely beside the point, that human experience bore at all times the character which we see as evident today. The problem, though, is that only under certain conditions do things, even the most ubiquitous and stubbornly present ones, become `evident'. (It is evident to us, for instance, that already Cro-Magnon men and the Neanderthals `must have had a culture'; but only in the second half of the eighteenth century could the concept of culture be coined, and they would hardly be the Cro-Magnons or Neanderthals they were if they were aware that they had a culture.) And it is under special conditions that lay perceptions, interpretations and ensuing life strategies may be recognized as knowledge -- a valid knowledge -- rather than manifestations of the endemically flawed, prejudiced and otherwise erroneous `common sense'; that understanding might have been recognized as the ongoing, ever repeated and never final accomplishment of daily life, rather than the product of a sophisticated methodology accessible to the experts only and moving relentlessly toward the ultimate, conclusive resolution.

Much could be said about such special conditions, this special kind of common life experience, which made `evident', these things which could be perhaps true also before, but certainly were not previously considered evident. I would like, however, to bring to your attention but one momentous change in life circumstances -- namely, the detemporalization of social space.

The projection of spatial, contemporaneous difference upon the continuum of time, re-presentation of heterogeneity as ascending series of time stages, was perhaps the most salient, and possibly also the most seminal, feature of the modern mind. But metaphors transform both sides that enter the metaphorical relationship. The projection of space upon time furnished time with certain traits which only space possesses `naturally': modern time had direction, just like any itinerary in space. Time progressed from the obsolete to the up-to-date, and the up-to-date was from the start the future obsolescence. Time had its `front', and its `behind'; one was goaded and boosted to move `forward with time'. The boisterous, self-congratulating town elders who built Leeds Town Hall in the middle of the nineteenth century as the monument to their own miraculous rise-in-time, have engraved their moral principles around the walls of its assembly hall. Alongside other commandments there is one most striking by its self-confident brevity -- `Forward', Those who designed the Town Hall had no doubts as to where `forward', was.

And so the modern men and women lived in a time-space with structure, a solid, tough, durable time-space -- just the right benchmark against which to plot and monitor the capriciousness and volatility of

human will -- but also a hard container in which human actions could feel sensible and secure. In that structured world one could be lost, but one could also find one's way and arrive exactly where one aimed to be. The difference between getting lost and arriving was made of knowledge and determination: the knowledge of the time-space structure and the determination to follow, be what may, the chosen itinerary. Under those circumstances, freedom was indeed the known necessity -- plus the resolve to act on that knowledge.

The structure was in its place before any human deed began, and lasted long enough, unshaken and unchanged, to see the deed through. It preceded all human accomplishment, but it also made the accomplishment possible: it transformed one's life struggle from an aimless tussle into a consistent accomplishment. One could add one achievement to another, follow the road step by step, each step leading, thanks to the road, to another; one could build one's accomplishment from the bottom up, from the foundations to the roof. That was the world of life-long pilgrimage, of vocation, or -- as the Owl of Minerva was to pronounce later on through Jean-Paul Sartre's lips -- of the life project. David Copperfield and Buddenbrooks alike were wrestling with indomitable standards -- commanding yet slippery, obligatory yet well-nigh impossible to reach. And so they knew from the start where to seek success and knew right away if they failed. Our life struggles dissolve, on the contrary, in that unbearable lightness of being... We never know for sure when to laugh and when to cry. And there is hardly a moment in life to say without dark premonitions: `I have arrived.'

Let me make myself clear. I am not saying that modern men and women spoke of all this in so many words, that they thought about it, reasoned and argued when going through their life business. I am saying rather that we, men and women of the late twentieth century, the late-modern, 'surnomadic' or postmodern men and women, have to impute to them such a vision of the world whenever we want to make sense of what we know of their lives and try to comprehend the kind of experience which made that life possible while having been made possible by it. I am not saying that they lived daily with the knowledge of tightly structured time-space and the solidity and durability of the world -- but that we live daily with the growing awareness that we cannot trust either. I am talking therefore above all about the present shock, not the past tranquillity. That past experience, as we tend to reconstruct it now, retrospectively, has come to be known to us mainly through its disappearance. What we think the past had -- is what we know we do not have.

And what we know we do not have is the facility to set apart the

structure of the world from the action of the humans; the rock-steady solidity of the world out there from the pliability of human will. Not that the world has suddenly become submissive and obedient to human desire; as before, it all too often makes light of human intention and effort and easily twists and bends the effects of human labours. But this world out there more and more reminds us of another player in the game, rather than of the indomitable
rule-setter and a no-appeal-allowing umpire; and as a player in a game in which the rules are made and remade in the course of playing. The experience of living in such a world (or is it, rather, the experience of living that world?) is the experience of a player, and in the experience of the player there is no way of telling necessity from accident, determination from contingency: there are but the moves of the players, the art of playing one's hand well and the skill of making the most of one's cards.

Human action has not become less frail and erratic; it is the world it tries to inscribe itself in and orient itself by that seems to have become more so. How can one live one's life as pilgrimage if the shrines and sanctuaries are moved around, profaned, made sacrosanct and then unholy again in a stretch of time much shorter than the journey to reach them would take? How can one invest in a lifelong achievement, if today values are bound to be devalued and inflated tomorrow? How can one groom oneself for life's vocation, if skills laboriously acquired become liabilities the day after they became assets? When professions and jobs disappear without notice and yesterday's specialisms are today's blinkers? And how can one mark and fence off one's place in the world if all acquired rights are but until-further-notice, when the withdrawal-at-will clause is written into every contract of partnership, when -- as Anthony Giddens aptly put it -- all relationship is but a 'pure' relationship, that is a relationship without strings attached and with no obligations earned, and all love is but 'confluent' love, lasting no longer than the satisfaction derived?

The meaning of identity, as the late Christopher Lasch pointed out, refers both to persons and to things. Both have lost their solidity in modern society, their definiteness and continuity. The world construed of durable objects has been replaced with disposable products designed for immediate obsolescence. In such a world, identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume. The horror of the new situation is that all diligent work of construction may prove to be in vain; the allurement of the new situation, on the other hand, lies in the fact of not being bound by past trials, of never being irrevocably defeated, always 'keeping the options open'. But the horror and the allure alike make life-as-pilgrimage hardly feasible as a strategy and unlikely to be chosen

as one. Not by many, anyway. And not with a great chance of success.

In the life-game of postmodern men and women the rules of the game change in the course of playing. The sensible strategy is therefore to keep each game short -- so that a sensibly played game of life calls for the splitting of one big all-embracing game with huge and costly stakes into a series of brief and narrow games with small, not-too-precious ones. To quote Christopher Lasch again -- determination to live one day at a time and depicting daily life as a succession of minor emergencies become the guiding principles of all rational life strategy.

To keep the game short means to beware long-term commitments. To refuse to be 'fixed' one way or the other. Not to get tied to one place, however pleasurable the present stopover may feel. Not to wed one's life to one vocation only. Not to swear consistency and loyalty to anything or anybody. Not to control the future, but refuse to mortgage it. To take care that the consequences of the game do not outlive the game itself, and to renounce responsibility for such consequences as do. To forbid the past to bear on the present. In short, to cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history. To abolish time in any other form but of a loose assembly, or an arbitrary sequence, of present moments; to flatten the flow of time into a continuous present.

Once dispersed and no more a vector, no more an arrow with a pointer or a flow with a direction -- time no more structures the space. On the ground, there is no more 'forward' and 'backward'; it is just the ability to move and not to stand still that counts. Fitness -- the capacity to move swiftly where the action is and be ready to take in experiences as they come -- takes precedence over health, that idea of the standard of normalcy and of keeping that standard stable and unscathed. All delay, also 'delay of gratification', loses its meaning: there is no arrowlike time left to measure it.

And so the snag is no more how to discover, invent, construct, assemble (even buy) an identity, but how to prevent it from being too tight -- and from sticking too fast to the body. Well-sewn and durable identity is no more an asset; increasingly and ever more evidently, it becomes a liability. The huh of postmodern life strategy is not making identity but the avoidance of being fixed.

The figure of the tourist is the epitome of such avoidance. Indeed, tourists worth their salt are the masters supreme of the art of melting the solids and unfixing the fixed. First and foremost, they perform the feat of not belonging to the place they might be visiting; theirs is the miracle of being in and out of place at the same time. The tourists keep their distance, and bar the distance from shrinking into proximity. It is as if each of them was enclosed in a bubble with tightly controlled osmosis;

only such things as the occupant of the bubble admits may leak in, only such things as he or she allows to go, may seep out. Inside the bubble the tourist may feel safe; whatever the pulling power of the outside, however sticky or voracious the world outside may be, the tourist is protected. Travelling lightly, with just a few belongings necessary to insure against the inclemency of alien places, the tourists may set out on the road again at a moment's notice, as soon as things threaten to get out of control, or as their potential of amusement seems to have been exhausted, or as still more exciting adventures beckon from afar. Mobility is the name of the game: one must be able to move when the needs push or the dreams call. This ability the tourists call freedom, autonomy or independence, and they cherish it more than anything else, since it is the conditio sine qua non of everything else that their hearts desire. This is also the meaning of their most often heard demand: 'need more space.' That is: no one shall be allowed to question my right to go out of the space I am presently locked in.

In the tourist life, the length of stay in any place is hardly ever planned in advance; neither is the next destination. The point of tourist life is to be on the move, not to arrive; unlike those of their predecessors, the pilgrims, the tourists' successive stopovers are not stations on the road, since there is no goal beckoning at the end of life's travels which could make them into stations. If the successive addresses add up into an itinerary, it happens only retrospectively, when a logic is discovered or impputed which did not guide the wanderer at the time of his wandering. When still on the move, no image of the future state is at hand to fill the present experience with meaning; each successive present, like works of contemporary art, must explain itself in its own terms and provide its own key to read out its sense.

The stopovers are campings, not domiciles; however long each respite in the travel may prove in the end, it is lived at each moment as an overnight stay. Only the shallowest of roots, if any, are struck. Only skin-deep relations, if any, are entered with the locals. Above all, there is no mortgaging of the future, no incurring of long-term obligations, no allowing something that happens today to bind the tomorrow. The locals are not, after all, the keepers of half-way inns, which pilgrims had to visit again and again on each pilgrimage; those local the tourists come across are literally 'bumped into' incidentally, as a side-effect of yesterday's impulse, which the day before yesterday was not yet imagined or anticipated and which could easily be different from what it was and bring the tourist to some other place. Their company has been born of one impulse and will die with the next. True -- that company is the consequence of the move, but it is an unanticipated consequence; it was

not part of the bargain, and it has no claim on the wanderer's loyalty.

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All this offers the tourist the gratifying feeling of 'being in control'. This is not, to be sure, control in the now old-fashioned and outdated, heroic sense of engraving one's shape on the world, remaking the world in one's own image or liking, and keeping it like that. This is but what can be called the 'situational control' -- the ability to choose where and with what parts of the world to 'interface' and when to switch off the connection. Switching on and off does not leave on the world any lasting imprint; as a matter of fact, thanks to the facility with which the switches are operated, the world (as the tourist knows it) seems infinitely pliable, soft and friable; it is unlikely to hold any shape for long. Sightings replace shapes: it is now the tourist's wandering interests, his shifting attention and the mobile angle of view that gives the world its 'structure' -- as fluid and as 'until further notice' as the gaze that brought it to be. Shaping the world in this way is effortless, but it is also, for the world at least, inconsequential.

An event which in principle has no consequences outlasting its own duration is called an episode; like the tourists themselves, the episode -- so says Milan Kundera -- breaks into the story without being part of it. The episode is a self-enclosed event. Each new episode is, so to speak, an absolute beginning, but equally absolute is its ending: 'not to be continued' is the last sentence of the story (even if, to make the plight of the unwary yet more bitter, it is written in invisible ink). The problem is, though -- as Kundera hastens to add -- that the decision about the finality of the ending is its elf never final. One would never know whether the episode is truly over and done with. All the effort to prevent it notwithstanding, past events may return to haunt the future presents. The better-to-be-for gotten partners of past intercourse may turn up again, inside entirely different episodes, brandishing the sores left by the encounters of yore. Pruning the episodes, nipping in the bud the seedlings of future consequences, therefore takes a constant effort, and a constantly inconclusive effort with that. This is a nasty fly in the otherwise tasty ointment of a life lived at every moment as an episode; or perhaps this is a hole, through which the world out there breaks time and again into the tightly controlled space -- thereby calling the bluff of the tourist's control. This is why the tourist's life is not all roses. There is a price to be paid for the pleasures it brings. The tourist's way of doing away with uncertainties brings about uncertainties of its own.

The tourists embark on their travels by choice -- or so, at least, they think. They set off because they find home boring or not attractive enough, too familiar and holding too few surprises; or because they hope to find elsewhere more exciting adventure and deeper sensations

than the homely routine is ever likely to deliver. The decision to leave the home behind in order to explore foreign parts is all the easier to make for the comfort feeling that one can always return, if need be. The discomforts of hotel rooms may indeed make one homesick; and it is gratifying and consoling to remember that there is a home -- somewhere -- a retreat from the hurly-burly where one could shelter, where one could be unambiguously, unproblematically chez sot -- draw the curtains, close the eyes and plug the ears to new sensations, shut the door to new adventures... Well, the point is that such a prospect stays gratifying and consoling as long as it remains a prospect. The 'home', as in 'homesickness', is none of the real buildings of brick and mortar, timber or stone. The moment the door is shut from the outside, home becomes a dream. The moment the door is shut from inside, it turns into prison. The tourist has acquired the taste for vaster, and above all open, spaces.

The tourists become wanderers and put the dreams of homesickness above the realities of home -- because they want to, because they consider it the most reasonable life-strategy 'under the circumstances', or because they have been seduced by the true or imaginary pleasures of a sensation-gatherer's life. But not all wanderers are on the move because they prefer being on the move to staying put. Many would perhaps refuse to embark on a life of wandering were they asked, but they had not been asked in the first place. If they are on the move, it is because they have been pushed from behind -- having been first uprooted by a force too powerful, and often too mysterious, to resist. They see their plight as anything but the manifestation of freedom. Freedom, autonomy, independence -- if they appear in their vocabulary at all -- invariably come in the future tense. For them, to be free means not to have to wander around. To have a home and to be allowed to stay inside. These are the vagabonds; dark moons reflecting the shine of bright suns; the mutants of postmodern evolution, the unfit rejects of the brave new species. The vagabonds are the waste of the world which has dedicated itself to tourists' services.

The tourists stay or move at their hearts' desire. They abandon the site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere. The vagabonds, however, know that they won't stay for long, however strongly they wish to, since nowhere they stop are they welcome: if the tourists move because they find the world irresistibly attractive, the vagabonds move because they find the world unbearably inhospitable. They take to the roads not when they have squeezed out the last drop of amusement the locals could offer, but when the locals lose patience and refuse to put up with their alien presence. The tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds -- because they have no other choice. The vagabonds are, one may say, involuntary tourists; but the notion of 'involuntary tourist' is a contradiction in terms. However much the tourist strategy may be a necessity in a world marked by shifting walls and mobile roads, freedom of choice is the tourist's flesh and blood. Take it away, and the attraction, the poetry and, indeed, the liveability of the tourist's life are all but gone.

A word of warning: tourists and vagabonds are the metaphors of contemporary life. One can be (and often is) a tourist or a vagabond without ever travelling physically far -- just as Max Weber's Puritans were pilgrims-through-life even if they hardly ever looked beyond the border of their home town, and were too busy pursuing their vocations ever to take time off and visit the seaside. Having this in mind, I suggest to you that in our postmodern society, we are all -- to one extent or another, in body or thought, here and now or in the anticipated future, willingly or unwillingly -- on the move; none of us can be certain that he or she has gained the right to any place once for all and no one thinks that his or her staying in one place forever is a likely prospect; wherever we happen to stop, we are at least in part displaced or out of place. But here the commonality of our plight ends and the differences begin.

I suggest to you that the opposition between the tourists and the vagabonds is the major, principal division of the postmodern society. We are all plotted on a continuum stretched between the poles of the 'perfect tourist' and the 'vagabond beyond remedy' -- and our respective places between the poles are plotted according to the degree of freedom we possess in choosing our life itineraries. Freedom of choice, I put to you, is in postmodern society by far the most seminal among the stratifying factors. The more freedom of choice one has, the higher is one's rank in the postmodern social hierarchy. Postmodern social differences are made of the width and narrowness of the range of realistic options.

But the vagabond is the tourist's alter ego -- just as the destitute is the alter ego of the rich, the savage the alter ego of the civilized, or the stranger the alter ego of the native. Being an alter ego means to serve as a rubbish bin into which all ineffable premonitions, unspoken fears, secret self-deprecations and, in some extreme cases, to be thought of as deserted; to be an alter ego means to serve as a public exposition of the innermost private, as an inner demon to be publicly excorized, an effigy in which all that which cannot be suppressed may be burnt. The alter ego is the dark and sinister backdrop against which the purified ego may shine.

No wonder that the tourist half of postmodern society is in two minds as far as the other, the vagabond, half is concerned. The vagabonds mock the tourist style, and mocking means ridicule. The
vagabonds are the caricature which reveals the ugliness hidden underneath the beauty of makeup. Their presence is irksome and infuriating; there is no evident use they may be put to; for all one knows, they may be disposed of to no one's -- not even their own -- loss or regret.

But remember -- the vagabonds are the rubbish bins for the tourist filth; dismantle the waste-disposal system, and the healthy ones of this world will suffocate and poison amidst their own refuse... More importantly yet, the vagabonds -- remember that -- are the dark background against which the sun of the tourist shines so brightly that the spots are hardly seen. The darker the background, the brighter the shine. The more repulsive and abhorrent the lot of the vagabond, the more bearable are the minor discomforts and major risks of the tourist life. One can live with the ambiguities of uncertainty which saturate the tourist life only because the certainties of vagabondage are so unambiguously loathsome and repugnant. The tourist needs an alternative too dreadful to contemplate to keep repeating, at the hour of stress, that 'there is no alternative'.

The vagabonds, the victims of the world which made the tourists into its heroes, have their uses, after all; as the sociologists love to say -- they are 'functional'. It is difficult to live in their neighbourhood, but it is unthinkable to live without them. It is their all-too-blant hardships that reduce one's own worries to marginal inconveniences. It is their evident unhappiness that inspires the rest to thank God daily for having made them tourists.

(Lecture delivered at the University of Virginia in October 1995.)