

The place the hands can't seek - III - Self-destructiveness and the urban world

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To think demands distance. It demands room, space, and the possibility to distend time. Saint Augustine was quite aiming at it when he wondered about this *distentio animi* in his Confessions. Time is correlated to the distance you can walk freely on your own accord. The greater this distance is, the longer time you get. Otherwise, if you are stuck in the tiny room of obligations, you cannot but withdraw into your own capacity to make room in your imagination.

That is why we are talking now about self-destructiveness as something that is a lack of room, and then the *don't know what to do* with the violence of it. Whenever the social environment reduces the possibilities for genuine expression from the individuals, pushing them to fit into the tiniest room of the acceptable alienation, violence is inevitable.

As well does the urban world in those neoliberal times. If we remember Pierre Bourdieu's ideas we mentioned from his article titled *L'essence du néolibéralisme*¹, the strategy of neoliberal ideology is to erase all the collective structures between the corporations and the capital, including the states. We also remember from Hannah Arendt - in her *The Crisis in Culture* - that the modern world was all about being on the breach of something looming in the depth of us.

Then, it is all about pressure. And pressure means room or lack of room. It means how much the distance is available or condemned.

We focused very much, in our later work, on the interconnections between morals and violence. Notably, on how the restriction of aggression came to provoke the birth of violence as a consequence of its prohibition. Violence, for those living under the moral laws, is first of all the knowledge of its own banishment. You are to be excluded from the course of society for being violent.

But, also, you are not allowed to be violent against the very violence that the same society pushes onto you, shall it be justified or not. Society justifies that being so many under its rules, there should be order to maintain the interests and integrity of all. Except that if the society induces the eradication of the middle-space, the room for all to pertain to the order of society, we enter the reign of unequal participation.

Quoting Henry David Thoreau : 'Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also in prison.'² That was yesterday. Today, we have Naomi Klein³ showing us that crisis were and are still used by governments to pass on unpopular laws against the same interests and integrity of the people they govern.

The way from the source of moral and social order - those pushing the laws of this order, should they be explicit or tacit - to the living matter of societies - the individuals and their natural environment - has to be direct in order to charge those at the bottom of the hierarchy with pressure and precarity. Capitalism and the delusion of democracy allow this system to endure for a while by creating enough precarity so people are kept in fear, and at the same time enough illusion of comfort so they can still try to believe someone else is going to solve the problem in the meantime.

1 In *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 1998, <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/03/BOURDIEU/3609>

2 In Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*, 1849.

3 In Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, June 2008.

Hence, we are on the breach. And as we would pressure people in precarity, erasing all alternative ways to build another kind of society by damaging social and economical structures as well as impoverishing our natural resourcing, we are at the same time damaging the spaces for valuable social action. This way, we narrow people's mental room for deriving aggression from its source to a long-term creative act.

If the only alternative to self-destructive behaviour you leave - not being able to express aggressive energy to morally positive outlets - are the ways of consumption, you are only giving the individuals another mean to express a short-term destructive act. Because to consume is to consume. It is a destructive impulse that once you have consumed your object, the object of your desire, it is not there anymore, and you have to keep on wanting for more of it.

Therefore, there is a problem to be solved with the urban world, because the urban infrastructures belong and came from private entities mostly, so they are only lent to their 'customers'. It is made out of consumption points and channels for transportation. Both of them are treating human and living beings like components. And it has become so widely and so globally accepted that it has now become norm.

How to fit in and how to be carried out through these functional components of what looks like a most predictable circuit ? First, by forgetting the steps of handworking. Our daily manufactured objects have also printed in their identification the opacity of the means by which they have been produced. Very few of the objects we own are that we have built ourselves, with our own hands. So the connection with the prime matter, mineral and natural matter, has been broken and taken up by the symbolic : the object of desire.

Since Edward Bernays who wrote *Propaganda* in 1928 - his later book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* inspired none the least than Goebbels and the Nazis propaganda - and *The Engineering of consent* in 1947, after working for the Wilson government in 1917 as well as for private companies on the manipulation of the masses, tools are not just tools anymore : they are most of all the support for new objects of desire. If the inventor of the *public relation* system did not invent the markers of social class that could have been most daily objects and clothing, he pertained to their generalisation.

Hence the urban world is deeply participating of this upholding of the impoverishment of people's environment. Because the objects of consumption have been taken up by symbolic objects of desire. Therefore, these symbolic objects have absorbed the social and moral values given to the individuals' interaction with each others and society. Then the urban infrastructures pertain to the pressure we hold on social obedience.

'If you want to desire, as you can't desire anymore in any other way than the ones left for you to consume and seek, you can only ask for the upholding of an order that although unequal, guarantees that you won't have to build everything out of nothing.' As we are floating on the surface of manufactured objects that constitute our daily environment, we have no access to primary matter we could arrange our reality from, free from the moral debt of lending them from somebody else.

What we can't borrow from our natural environment anymore, because resources have been privatised, we can only try to dream it though we are constantly kept in a state of moral debt toward the daily objects we accepted to use - granting private companies with our consent. Why ? Because we wanted to stick to the course of desire, that is vehiculed in our societies through social objects of desire, full of private interests from which we would get no benefits.

Then it becomes self-destructive, because we are at least conscious enough or alerted that we are in a state of alienation, of submission, of addiction, that we come to the point we want to

forget that we really are, by making it 'normal'. We start believing there is no other way to do it, that the power of the oppressor is too strong, that money and the phantasies of omnipotence of the few leaders of this world will ever win over public interests.

This may partly be one of the origins of the mythology of the nerd, pointed out by Darian Leader's remarkable work on daily objects and their relation to the hands.⁴ Somehow, this mythology is presenting us people capable of passing through the surface of the generally available technology. Contrarily to the average people, they have the capacity, like magic and omnipotent power, to get their hands dirty and fix the heart of unsound machines.

They are here, breaking the link of moral debt we have toward these objects that seem more and more to belong to those who created them : the era of connected object, of an impalpable cloud world through which datas are flowing. Urban network gets blurred by the abstract world of data, and the design of the connected objects tends to be more and more spherical.

We are in a way pushed to forget about the hardware, to focus on the abstraction of those objects presented as pure objects of desire, that we don't even have to touch anymore, that extend our action on the world... remotely.

The connection to the theory of the three paradoxes here is that it is at the heart of it. The hand I see but cannot grasp without extinguishing the object of desire it represents is a remotely influenced object. *I see it and I know I can move it*. From here to the remote-action on my environment, only one imaginary step is needed.

Its most obvious incarnation in pop-culture is none the less than the Force and Jedi powers in the Star Wars's saga. Jedis have the power to use the Force to bring objects to them, to lift them up or throw them away. Rising their hand, they summon an omnipresent and absolute supernatural force that gives them influence over their surroundings. It is a dream but a dream that may pull roots from the beginnings of human times.

To mind one's surroundings and to plunge into the desire to be connected to their objects as much as one is connected to their own hands, though they can appear alien in the world of vision, this is not other postulate than the one of the theory we are presenting. Somehow, the imaginary force of the Jedis are the hands gotten dirty in a symbolic world where getting their hands really dirty is not enough to desire. Maybe thousands of years ago, but not anymore, or shall it be in contrast with the educated style. Dirty is wild, but only wild by contrast.

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novels are interesting in this point of view - also noted by philosopher Gilles Deleuze. The portraits in his stories were very much detailed as a function of all the small objects that could tell the social resonance of who the characters are. The values of these characters are given by contrast between the outfits they wear and who they are underneath their costume. Like the example of the fan given by Darian Leader in his book *Hands*, Sacher-Masoch's stories are full of such details that already in the nineteenth century, turned those objects into reasons to desire.

The fact that we are stressing today's generalisation of one old aristocratic fashion of enjoying leisure as a room for desire doesn't rub the genealogy of it. The norms of today take their origins in a slow and chaotic setting throughout the centuries. Cultures and their objects act likewise : we tend to forget where they came from and how they got in our hands, the steps it took. Yet now we have the obligation to look backward and see the traces of their upbringing.

4 In Darian Leader, *Hands*, 2016.

How then can the urban world be related to self-destructiveness ? Because it is based on predictability, mostly. Depending on the degree of this predictability we ask from our environment, we tend to narrow down our own authority over what we do and why we are doing it. Moral debt is fragmented. All those objects of economical and symbolic debt are working like an opaque screen hiding the forest we use to create them. But it is only happening because we are pressured in time and space not to see anything else but the surface of it.

The mythology of the nerds stages those who have a look on what is going on behind. Yet, we should all do the same and call for means to action to set it right. For that, we have to learn to desire other objects, moral objects that are working in the long-term, and that are permissive to everyone.

German philosopher - inspirer of Marx - Georg Wilhelm Hegel's dialectics of the Master and the Slave told us one thing about the constant effort of the Master to hold pressure on the working Slave. To hold power on something or someone is the same as living with the hands stuck in the middle between oneself and the others. But it is only leading them to stand split with the alien self.

We, as a species, only stepped forward the monopoly of our environment over us by understanding we had to resume our conversation with it. Being stuck in the phantasy wouldn't have led us nowhere else. If the holding gives the measure of what to do and what we can do, the only way we can do it is to accept the others as other alien selves longing to communicate and share some common ground.

The phantasy of supernatural power only has efficiency when shared, and hopefully played with. So we wish that opening the breach for a new landscape for thinking, we would help the best parts of our minds to settle and start to play.