

**COUNTERREVOLUTION  
AND REVOLT**

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"... certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization." MARX

I

*Cultural Revolution*: the phrase, in the West, first suggests that ideological developments are ahead of developments at the base of society: cultural revolution but *not* (yet) political and economic revolution. While, in the arts, in literature and music, in communication, in the mores and fashions, changes have occurred which suggest a new experience, a radical transformation of values, the social structure and its political expressions seem to remain basically unchanged, or at least to lag behind the cultural changes. But "Cultural Revolution" also suggests that the radical opposition today involves in a new sense the entire realm beyond that of the material needs—nay, that it aims at a total transformation of the entire traditional culture.

The strong emphasis on the political potential of the arts which is a feature of this radicalism is first of all expressive of the need for an effective *communication* of the indictment of the established reality and of the goals of liberation. It is the effort to find forms of communication that may break the oppressive rule of the established language and images over the mind and body of man—language and images which have long since become a means of domination, indoctrination, and deception. Communication of the radically nonconformist, new historical goals of the revolution requires an equally noncon-

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#### ART AND REVOLUTION

formist language (in the widest sense), a language that reaches a population which has introjected the needs and values of their masters and managers and made them their own, thus reproducing the established system in their minds, their consciousness, their senses and instincts. Such a new language, if it is to be political, cannot possibly be "invented": it will necessarily depend on the subverting use of traditional material, and the possibilities of this subversion are naturally sought where the tradition itself has permitted, sanctioned, and preserved another language, and other images. Such other languages exist mainly in two domains at opposite poles of society:

1) in art \*

2) in the folk tradition (black language, argot, slang)

The latter is largely the language of the oppressed, and as such it has a natural affinity to protest and refusal. In black language, methodically fostered by black people today, it strengthens solidarity, the consciousness of their identity, and of their repressed or distorted cultural tradition. And because of this function, it militates against generalization. Another form of linguistic rebellion is the systematic use of "obscenities." I stressed its supposed political potential (in *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 35); today, this potential is already ineffective. Spoken to an Establishment which can well afford "obscenity," this language no longer identifies the radical, the one who does not belong. Moreover, standardized obscene language is repressive desublimation: facile (though vicarious) gratification of aggressiveness. It turns easily against sexuality itself. The verbalization of the genital and anal sphere, which has become a ritual in left-radical speech (the "obligatory" use of "fuck," "shit") is a *debasement* of sexuality. If a radical says, "Fuck Nixon," he associates the word for highest genital gratification

\* I use the term "art" to include literature and music.

with the highest representative of the oppressive Establishment, and "shit" for the products of the Enemy takes over the bourgeois rejection of anal eroticism. In this (totally unconscious) debasement of sexuality, the radical seems to punish himself for his lack of power; his language is losing its political impact. And while serving as a shibboleth of identity (belonging to the radical nonconformists), this linguistic rebellion mars the *political* identity by the mere verbalization of petty bourgeois taboos.

At the other pole of society, in the domain of the arts, the tradition of protest, the negation of that which is "given," persists in its own universe and in its own right. Here, the other language, the other images continue to be communicated, to be heard and seen; and it is this art which, in a subverted form, is now being used as a weapon in the political fight against the established society—with an impact far transcending a specific privileged or underprivileged group. The subverting use of the artistic tradition aims from the beginning at a systematic (*desublimation* of culture:) that is to say, at undoing the aesthetic form.\* "Aesthetic form" means the total of qualities (harmony, rhythm, contrast) which make an oeuvre a self-contained whole, with a structure and order of its own (the style). By virtue of these qualities the work of art (*transforms*) the order prevailing in reality. This transformation is "illusion," but an illusion which gives the contents represented a meaning and a function different from those they have in the prevailing universe of discourse. Words, sounds, images, from another dimension "bracket" and invalidate the right of the established reality for the sake of a reconciliation still to come.

The harmonizing illusion, the idealistic transfiguration, and, with it (*the divorce of the arts from reality*) has been a feature of this [aesthetic form]. Its [desublimation] means: return to

\* See *An Essay on Liberation*, loc. cit., pp. 42 f.

Resublimation =  
undo form  
Form

Sublimation =  
Divorce  
of reality

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Rebellion ≠  
undo form  
forms

sublim = force  
& artificiality

an ["immediate" art,] which responds to, and activates, not only the intellect and a refined, "distilled," restricted sensibility, but also, and primarily, a "natural" sense experience freed from the requirements of an obsolescent exploitative society. The search is for art forms which express the experience of the body (and the "soul"), not as vehicles of labor power and resignation, but as vehicles of liberation. This is the search for a [sensuous culture,] "sensuous" inasmuch as it involves the radical transformation of man's sense experience and receptivity: their emancipation from a self-propelling, profitable, and mutilating productivity. But the cultural revolution goes far beyond a revaluation in the arts: it strikes at the roots of capitalism in the individuals themselves.

In the preceding chapter, I have tried to outline the material, practical force of this emancipation. Cultural changes can no longer be adequately understood within the abstract schema of base and superstructure (ideology). At the present stage, the disintegration of "bourgeois culture" affects the operational values of capitalism. A new experience of reality, new values weaken the conformity among the underlying population. More effectively than its political goals and slogans, this "existential" protest, hard to isolate and hard to punish, threatens the cohesion of the social system. And it is this protest which motivates the efforts to subvert also the "higher" culture of the system: the striving for essentially different ways of life seems to depend largely on liberation from "bourgeois culture."

Today, the break with the bourgeois tradition in art, serious as well as popular, seems to be all but complete. The new "open" forms or "free forms" express not just a new style in the historical succession but rather the negation of the very universe in which art has moved, the efforts to change the historical function of art. Are these efforts really steps on the road to liberation? Do they really subvert what they are supposed to

subvert? To prepare the answer, the target has first to be brought into focus.

"Bourgeois culture": is there a meaningful common denominator (other than a vague unhistorical one) which characterizes the dominant culture from the 16th to the 20th centuries? The historical subject of this culture is the *bourgeoisie*: first the urban middle class between the nobility and the agricultural and manufacturing laborers; subsequently the ruling class confronting the industrial working class during the 19th century. But the *bourgeoisie* which is (supposed to be) represented by the culture of this period, this *bourgeoisie* is, in terms of its social function and spirit, no longer the ruling class today, and its culture is no longer the culture dominating the advanced capitalist society today: neither the *material* nor the *intellectual*, artistic ("higher") culture.

The distinction between these two spheres of culture must be recalled:

- the [material culture] comprising the actual patterns of behavior in "earning a living," the system of operational values; the rule of the Performance Principle; the patriarchal family as educational unit; work as calling, vocation;
- the [intellectual culture] comprising the "higher values," science and the "humanities," the arts, religion.

We shall see that these two dimensions of bourgeois culture, far from constituting a unified whole, have developed in tension, even contradiction, to each other.

In the *material culture*, typically "bourgeois" have been:

- the preoccupation with money, business, "commerce" as "existential" value, with religious and ethical sanction;
- the dominant economic and "spiritual" function of the father as head of the family and of the enterprise; and
- an authoritarian education designed to reproduce and introject these utilitarian goals.

This whole "life style" of bourgeois materialism was permeated with an instrumentalist rationality which militated against libertarian tendencies, debased sex, discriminated against women, and imposed repression for the sake of God and business.

At the same time the intellectual culture devaluing and even negating this material culture, was largely idealistic: it sublimated the repressive forces by joining inexorably fulfillment and renunciation, freedom and submission, beauty and illusion (*Schein*).

Now it is rather obvious that this has ceased to be the dominant culture. Today, the ruling class has neither a culture of its own (so that the ideas of the ruling class could become the ruling ideas) nor does it practice the bourgeois culture it has inherited. The classical bourgeois culture is outdated now, it is disintegrating—not under the impact of the cultural revolution and the student rebellion, but rather by virtue of the dynamic of monopoly capitalism which made this culture incompatible with the requirements of its survival and growth.

I shall briefly recapitulate the most general indices of this internal disintegration of bourgeois culture:

- the reversal of "inner-worldly asceticism" as the classical "spirit of capitalism": the "Keynesian revolution" as a requisite of enlarged capital accumulation;
- the dependence of the ruling class on the reproduction of a "consumer society" which comes into increasing contradiction to the capitalist need for the perpetuation of alienated labor;
- in line with the social need for an intensive integration of behavior into the capitalist orbit: discreditation of idealistic notions, education to positivism, ingression of the methods of the "hard" sciences into the social sciences and humanities;
- the co-option of libertarian subcultures which can enlarge the commodity market; and

—the destruction of the universe of language: super-Orwellianism as normal communication (see p. 109 below);

—the decline of the father image and of the Superego in the bourgeois family.\*

Where and when today's ruling class still adheres to the traditional cultural values, it is with the ritual cynicism with which one speaks of defending the Free World, private enterprise, civil rights, individualism. Cynicism: because no ideology can possibly conceal the fact that this ruling class is no longer developing the productive forces once contained in these institutions but is arresting and abusing them. The ideology retreats from the superstructure (where it is replaced by a system of blatant lies and non-sense) and becomes incorporated in the goods and services of the consumer society; they sustain the false consciousness of the good life.

Now the question arises: if today we are witnessing a disintegration of bourgeois culture which is the work of the internal dynamic of contemporary capitalism and the adjustment of culture to the requirements of contemporary capitalism, is not the cultural revolution then, inasmuch as it aims at the destruction of bourgeois culture, falling in line with the capitalist adjustment and redefinition of culture? Is it not thus defeating its own purpose, namely, to prepare the soil for a qualitatively different, a radically anticapitalist culture? Is there not a dangerous divergence, if not contradiction, between the political goals of the rebellion and its cultural theory and praxis? And must not the rebellion change its cultural "strategy" in order to resolve this contradiction?

The contradiction appears most clearly in the efforts to develop an anti-art, ["living art"]—in the rejection of the aesthetic

\* See *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, 1966), pp. 85 ff.; and Henry and Yela Lowenfeld, "Our Permissive Society and the Superego," in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, October 1970.

form. These efforts are to serve the larger long-range aim: to undo the separation of the intellectual from the material culture, a separation which is said to express the class character of bourgeois culture. And this class character is held to be constitutive in the most representative and most perfect *oeuvres* of the bourgeois period.

First, a brief critical look at this notion. A survey of these *oeuvres* at least since the 19th century would show that a thoroughly *antibourgeois* stance is prevalent: the higher culture indicts, rejects, withdraws from the material culture of the bourgeoisie. It is indeed separated; it dissociates *itself* from the world of commodities, from the brutality of bourgeois industry and commerce, from the distortion of human relationships, from capitalist materialism, from instrumentalist reason. The aesthetic universe *contradicts* reality—a “methodical,” intentional contradiction.

This contradiction is never “direct,” immediate, total; it does not assume the form of a social or political novel, poem, painting, et cetera. Or, when it does (as in the work of Büchner, Zola, Ibsen, Brecht, Delacroix, Daumier, Picasso), the *oeuvre* remains committed to the structure of *art*, to the form of the drama, the novel, the painting, thereby articulating the distance from reality. The negation is “contained” by the form, it is always a “broken,” “sublimated” contradiction, which transfigures, transsubstantiates the given reality—and the liberation from it. This transfiguration creates a universe closed on itself; no matter how realistic, naturalistic, it remains *the other* of reality and nature. And in this aesthetic universe, the contradictions are indeed “solved” inasmuch as they appear within a universal order to which they belong. And this universal order is first a very concrete, historical one: that of the Greek city state, or the feudal courts, or bourgeois society. In this universe, the fate of the individual (as depicted in the

work of art) is more than individual: it is also that of others. There is no work of art where this universal does not show forth in the particular configurations, actions, sufferings. “Shows forth” in an immediate, sensuous rather than “symbolic” form: the individual “embodies” the universal; thus he becomes the harbinger of a universal truth which erupts in his unique fate and place.

The work of art first transforms a particular, individual content into the universal social order of which it partakes—but does the transformation *terminate* in this order? Is the truth, the “validity,” of the work of art *confined* to the Greek city state, bourgeois society, and so on? Evidently not. Aesthetic theory is confronted with the age-old question: what are the qualities which make the Greek tragedy, the medieval epic still true today—not only understandable but also enjoyable today? The answer must be sought on two levels of “objectivity”: (1) the aesthetic transformation reveals the human condition as it pertains to the entire history (Marx: pre-history) of mankind over and above any specific condition, and (2) the aesthetic form responds to certain constant qualities of the human intellect, sensibility, and imagination—qualities which the tradition of philosophical aesthetics has interpreted as the idea of beauty.\*

By virtue of this transformation of the specific historical universe in the work of art—a transformation which arises in the presentation of the specific content itself—art opens the established reality to another dimension: that of possible liberation. To be sure, this is illusion, *Schein*, but an illusion in which another reality shows forth. And it does so only if art *wills* itself as illusion: as an unreal world other than the established one. And precisely in this transfiguration, art preserves and tran-

\* For an analysis of the discussion of the “objectivist position in aesthetics” see Stefan Morawski, “Artistic Value,” in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, especially pp. 36 ff.



scends its class character. And transcends it, not toward a realm of mere fiction and fantasy, but toward a universe of concrete possibilities.

I shall try first to isolate the features which appear as typical of the class character of the higher culture of the bourgeois period. They are generally seen in the discovery and celebration of the individual *subject*, the "autonomous person" which is to come into its own, to become a self in and against a world that destroys the self. This subjectivity opens the new dimension in the bourgeois reality, a dimension of freedom and fulfillment; but this realm of freedom is finally found in the inner being (*Innerlichkeit*) and is thus "sublimated," if not made unreal. In the given reality, the individual accommodates himself, or renounces, or destroys himself. The given reality exists in its own right, its own truth; it has its own ethics, its own happiness and pleasures (and much can be said for them!). The other truth is music, song, verse, image, in the work of the masters: an aesthetic realm, self-sufficient, a world of aesthetic harmony which leaves the miserable reality to its own devices. It is precisely this "inner truth," this sublime beauty, depth, and harmony of the aesthetic imagery, which today appears as mentally and physically intolerable, false, as part of the commodity culture, as an obstacle to liberation.

I confess that I have difficulties in defining the specific class character of bourgeois art. To be sure, the works of bourgeois art are (commodities) they may even have been created as commodities for sale on the market. But this fact by itself does not change their substance, their truth. "Truth" in art refers not only to the internal consistency and logic of the *oeuvre*, but also to the *validity* of what it says, of its images, sound, rhythm. They reveal and communicate facts and possibilities of the human existence; they "see" this existence in a light very different from that in which reality appears in ordinary (and scientific) language and communication. In this sense, the au-

thentic *oeuvre* has indeed a meaning which claims general validity, objectivity. After all, there is such a thing as the text, the structure, the rhythm of a work which is there, "objectively," and which can be reconstructed and identified as being there, identical in, through, and against all particular interpretation, reception, distortion. Nor is this objectivity of the *oeuvre*, its general validity, canceled by the fact that those who created it have come from bourgeois families: a confusion of the psychological and ontological realm. To be sure, the ontological structure of art is a (*historical one*), but history is the history of *all* classes. They share an environment which is the same in its general features (town, countryside, nature, seasons, et cetera), and their struggle takes place within this universal objective environment.

Moreover, art envisions still another, larger, as it were, "negative," totality: the "tragic" universe of the human existence and of the ever-renewed quest for secular redemption—the promise of liberation. I suggested that art invokes this promise and, by virtue of this function, transcends all particular class content without, however, eliminating it. Evidently, there is such a particular class content in bourgeois art: the bourgeois, his décor, and his problems dominate the scene, as the knight, his décor, and his problems do in medieval art; but does this fact suffice to define the truth, the content, and form of the work of art? (Hegel) has revealed the continuity of substance, the truth which joins the modern novel and the medieval epic:

[The] spirit of modern fiction is, in fact, that of chivalry, once more taken seriously and receiving a true content. The contingent character of external existence has changed to a stable, secure order of civic society and the state, so that now the police, the courts of law, the army and the government take the

place of those chimerical objects which the knight of chivalry proposed to himself. For this reason, the knightly character of the heroes who play their parts in our modern novels is altered. They appear before us as individuals whose subjective aims of love, honor, ambition, or ideas of world reform are confronted by this established order and the ordinary prose of life which present obstacles on every side. The result is that subjective desires and demands rise to unfathomable heights. Everyone finds himself face to face with an enchanted (*verzauberte*, mystified) world—a world which is unsuitable (*ungehörig*, alien) for him, which he must combat because it resists him and in its tenacious stability refuses to give way before his passions, but interposes as an obstacle the will of a father, an aunt, bourgeois conditions, etc.\*

Certainly, there are conflicts and solutions which are specifically bourgeois, foreign to preceding historical periods (see Defoe, Lessing, Flaubert, Dickens, Ibsen, Thomas Mann), but their specific character is loaded with universal meaning. Similarly, are Tristan, Parsival, Siegfried just feudal knights whose fate is simply due to the feudal code? Obviously, the class content is there, but it becomes transparent as the condition and as the dream of humanity: conflict and reconciliation between man and man, man and nature—the miracle of the aesthetic form. In the particular content appears another dimension where the (feudal and) bourgeois men and women incarnate the species man: the human being.

To be sure, the higher culture of the bourgeois period was

\* Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik (Sämmtliche Werke)*, Glockner, ed. (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1928), vol. XIII, pp. 215 f. Translation by F. P. R. Osmaston, *The Philosophy of Fine Art* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), vol. II, p. 375 (slight changes by me).

(and is) an elitist culture, available and even meaningful only to a privileged minority—but this character it shares with all culture since antiquity. The inferior place (or absence) of the laboring classes in this cultural universe certainly makes it a class culture, but not specifically a bourgeois one. If this is so, we have reason to assume that the cultural revolution aims far beyond bourgeois culture, that it is directed against the aesthetic form as such, against art as such, literature as literature. And, indeed, the arguments advanced by the cultural revolution corroborate this assumption.

## II

What are the main counts in the indictment of the aesthetic form?

—it is not adequately expressive of the real human condition;

—it is divorced from reality inasmuch as it creates a world of beautiful illusion (*schöner Schein*), of poetic justice, of artistic harmony and order which reconciles the irreconcilable, justifies the unjustifiable;

—in this world of illusory reconciliation, the energy of the life instincts, the sensuous energy of the body, the creativity of matter which are forces of liberation are repressed; and, by virtue of these features,

—the aesthetic form is a factor of stabilization in the repressive society and thus is itself repressive.

At one of the early manifestations of the cultural revolution, at the (first surrealist exposition) in London, Herbert Read programmatically formulated this relation between classical art and repression:

Classicism, let it be stated without further preference, represents for us now, and has always represented,

the forces of oppression. Classicism is the intellectual counterpart of political tyranny. It was so in the ancient world and in the medieval empires; it was renewed to express the dictatorships of the Renaissance and has ever since been the official creed of capitalism.

[And later] The norms of classical art are the typical patterns of order, proportion, symmetry, equilibrium, harmony and of all static and inorganic qualities. They are intellectual concepts which control or repress the vital instincts on which growth and therefore change depend, and in no sense represent a freely determined preference, but merely an imposed ideal.\*

Today's cultural revolution extends Herbert Read's rejection of Classicism to practically all styles, to the very essence of bourgeois art.

At stake is the [affirmative character] of bourgeois culture, by virtue of which art serves to beautify and justify the established order.\*\* The aesthetic form responds to the misery of the isolated bourgeois individual by celebrating universal humanity, to physical deprivation by exalting the beauty of the soul, to external servitude by elevating the value of inner freedom.

But this affirmation has its own dialectic. There is no work of art which does not break its affirmative stance by the "power of the negative" which does not, in its very structure, evoke the words, the images, the music of another reality, of another order repelled by the existing one and yet alive in memory and anticipation, alive in what happens to men and women, and in their rebellion against it. Where this tension between affirmation and negation, between pleasure and sorrow, higher and

\* *Surrealism*, edited with an introduction by Herbert Read (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), pp. 23, 25 f.

\*\* See my article *Der affirmative Charakter der Kultur* (1937), English translation in *Negations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 88 ff., especially p. 98.

material culture no longer prevails, where the work no longer sustains the (dialectical unity) of what is and what can (and ought to) be, art has lost its (truth) has lost itself. And precisely in the [aesthetic form] are this tension, and the critical, negating, transcending qualities of bourgeois art—its antibourgeois qualities. To recapture and transform them, to save them from expulsion must be one of the tasks of the cultural revolution.

This different, positive evaluation of the aesthetic form, its validation for the radical reconstruction of society, seems to be called for by the (new stage of the historical process) in which the cultural revolution is placed: the stage of the intensified disintegration of the capitalist system, and of the intensified reaction against it, namely, the counterrevolutionary organization of suppression. To the degree to which the latter prevails over the former, to that degree the opposition is "displaced" to the cultural and subcultural realm, to find there the images and tones which may break through the established universe of discourse and preserve the future.

The situation is worse now than it was in the period from the beginning of [modern art] (in the last third of the 19th century) to the ascent of fascism. The revolution in the West was defeated, fascism has shown a way to institutionalize terror in order to save the capitalist system, and in the most advanced industrial country which still dominates this system on a global scale, the working class is not a revolutionary class. Though the classical bourgeois culture is no more, the development of an independent post-bourgeois (socialist) culture has been arrested. Without soil and basis in society, the cultural revolution appears as the abstract negation rather than the historical heir of bourgeois culture. Not carried by a revolutionary class, it seeks support in two different, and even contrary, directions; on the one side, it tries to give word, image, and tone to the feelings and needs of "the masses" (which are not revolutionary); on the other side, it elaborates anti-forms which are con-



The result is the creation of an object world other than and yet derived from the existing one, but this transformation does not do violence to the objects (man and things)—it rather speaks for them, gives word and tone and image to that which is silent, distorted, suppressed in the established reality. And this (liberating and cognitive power) inherent in art is in all its styles and forms. Even in the realistic novel or painting, which tells a story the way it could indeed happen (and perhaps did happen) at that time and place, the story is changed by the aesthetic form. In the *oeuvre*, men and women may talk and act the way they did "in reality"; things may look as they do "in reality"—still, another dimension is present: in the description of the environment, the structuring of (inner and outer) time and space, in the marked silence, in that which is not there,\* and in the microcosmic (or macrocosmic) view of things. Thus, we can say that, in the aesthetic order, things are moved into their place which is not the place they "happen to have," and that, in this transformation, they come into their own.

To be sure, the aesthetic transformation is *imaginary*—it must be imaginary, for what faculty other than the imagination could invoke the sensuous presence of that which is not (yet)? And this transformation is sensuous rather than conceptual; it must be enjoyable ("disinterested pleasure"); it remains committed to harmony. Does this commitment make the traditional art inevitably an agent of repression, a dimension of the respective Establishment?

\* Merleau-Ponty with reference to Stendhal: "One can narrate the subject of a novel like that of a painting, but the force of the novel, like that of a painting, is not in the subject. What counts is not so much that Julien Sorel, when he hears that Mme. de Rênal has betrayed him, goes to Verrière and tries to kill her—what counts is, after the news, this silence, this dream cavalcade, this certainty without thought, this eternal resolution . . . But all this is nowhere said." (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Prose du monde* [Paris: Gallimard, 1969], p. 124.)

## III

The [affirmative character of art] was grounded not so much in its divorce from reality as in the ease with which it could be reconciled with the given reality, used as its décor, taught and experienced as uncommitting but rewarding value, the possession of which distinguished the "higher" order of society, the educated, from the masses. But the affirmative power of art is also the power which denies this affirmation. In spite of its (feudal and bourgeois) use as status symbol, conspicuous consumption, refinement, art retains that alienation from the established reality which is at (the origin of art.) It is a second alienation, by virtue of which the artist dissociates himself methodically from the alienated society and creates the unreal, "illusory" universe in which art alone has, and communicates, its truth. At the same time, this alienation *relates* art to society: it preserves the class content—and makes it transparent. As "ideology," art "invalidates" dominant ideology. The class content is "idealized," stylized, and thereby becomes the receptacle of a universal truth beyond the particular class content. Thus the classical theater stylizes the world of the real princes, nobles, burghers of the respective period. Although this ruling class hardly talked and acted like its protagonists on the stage, it could at least recognize in them its own ideology, its own ideal or model (or caricature).\* The court of Versailles could still understand the theater of Corneille and recognize there its ideological code; similarly, the court of Weimar could still be expected to find its ideology in the court of Thaos in Goethe's *Iphigénie*, or in the court of Ferrara in his *Torquato Tasso*.

The medium in which art and reality met was the style of

\* See Leo Lowenthal, *Literature and the Image of Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), especially the introduction and Chapter IV.

life. The parasitic nobility had its own aesthetic form which demanded a ritual behavior: honor, dignity, display of pleasure, even "higher culture," education. The classical theater was the *mimesis* and, at the same time, the critical idealization of this order. But through all accommodation, through all kinship to the established reality, the theater proclaims its own dissociation from it. The artistic alienation appears in the theater as its historical décor, its language, its "exaggerations" and condensations.

The modes of alienation change with the basic changes in society. With the capitalist democratization and industrialization, classicism has indeed lost much of its truth—it has lost its affinity, its kinship to the code and culture of the ruling class. Any affinity between the White House and classicism is beyond the stretch of even the most absurd imagination, and what was still faintly conceivable in France under de Gaulle has become inconceivable under his successor.

The artistic alienation makes the work of art, the universe of art, essentially unreal—it creates a world which does not exist, a world of *[Schein]* appearance, illusion. But in this transformation of reality into illusion, and only in it, appears the subversive truth of art.

In this universe, every word, every color, every sound is "new," different—breaking the familiar context of perception and understanding, of sense certainty and reason in which men and nature are enclosed. By becoming components of the aesthetic form, words, sounds, shapes, and colors are insulated against their familiar, ordinary use and function; thus they are freed for a new dimension of existence.\* This is the achieve-

\* Here is Merleau-Ponty's magnificent description of the methodical alienation in Cézanne's paintings. Cézanne breaks with the customary experience of our world: "[il] révèle le fond de nature inhumaine sur lequel l'homme s'installe. C'est pourquoi ses personnages sont étranges et comme vus par un être d'une autre espèce. La nature elle-même est dépouillée

ment of the *[style]* which is the poem, the novel, the painting, the composition. The *[style]* embodiment of the aesthetic form, in subjecting reality to another order, subjects it to the "laws of beauty."

True and false, right and wrong, pain and pleasure, calm and violence become aesthetic categories within the framework of the *oeuvre*. Thus deprived of their (immediate) reality, they enter a different context in which even the ugly, cruel, sick become parts of the aesthetic harmony governing the whole. They are thereby not "canceled": the horror in Goya's etchings remains horror, but at the same time ("eternalizes") the horror of horror.

## IV

In Chapter 2, I referred to the subterranean survival of the ancient theory of recollection in Marxian theory. The notion aimed at a repressed quality in men and things which, once recognized, could drive toward a radical change in the relation between man and nature. The discussion of early Marxian theory, traced the concept of recollection in the context of the "emancipation of the senses": "aesthetic" as pertaining to sensibility. Now, in discussing the *[critical theory of art]*, the notion of recollection is again suggested: "aesthetic" as pertaining to art.

On a primary level, *[art]* is recollection: it appeals to a pre-conceptual experience and understanding which reemerge in and against the context of the social functioning of experience and understanding—against instrumentalist reason and sensibility.

des attributs qui la préparent pour des communions animistes: le paysage est sans vent, l'eau du lac d'Annecy sans mouvement, les objets gelés hésitants comme à l'origine de la terre. C'est un monde sans familiarité, où l'on n'est pas bien, qui interdit toute effusion humaine." ("Le Doute de Cézanne," in *Sens et Non-Sens* [Paris: Nagel, 1948], p. 30.)

When it attains this primary level—the terminal point of the intellectual effort—art violates taboos: it lends voice and sight and ear to things which are normally repressed: dreams, memories, longings—ultimate states of sensibility. Here is no more superimposed restraint: the form, far from repressing the full content, makes it appear in its integrity. Here is also no more conformity and no more rebellion—only sorrow and joy. These extreme qualities, the supreme points of art, seem to be the prerogative of music (which “gives the innermost kernel preceding all form, or the heart of things”),\* and within music, of melody. Here the melody—dominant, *cantabile*, is the basic unit of recollection: recurring through all variations, remaining when it is cut off and no longer carries the composition, it sustains the supreme point: in and against the richness and complexity of the work. It is the voice, beauty, calm of another world here on earth, and it is mainly this voice which constitutes the two-dimensional structure of classical and romantic music.

In the classical theater, the verse is the dominant voice of the two-dimensional world. The verse challenges the rule of ordinary language and becomes a vehicle for the expression of that which remains unsaid in the established reality. Again, it is the rhythm of the verse which renders possible, prior to all specific content, the eruption of the unreal reality and its truth. The “laws of beauty” form reality in order to make it transparent. It is the “sublimated” mode in which the protagonists of the classical theater speak, and not only what they do and suffer, which evokes and at the same time rejects that which is.

The bourgeois theater (meaning here: the theater in which the protagonists are members of the bourgeoisie) moves from the beginning in a desublimated, de-idealized, aesthetic universe. Prose replaces verse; the historic décor is dropped;

\* Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation*, translated by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover), I, § 52.

realism prevails. The classical form gives way to open forms (“Storm and Stress”). But the egalitarian ideas of the bourgeois revolution explode the realistic universe: the class conflict between nobility and bourgeoisie assumes the form of a tragedy for which there is no solution. And when this class conflict no longer holds the center of the stage, the specific bourgeois content is transcended: the bourgeois world is shattered by symbolic figures or configurations which become the messengers of catastrophe and liberation (Ibsen, Gerhart Hauptmann).

The novel is not closed to this (aesthetic transcendence) No matter which particular “plot” or environment is the subject matter of the novel, its prose can shatter the established universe. Kafka is perhaps the most outstanding example. From the beginning, the links with the given reality are cut by calling things by their names, which turn out to be misnomers. The discrepancy between that which the name says and that which is becomes unconquerable. Or is it rather the coincidence, the literal identity between the two, which is the horror? In any case, this language breaks through the masquerade: the illusion is in the reality itself—not in the work of art. This work is in its very structure rebellion—with the world it depicts, there is no conceivable reconciliation.

It is this second alienation which disappears in today's systematic efforts to reduce, if not close, the gap between art and reality. The effort is (doomed to failure) Certainly, there is rebellion in the guerrilla theater, in the poetry of the “free press,” in rock music—but it remains artistic without the negating power of art. To the degree to which it makes itself part of real life, it loses the transcendence which opposes art to the established order—it remains immanent in this order, (one-dimensional) and thus succumbs to this order. Precisely its immediate “life quality” is the undoing of this anti-art, and of its appeal. It moves (literally and figuratively) here and now,



within the existing universe, and it terminates in the frustrated outcry for its abrogation.

There is indeed a profound uneasiness toward classical and romantic art. Somehow, it seems a thing of the past: it seems to have lost its truth, its meaning. Is it because this art is too sublime, because it substitutes for the real, living soul an "intellectual," metaphysical soul, and is therefore repressive? Or could it be *the other way around*?

Perhaps the extreme qualities of this art strike us today as an all too *unsublimated*, direct, unrestrained expression of passion and pain—some sort of shame reacts against this kind of exhibitionism and "outpouring" of the soul. Perhaps we can no longer cope with this *pathos* which drives to the limits of the human existence—and beyond the limits of social restraint. Perhaps this art presupposes, on the part of the recipient, that distance of reflection and contemplation, that self-chosen silence and receptivity which today's "living art" rejects.

The atrophy of the organs for artistic alienation is the result of very material processes. The totalitarian organization of society, its violence and aggressiveness have invaded the inner and outer space where the extreme aesthetic qualities of art can still be experienced and accepted with good faith. They contradict too blatantly the horrors of reality, and this contradiction appears as escape from a reality from which there is no escape. They require a degree of emancipation from immediate experience, of "privacy," which has become all but impossible, false. This is non-behavioral, non-operational art: it does not "activate" to anything but reflection and remembrance—the promise of the dream. But the dream must become a force of changing rather than dreaming the human condition: it must become a political force. If art dreams of liberation within the spectrum of history, dream realization through revolution must be possible—the surrealist program must still be valid. Does the cultural revolution testify to this possibility?

v

The cultural revolution remains a radically progressive force. However, in its efforts to free the political potential of art, it is blocked by an *unsolved contradiction*. A subversive potential is in the (very nature of art)—but how can it be translated into reality today, that is to say, how can it be expressed so that it can become a guide and element in the *praxis* of change without ceasing to be art, without losing its *internal* subversive force? How can it be translated in such a manner that the aesthetic form is replaced by "something real," alive, and yet *transcending* and *denying* the established reality?

Art can express its radical potential only as art, in its own language and image, which *invalidate* the ordinary language, the "*prose du monde*." The liberating "message" of art also *transcends* the actually attainable goals of liberation, just as it transcends the actual critique of society. Art remains committed to the Idea (Schopenhauer), to the universal in the particular; and since the tension between idea and reality, between the universal and the particular, is likely to persist until the millennium which will never be, art must remain *alienation*. If art, because of this alienation, does not "speak" to the masses, this is the work of the class society which creates and perpetuates the masses. If and when a classless society achieves the transformation of the masses into "freely associated" individuals, art would have lost its elitist character, but not its estrangement from society. The tension between affirmation and negation precludes any identification of art with revolutionary *praxis*. Art cannot represent the revolution,\* it can only

\* Certainly, there are the great presentations of the French Revolution in Büchner's *Dantons Tod*, of 1848 in Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale*—they are critical, if not hostile presentations, hostile to the actual revolutionary practice and its exigencies. There is William Blake's

Sub. Poles  
inde ..  
Talisman C.

in Revolt



invoke it in another medium, in an aesthetic form in which the political content becomes *metapolitical*, governed by the internal necessity of art. And the goal of all revolution—a world of tranquillity and freedom—appears in a totally unpolitical medium, under the laws of beauty, of harmony. Thus Stravinsky heard the revolution in Beethoven's quartets:

My further, personal belief is that the quartets are a charter of human rights, and a perpetually seditious one in the Platonic sense of the subversiveness of art . . .

A high concept of freedom is embodied in the quartets, . . . both beyond and including what Beethoven himself meant when he wrote [to Prince Galitzin] that his music could "help suffering mankind." They are a measure of man . . . and part of the description of the quality of man, and their existence is a guarantee.\*

There is a symbolic event which announces the transition from everyday life to an essentially different medium, the "leap" from the established social universe to the estranged universe of art; this is the occurrence of *silence*:

The moment at which a piece of music begins provides a clue to the nature of all art. The incongruity of that moment, compared to the uncounted, unperceived silence which preceded it, is the secret of art . . . it is in the distinction between the actual

magnificent epic fragment—which ends prior to the meeting of the États Généraux: the fragment is a cosmic transfiguration of the revolution, where mountains, valleys, and streams join the political struggle.

\* Igor Stravinsky, in *The New York Review of Books*, April 24, 1969, p. 4.

and the desirable. [All art] is an attempt to define and make unnatural this distinction.\*

And this silence becomes part of the aesthetic form not only in music: it permeates the entire work of Kafka; it is ever present in Beckett's *End Game*; it is in a painting of Cézanne.

. . . [the painter's] only aspiration must be to silence. He must stifle within himself the voices of prejudice, he must forget, and keep on forgetting, he must make silence all about him, he must be a perfect echo.\*\*

An "echo" not of what is immediate nature, reality, but of that reality which erupts in the artist's estrangement from the immediate reality—even from that of the revolution.

The relation between art and revolution is a unity of opposites, an antagonistic unity. Art obeys a necessity, and has a freedom which is its own—not those of the revolution. Art and revolution are united in "changing the world"—liberation. But in its practice, art does not abandon its own exigencies and does not quit its own dimension: it remains non-operational. In art, the political goal appears only in the transfiguration which is the aesthetic form. The revolution may well be absent from the *oeuvre* even while the artist himself is "engaged," is a revolutionary. .

André Breton recalls the case of Courbet and Rimbaud: During the Commune of 1871, Courbet was a member of the Council of the Commune, he was held responsible for the dis-

\* John Berger, *The Moment of Cubism* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), pp. 31 f.

\*\* Cézanne, as quoted by Gasquet in Max Raphael, *The Demands of Art*, translation by Norbert Guterman, Bolingen Series LXXVIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 8.

has separate  
from politics

Art/Politics  
Autonomy/Revolution

mantling of the Vendôme column. He fought for a "free and nonprivileged" art. Yet there is no direct testimony of the revolution in his paintings (although there is in his drawings); there is no political content. After the collapse of the Commune, and after the massacre of its heroes, Courbet paints still lifes:

... some of these apples . . . , prodigious, colossal, extraordinary in their weight and sensuality, are more powerful and more "protestaire" than any political painting.\*

Breton writes:

Everything happens as if he had decided that there must be some way to reflect his profound faith in the betterment of the world in everything that he tried to evoke, some way to make it appear somehow in the light he caused to fall on the horizon or on a roebuck's belly.\*\*

And Rimbaud: he sympathized with the Commune; he drafted a constitution for a communist society, but the tenor of his poems written under the immediate impact of the Commune "in no way differs from that of the other poems." The revolution was in his poetry from the beginning and to the end: as a preoccupation of a technical order, namely, to translate the world into a new language.†

The political "engagement" becomes a problem of artistic

\* André Fernigier, quoted in Robert Fernier, *Gustave Courbet* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1969), p. 110.

\*\* *Manifestos of Surrealism*, translation by R. Scaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 219.

† *Ibid.*, p. 220.

"technique," and instead of translating art (poetry) into reality, reality is translated into a new aesthetic form. The radical refusal, the protest, appears in the way in which words are grouped and regrouped, freed from their familiar use and abuse. *Alchemy of the word*: the image, the sound, creation of another reality out of the existing one—permanent imaginary revolution, emergence of a "second history" within the historical continuum.

Permanent aesthetic subversion—this is the way of art.

The (abolition of the aesthetic form) the notion that art could become a component part of revolutionary (and prerevolutionary) *praxis*, until under fully developed socialism, it would be adequately translated into reality (or absorbed by "science")—this notion is false and oppressive: it would mean the end of art. Martin Walser has well formulated this falsehood with respect to literature:

The metaphor of the "death of literature" comes an eternity too early: Only when the objects and their names would melt into one (*in eins verschmelzen*), only then would literature be dead. As long as this paradisaical state has not arrived, the struggle for the objects (*Streit um die Gegenstände*) will also be waged with the help of words.\*

And the meaning of the words will continue to devalue their ordinary meaning: they (as well as the images and tones) will continue the imaginary transformation of the object world, man, and nature. Coincidence of words and things: this would mean that all the potentialities of things would be realized, that the "power of the negative" would have ceased to operate—it would mean that the imagination has become (wholly functional: servant to instrumentalist Reason.)

\* In *Kursbuch* 20, March 1970 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 37.

I have spoken of "art as a form of reality" \* in a free society. The phrase is ambiguous. It was supposed to indicate an essential aspect of liberation, namely, the radical transformation of the technical and natural universe in accordance with the emancipated sensibility (and rationality) of man. I still hold this view. But the goal is a permanent one; that is to say, no matter in what form, art can never eliminate the tension between art and reality. Elimination of this tension would be the impossible final unity of subject and object: the materialistic version of absolute idealism. It denies the insurmountable limit to the mutability of human nature: a biological, not theological, limit. To interpret this irredeemable alienation of art as a mark of bourgeois (or any other) class society is nonsense.

The nonsense has a basis in fact. The aesthetic representation of the Idea, of the universal in the particular, leads art to transform particular (historical) conditions into universal ones: to show as the tragic or cosmic fate of man what is only his fate in the established society. There is, in the Western tradition, the celebration of an unnecessary tragedy, an unnecessary fate—unnecessary to the extent to which they pertain, not to *the* human condition but rather to specific social institutions and ideologies. I have previously referred to a work in which the class content seems most conspicuously the substance: the catastrophe of *Madame Bovary* is evidently due to the specific situation of the petty bourgeoisie in a French province. Nevertheless, you can, in your imagination, in reading the story, remove (or rather "bracket") the "external," extraneous environment, and you will read, in the story, the refusal and denial of the world of the French petty bourgeois, their values, their morality, their aspirations and desires, namely, the fate of

\* In *On the Future of Art*, essays by Arnold J. Toynbee, Louis I. Kahn, and others, edited by Edward Fry (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 123 ff.

men and women caught in the catastrophe of love. Enlightenment, democracy, and psychoanalysis may mitigate the typically feudal or bourgeois conflicts and perhaps even change the outcome—the tragic substance would remain. This interplay between the universal and the particular, between class content and transcending form is the history of art.

Perhaps there is a "scale" according to which the class content appears most distinctly in literature and least distinctly (if at all!) in music (Schopenhauer's hierarchy of the arts!). The *word* communicates daily the society to its members; it becomes a name for the objects as they are made, shaped, used by the established society. Colors, shapes, tones do not carry such "meaning": they are in a sense more universal, "neutral" toward their social usage. In contrast, the word can all but lose its transcendent meaning—and tends to do so the more society approaches the stage of total control over the universe of discourse. Then we can indeed speak of a "coincidence between the name and its object"—but a false, enforced, deceptive coincidence: instrument of domination.

I refer again to the use of [Orwellian language] as normal means of communication. The rule of this language over the minds and bodies of men is more than outright brainwashing, more than the systematic application of lies as means of manipulation. In a sense, this language is correct; it expresses, quite innocently, the omnipresent contradictions which permeate this society. Under the regime it has given itself, striving for peace is indeed waging war (against the "communists" everywhere); ending the war means exactly what the warring government is doing—though it may in fact be the opposite, namely, intensifying rather than extending the slaughter; freedom is exactly that which the people have under the Administration—though it may in fact be the opposite; tear gas

\* See the Cornell report on intensified bombing in Indochina, *New York Times*, November 6, 1971.

and plant killers are indeed "legitimate and humane" against the Vietnamese for they cause "less suffering" to the people than "burning them to death with napalm" °—apparently the only alternative open to this government. These blatant contradictions may well enter the consciousness of the people—this does not change the fact that the word *as defined* by the (public or private) administration remains valid, effective, operational: it stimulates the desired behavior and action. Language assumes again magical character: a government spokesman has only to pronounce the words ("national security") and he gets what he wants—rather sooner than later.

## VI

At precisely this stage, the radical effort to sustain and intensify the "power of the negative," the subversive potential of art, must sustain and intensify the *alienating* power of art: the aesthetic form, in which alone the radical force of art becomes communicable.

In his essay "*Die Phantasie im Spätkapitalismus und die Kulturrevolution*," Peter Schneider calls this recapture of the aesthetic transcendence the "propagandistic function of art":

Propagandistic art would seek in the recorded dream history (*Wunschgeschichte*) of mankind the utopian images, would free them from the distorted forms which were imposed upon them by the material conditions of life, and show to these dreams (*Wünschen*) the road to realization which now, finally, has become possible. . . . The aesthetic of this art should be the strategy of dream realization. °°

° *Kursbuch* 16, 1969, p. 31.

°° G. Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security, *New York Times*, March 23, 1971.

This strategy of realization, precisely because it is to be that of a dream, can never be "complete," never be a translation into reality, which would make art into a psychoanalytic process. Realization rather means finding the *aesthetic* forms which can communicate the possibilities of a liberating transformation of the technical and natural environment. But here, too, the distance between art and practice, the dissociation of the former from the latter, remain.

At the time between the two World Wars, where the protest seemed to be directly translatable into action, joined to action, where the shattering of the aesthetic form seemed to be the response to the revolutionary forces in action, Antonin Artaud formulated the program for the abolition of art: "*En finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvres*": art must become the concern of the masses (*la foule*), must be an affair of the streets, and above all, of the organism, the body, of nature. Thus, it would move men, would move things, for: "il faut que les choses crèvent pour repartir et recommencer." The serpent moves to the tones of the music not because of their "spiritual content" but because their vibrations communicate themselves through the earth to the serpent's entire body. Art has cut off this communication and "deprived a gesture (*un geste*) from its repercussion in the organism": this unity with nature must be restored: "beneath the poetry of text, there is a poetry *tout court*, without form and without text." This natural poetry must be recaptured which is still present in the eternal myths of mankind (such as "beneath the text" in Sophocles' *Oedipus*) and in the magic of the primitives: its rediscovery is prerequisite for the liberation of man. For "we are not free, and the sky can still fall on our head. And the theater is made first of all in order to teach us all this." ° To attain this goal, the theater must leave

° Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 113, 124, 123, 119, 121 (written in 1933).

the stage and go on the street, to the masses. And it must shock, cruelly shock and shatter the complacent consciousness and unconscious.

[a theater] where violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator, seized in the theater as by a whirlwind of superior forces.\*

Even at the time when Artaud wrote, the "superior forces" were of a very different kind, and they seized man, not to liberate but rather to enslave and destroy him more effectively. And today, what possible language, what possible image can crush and hypnotize minds and bodies which live in peaceful coexistence (and even profiting from) genocide, torture, and poison? \*\* And if Artaud wants a "constant sonorization": sounds and noises and cries, first for their quality of vibration and then for that which they represent, † we ask: has not the audience, even the "natural" audience on the streets, long since become familiar with the violent noises, cries, which are the daily equipment of the mass media, sports, highways, places of recreation? They do not break the oppressive familiarity with destruction; they reproduce it.

The German writer Peter Handke blasted the "ekelhafte Unwahrheit von Ernsthaftigkeiten im Spielraum (the loathsome untruth of seriousness in play)." ‡ This indictment is not an attempt to keep politics out of the theater, but to indicate the form in which it can find expression. The indictment cannot be upheld with respect to Greek tragedy, to Shakespeare, Racine, Kleist, Ibsen, Brecht, Beckett: there, by virtue of the

\* *Ibid.*, p. 126.

\*\* *Ibid.*

† *Ibid.*, p. 124.

‡ Quoted in Yark Karsunke, "Die Strasse und das Theater," in *Kursbuch* 20, *loc. cit.*, p. 67.

aesthetic form, the "play" creates its own universe of "seriousness" which is *not* that of the given reality, but rather its negation. But the indictment holds for the guerrilla theater of today: it is a *contradictio in adjecto*; altogether different from the Chinese (whether played on or after the Long March); there, the theater did not take place in a "universe of play"; it was part of a revolution in actual process, and established, as an episode, the identity between the players and the fighters: unity of the space of the play and the space of the revolution.

The Living Theatre may serve as an example of self-defeating purpose.\* It makes a systematic attempt to unite the theater and the Revolution, the play and the battle, bodily and spiritual liberation, individual internal and social external change. But this union is shrouded in mysticism: "the Kabbalah, Tantric and Hasidic teaching, the I Ching, and other sources." The mixture of Marxism and mysticism, of Lenin and Dr. R. D. Laing does not work; it vitiates the political impulse. The liberation of the body, the sexual revolution, becoming a ritual to be performed ("the rite of universal intercourse"), loses its place in the political revolution: if sex is a voyage to God, it can be tolerated even in extreme forms. The revolution of love, the nonviolent revolution, is no serious threat; the powers that be have always been capable of coping with the forces of love. The radical desublimation which takes place in the theater, as theater, is organized, arranged, performed desublimation—it is close to turning into its opposite.\*\*

\* See *Paradise Now*, Collective Creation of the Living Theatre, written down by Judith Malina and Julian Beck (New York: Random House, 1971).

\*\* In the summer of 1971, the Living Theatre group that had been playing before the wretched of the earth in Brazil was incarcerated by the fascist government. There, in the midst of the terror which is the life of the people, and which precluded any integration into the established order; even the mystified liberation play seemed a threat to the regime. I wish to express my solidarity with Judith Malina and Julian Beck and their group; my criticism is fraternal, since we share the same struggle.

Untruth is the fate of the unsublimated, direct representation. Here, the "illusory" character of art is not abolished but doubled: the players only play the actions they want to demonstrate, and this action itself is unreal, is play.

The distinction between an internal revolution of the aesthetic form and its destruction, between authentic and contrived directness (a distinction based on the tension between art and reality), has also become decisive in the development (and function) of "living music," "natural music." It is as if the cultural revolution had fulfilled Artaud's demand that, in a literal sense, music move the body, thereby drawing nature into the rebellion. Life music has indeed an authentic basis: black music as the cry and song of the slaves and the ghettos.\* In this music, the very life and death of black men and women are lived again: the music is body; the aesthetic form is the "gesture" of pain, sorrow, indictment. With the takeover by the whites, a significant change occurs: white "rock" is what its black paradigm is not, namely, performance. It is as if the

\* Pierre Lere analyzes the dialectic of this black music in his article "Free Jazz: Evolution ou Révolution":

"... the liberty of the musical forms is only the aesthetic translation of the will to social liberation. Transcending the tonal framework of the theme, the musician finds himself in a position of freedom. This search for freedom is translated into atonal musicality; it defines a modal climate where the Black expresses a new order. The melodic line becomes the medium of communication between an initial order which is rejected and a final order which is hoped for. The frustrating possession of the one, joined with the liberating attainment of the other, establishes a rupture in between the West of harmony which gives way to an aesthetic of the cry (*esthétique du cri*). This cry, the characteristic resonant (*sonore*) element of "free music," born in an exasperated tension, announces the violent rupture with the established white order and translates the advancing (*promotrice*) violence of a new black order." (*Revue d'Esthétique*, vols. 3-4, 1970, pp. 320, 321.)

crying and shouting, the jumping and playing, now take place in an artificial, organized space; that they are directed toward a (sympathetic) *audience*. What had been part of the permanence of life, now becomes a concert, a festival, a disc in the making. "The group" becomes a fixed entity (*verdinglicht*), absorbing the individuals; it is ("totalitarian") in the way in which it overwhelms individual consciousness and mobilizes a collective unconscious which remains without social foundation.

And as this music loses its radical impact, it tends to massification: the listeners and co-performers in the audience are masses streaming to a spectacle, a performance.

True, in this spectacle, the audience actively participates: the music *moves* their bodies, makes them "natural." But their (literally) electrical excitation often assumes the features of hysteria. The aggressive force of the endlessly repeated hammering rhythm (the variations of which do not open another dimension of music), the squeezing dissonances, the standardized "frozen" distortions, the noise level in general—is it not the force of frustration?° And the identical gestures, the twisting and shaking of bodies which rarely (if ever) really touch each other—it seems like treading on the spot, it does not get you anywhere except into a mass soon to disperse. This music is, in a literal sense, imitation, mimesis of effective aggression: it is, moreover, another case of catharsis: group therapy which, temporarily, removes inhibitions. Liberation remains a private affair.

\* The frustration behind the noisy aggression is revealed very neatly in a statement by Grace Slick of the "Jefferson Airplane" group, reported in the *New York Times Magazine* (October 18, 1970): "Our eternal goal in life, Grace says, absolutely deadpan, is to get louder."

## VII

The tension between art and revolution seems irreducible. Art itself, in practice, (cannot change reality), and art cannot submit to the actual requirements of the revolution without denying itself. But art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very form, from the then-prevailing revolutionary movement—for revolution is in the substance of art. The historical substance of art asserts itself in all modes of alienation; it precludes any notion that recapturing the aesthetic form today could mean revival of classicism, romanticism, or any other traditional form. Does an analysis of the social reality allow any indication as to art forms which would respond to the revolutionary potential in the contemporary world?

According to Adorno, art responds to the total character of repression and administration with total alienation. The highly intellectual, constructivist, and at the same time spontaneous-formless music of (John Cage), Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez may be the extreme examples.

But has this effort already reached the point of no return, that is, the point where the *oeuvre* drops out of the dimension of alienation, of *formed* negation and contradiction, and turns into a sound-game, language-game—harmless and without commitment, shock which no longer shocks, and thus succumbing?

The radical literature which speaks in formless semi-spontaneity and directness loses with the aesthetic form the political content, while this content erupts in the most highly formed poems of Allan Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti. The most uncompromising, most extreme indictment has found expression in a work which precisely because of its radicalism repels the political sphere: in the work of Samuel Beckett, there is no hope which can be translated into political terms, the aesthetic form

excludes all accommodation and leaves literature as literature. And as literature, the work carries one single message: to make an end with things as they are. Similarly, the revolution is in Bertolt Brecht's most perfect lyric rather than in his political plays, and in Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* rather than in today's anti-fascist opera.

This is the passing of anti-art, the (reemergence of form.) And with it we find a new expression of the inherently subversive qualities of the aesthetic dimension, especially beauty as the sensuous appearance of the (idea of freedom) The delight of beauty and the horror of politics; Brecht has condensed it in five lines:

Within me there is a struggle between  
The delight about the blooming apple tree  
And the horror about a Hitler speech.  
But only the latter  
Forces me to my desk

(Translation: Reinhard Lettau)

The image of the tree remains present in the poem which is "enforced" by a Hitler speech. The horror of that which is, marks the moment of creation, is the origin of the poem which celebrates the beauty of the blooming apple tree. The political dimension remains committed to the other, the aesthetic dimension, which, in turn, assumes political value. This happens not only in the work of Brecht (who is already considered a "classic") but also in some of the (radical songs of protest) of today—or yesterday, especially in the lyrics and music of Bob Dylan. Beauty returns, the "soul" returns: not the one in food and "on ice" but the old and repressed one, the one that was in the *Lied*, in the melody: *cantabile*. It becomes the form of the subversive content, not as artificial revival, but as a ("return of

the repressed." The music, in its own development, carries the song to the point of rebellion where the voice, in word and pitch, *halts* the melody, the song, and turns into outcry, shout.

Junction of art and revolution in the aesthetic dimension,<sup>o</sup> in art itself. Art which has become capable of being political even in the (apparently) total absence of political content, where nothing remains but the poem—about what? Brecht accomplishes the miracle of making the simplest ordinary language say the unutterable: the poem invokes, for a vanishing moment, the images of a liberated world, liberated nature:

## DIE LIEBENDEN

Sieh jene Kraniche in grossem Bogen!  
Die Wolken, welche ihnen beigegeben  
Zogen mit ihnen schon, als sie entflohen  
Aus einem Leben in ein andres Leben.  
In gleicher Höhe und mit gleicher Eile  
Scheinen sie alle beide nur daneben.  
Dass so der Kranich mit der Wolke teile  
Den schönen Himmel, den sie kurz befliegen  
Dass also keiner länger hier verweile  
Und keines andres sehe als das Wiegen

<sup>o</sup> One only has to read some of the authentic-sounding poems of young activists (or former activists) in order to see how poetry, remaining poetry, can be political also today. These love poems are political as love poems: not where they are fashionably desublimated, verbal release of sexuality, but on the contrary: where the erotic energy finds sublimated, poetic expression—a poetic language becoming the outcry against that which is done to men and women who love in this society. In contrast, the union of love and subversion, the social liberation inherent in Eros is lost where the poetic language is abandoned in favor of versified (or pseudoversified) pig language. There is such a thing as pornography, namely, the sexual publicity, propaganda with the exhibitionist, marketable Eros. Today, the pig language and the glossy photography of sex have exchange value—not the romantic love poem.

Des andern in dem Wind, den beide spüren  
Die jetzt im Fluge beieinander liegen  
So mag der Wind sie in das Nichts entführen  
Wenn sie nur nicht vergehen und sich bleiben  
So lange kann sie beide nichts berühren  
So lange kann man sie von jedem Ort vertreiben  
Wo Regen drohen oder Schüsse schallen.  
So under Sonn und Monds wenig verschiedenen  
Scheiben  
Fliegen sie hin, einander ganz verfallen.  
Wohin, ihr?—Nirgend hin.—Von wem davon?—  
Von allen.  
Ihr fragt, wie lange sind sie schon beisammen?  
Seit kurzem.—Und wann werden sie sich trennen?  
—Bald.  
So scheint die Liebe Liebenden ein Halt.<sup>o</sup>

## THE LOVERS

See those cranes in their wide sweep!  
See the clouds given to be at their side  
Traveling with them already when they left  
One life to fly into another life.  
At the same height and with the same speed  
Both seem merely at each other's side.  
That the crane may share with the cloud  
The beautiful sky through which they briefly fly  
That neither may linger here longer  
And neither see but the swinging  
Of the other in the wind which both feel  
Now lying next to each other in flight.

<sup>o</sup> *Gedichte*, vol. II (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 210. Erich Kahler and Theodor W. Adorno have revealed the significance of this poem. See Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie*, loc. cit., p. 123.



If only they not perish and stay with each other  
 The wind may lead them into nothingness  
 They can be driven from each place  
 Where rain threatens and shots ring out  
 Nothing can touch either of them.  
 Thus under the sun's and the moon's little varying  
     orbs  
 They fly on together lost and belonging to each other.  
 Where to, you?—Nowhere. Away from whom?—From  
     all.  
 You ask how long are they together?  
 A short time. And when will they leave each other?  
     Soon.  
 Thus seem the lovers draw strength from love.

(Translation by Inge S. Marcuse)

The image of liberation is in the flight of the cranes, through their beautiful sky, with the clouds which accompany them: sky and clouds belong to them—without mastery and domination. The image is in their ability to flee the spaces where they are threatened: the rain and the rifle shots. They are safe as long as they remain themselves, entirely with each other. The image is a vanishing one: the wind can take them into nothingness—they would still be safe: they fly from one life into another life. Time itself matters no longer: the cranes met only a short while ago, and they will leave each other soon. Space is no longer a limit: they fly nowhere, and they flee from everyone, from all. The end is illusion: love *seems* to give duration, to conquer time and space, to evade destruction. But the illusion cannot deny the reality which it invokes: the cranes *are*, in their sky, with their clouds. The end is also denial of the illusion, insistence on its reality, realization. This insistence is in the poem's language which is prose becoming

verse and song in the midst of the brutality and corruption of the *Netzestadt* (Mahagonny)—in the dialogue between a whore and a bum. There is no word in this poem which is not prose. But these words are joined to sentences, or parts of sentences which say and show what ordinary language never says and shows. The apparent "protocol statements" which seem to describe things and movements in direct perception, turn into images of that which goes beyond all direct perception: the flight into the realm of freedom which is also the realm of beauty.

Strange phenomenon: [beauty] as a quality which is in an opera of Verdi as well as in a Bob Dylan song, in a painting of Ingres as well as Picasso, in a phrase of Flaubert as well as James Joyce, in a gesture of the Duchess of Guermantes as well as of a hippie girl! Common to all of them is the expression, against its plastic de-erotization, of [beauty] as negation of the commodity world and of the performances, attitudes, looks, gestures, required by it.

The aesthetic form will continue to change as the political practice succeeds (or fails) to build a better society. At the optimum, we can envisage a universe common to art and reality, but in this common universe, art would retain its transcendence. In all likelihood, people would not talk or write or compose poetry; *la prose du monde* would persist. The "end of art" is conceivable only if men are no longer capable of distinguishing between true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, present and future. This would be the state of perfect barbarism at the height of civilization—and such a state is indeed a historical possibility.

Art can do nothing to prevent the ascent of barbarism—it cannot by itself keep open its own domain in and against society. For its own preservation and development, art depends on the struggle for the abolition of the social system which generates barbarism as its own potential stage: potential form of its

progress. The fate of art remains linked to that of the revolution. In this sense, it is indeed an internal exigency of art which drives the artist to the streets—to fight for the Commune, for the Bolshevik revolution, for the German revolution of 1918, for the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, for all revolutions which have the historical chance of liberation. But in doing so he leaves the universe of art and enters the larger universe of which art remains an antagonistic part: that of radical practice.

## VIII

Today's cultural revolution places anew on the agenda the problems of a Marxist aesthetics. In the preceding sections, I tried to make a tentative contribution to this subject; an adequate discussion would require another book. But one specific question must again be raised in this context, namely, the meaning, and the very possibility, of a "proletarian literature" (or working class literature). In my view, the discussion has never again reached the theoretical level it attained in the twenties and early thirties, especially in the controversy between Georg Lukács, Johannes R. Becher, and Andor Gabor on the one side, and Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Hanns Eisler, and Ernst Bloch on the other. The discussion during this period is recorded and reexamined in Helga Gallas' excellent book *Marxistische Literaturtheorie* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971).

All protagonists accept the central concept according to which art (the discussion is practically confined to literature) is determined, in its "truth content" as well as in its forms, by the class situation of the author (of course not simply in terms of his personal position and consciousness but of the objective correspondence of his work to the material and ideological position of the class). The conclusion which emerges from this discussion is that at the historical stage where the position of

the proletariat alone renders possible insight into the totality of the social process, and into the necessity and direction of radical change (i.e., into "the truth"), only a proletarian literature can fulfill the progressive function of art and develop a revolutionary consciousness: indispensable weapon in the class struggle.

Can such a literature arise in the traditional forms of art, or will it develop new forms and techniques? This is the case of the controversy: while Lukács (and with him the then "official" Communist line) insists on the validity of the (revamped) tradition (especially the great realistic novel of the 19th century), Brecht demands radically different forms (such as the "epic theater"), and Benjamin calls for the transition from the art form itself to such new technical expressions as the film: "large, closed forms versus small, open forms."

In a sense, the confrontation between closed and open forms seems no longer an adequate expression of the problem: compared with today's anti-art, Brecht's open forms appear as "traditional" literature. The problem is rather the underlying concept of a proletarian world view which, by virtue of its (particular) class character, represents the truth which art must communicate if it is to be authentic art. This theory

presupposes the existence of a proletarian world view. But precisely this presupposition does not stand up to an even tentative (*annähernde*) examination.\*

This is a statement of fact—and a theoretical insight. If the term "proletarian world view" is to mean the world view that is prevalent among the working class, then it is, in the advanced capitalist countries, a world view shared by a large part of the other classes, especially the middle classes. (In ritual-

\* Gallas, *loc. cit.*, p. 73.

ized Marxist language, it would be called petty bourgeois reformist consciousness.) If the term is to designate *revolutionary* consciousness (latent or actual), then it is today certainly not distinctively or even predominantly "proletarian"—not only because the revolution against global monopoly capitalism is more and other than a proletarian revolution, but also because its conditions, prospects, and goals cannot be adequately formulated in terms of a proletarian revolution (see Chapter 1). And if this revolution is to be (in whatever form) present as a goal in literature, such literature could not be typically proletarian.

This is at least the conclusion suggested by Marxian theory. I recall again the dialectic of the universal and the particular in the concept of the proletariat: as a class in but not of capitalist society, its particular interest (its own liberation) is at the same time the general interest: it cannot free itself without abolishing itself as a class, and all classes. This is not an "ideal," but the very dynamic of the socialist revolution. It follows that the goals of the proletariat as *revolutionary class* are self-transcendent: while remaining historical, concrete goals, they extend, in their class content, beyond the specific class content. And if such transcendence is an essential quality of all art, it follows that the goals of the revolution may find expression in bourgeois art, and in all forms of art. It seems to be more than a matter of personal preference if Marx had a conservative taste in art, and Trotsky as well as Lenin were critical of the notion of a "proletarian culture." °

It is therefore no paradox, and no exception, when even specifically proletarian contents find their home in "bourgeois literature." They are often accompanied by a kind of linguistic revolution, which replaces the language of the ruling class by that of the proletariat—without exploding the traditional form (of the novel, the drama). Or, conversely, the proletarian revo-

° Gallas, *loc. cit.*, pp. 210 f.

lutionary contents are formed in the "high," stylized language of (traditional) poetry: as in Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* and *Mahagonny* and in the "artistic" prose of his *Galilei*.

The spokesmen for a specifically proletarian literature tried to save this notion by establishing a sweeping criterion that would allow to reject the "reformist" bourgeois radicals, namely, the appearance, in the work, of the basic laws which govern capitalist society. (Lukács) himself made this the shibboleth by which to identify authentic revolutionary literature. But precisely this requirement offends the very nature of art. The basic structure and dynamic of society can never find sensuous, aesthetic expression: they are, in Marxian theory, the essence behind the appearance, which can only be attained through scientific analysis, and formulated only in the terms of such an analysis. The "open form" cannot close the gap between the scientific truth and its aesthetic appearance. The introduction, into the play or the novel, of montage, documentation, reportage may well (as in Brecht) become an essential part of the aesthetic form—but it can do so only as a subordinate part.

Art can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting (changes in the prevailing consciousness.) However, the cases where a transparent correlation exists between the respective class consciousness and the work of art are extremely rare (Molière, Beaumarchais, Defoe). By virtue of its own subversive quality, art is associated with revolutionary consciousness, but to the degree to which the prevailing consciousness of a class is affirmative, integrated, blunted, revolutionary art will be opposed to it. Where the proletariat is non-revolutionary, revolutionary literature will not be proletarian literature. Nor can it be "anchored" in the prevailing (non-revolutionary) consciousness: only the rupture, the leap, can prevent the resurrection of the "false" consciousness in a socialist society.

The fallacies which surround the notion of a revolutionary literature are still aggravated in today's cultural revolution. The anti-intellectualism rampant in the New Left champions the demand for a working class literature which expresses the worker's actual interests and "emotions." For example:

"Intellectual pundits of the Left" are blamed for their "revolutionary aesthetic," and a "certain coterie of talmudists" is taken to task for being more "expert in weighing the many shadings and nuances of a word than involvement in the revolutionary process." \* Archaic anti-intellectualism abhors the idea that the former may be an essential part of the latter, part of that translation of the world into a new language which may communicate the radically new claims of liberation.

Such spokesmen for the proletarian ideology criticize the cultural revolution as a "middle class trip." The philistine mind is at its very best when it proclaims that this revolution will "become meaningful" only "when it begins to understand the very real cultural meaning that a washing machine, for instance, has for a working class family with small children in diapers." And the philistine mind demands that "the artists of that revolution . . . tune in on the emotions of that family on the day, after months of debate and planning, that the washing machine is delivered . . ." \*\*

This demand is reactionary not only from an artistic but also from a political point of view. Regressive are, not the emotions of the working class family, but the idea to make them into a standard for authentic radical and socialist literature: what is proclaimed to be the focal point of a revolutionary new culture is in fact the adjustment to the established one.

To be sure, the cultural revolution must recognize and subvert this atmosphere of the working class home, but this will not be done by "tuning in" on the emotions aroused by the

\* Irvin Silber, in *Guardian*, December 13, 1969.

\*\* Irvin Silber, in *Guardian*, December 6, 1969, p. 17.

delivery of a washing machine. On the contrary, such empathy perpetuates the prevailing "atmosphere."

The concept of proletarian literature = revolutionary literature remains questionable even if it is freed from the "tuning in" on prevailing emotions, and, instead, related to the *most advanced* working class consciousness. This would be a political consciousness, and prevalent only among a minority of the working class. If art and literature would reflect such advanced consciousness, they would have to express the actual conditions of the class struggle and the actual prospects of subverting the capitalist system. But precisely these brutally political contents *militate* against their aesthetic transformation—therefore the very valid objection against "pure art." However, these contents also militate against a less pure translation into art, namely, the translation into the concreteness of the daily life and practice. Lukács has, on these grounds, criticized a representative workers' novel of the time: the personages of this novel talk at the dinner table at home the same language as a delegate at a party meeting. °

A revolutionary literature in which the working class is the subject-object, and which is the historical heir, the definite negation, of "bourgeois" literature, remains a thing of the future.

But what holds true for the notion of revolutionary art with respect to the working classes in the advanced capitalist countries does not apply to the situation of the racial minorities in these countries, and the majorities in the Third World. I have already referred to black music; there is also a black literature, especially poetry, which may well be called revolutionary: it lends voice to a total rebellion which finds expression in the aesthetic form. It is not a "class" literature, and its particular content is at the same time the universal one: what is at

° Gallas, *loc. cit.*, p. 121. A Communist participant in the discussion remarked correctly that, in this case, one should call things by their name and speak not of art or literature but of propaganda.

stake in the specific situation of the oppressed racial minority is the most general of all needs, namely, the very existence of the individual and his group as *human beings*. The most (extreme political content) does not repel (traditional forms).

From Currier