

INSIPIDITIES SERIES

**The world said no  
to your dream,  
must you now  
refuse the world?**

**frère dupont**



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*But don't try to touch me, don't try to touch me. 'Cos that will never happen again.*

*Past, Present, Future*

**John.Steven.** It is now one hundred years since the log jam of accumulated productive forces reached critical mass and lurched into war. And after the war, in preparation for the next cycle, but to prevent a recurrence of the same blocking, productive forces were plumbed into a continent-wide plan of irrigation. From the Atlantic to the Baltic, a vast technocratic project of reconstructing the European economies was commenced. By implication, it is one hundred years since the moment when the revolution that should have happened within this clotting event, didn't. And so, from the occurrence of one event, and the non-occurrence of another, we might, as communists, reasonably conclude that effectively everything finished for human society at that juncture - one hundred years later, we are still stranded in some self-eternalising netherworld.

**Joseph.** In *Radetzky March*, Roth draws just such a line through the world as an aid for his 'before and after' comparison. And as you suggest, the line intersects history at 1914...

*Back then, before the Great War [...], it was not yet a matter of indifference whether a person lived or died. If a life was snuffed out from the host of the living, another life did not instantly replace it and make people forget the deceased. Instead, a gap remained where he had been, and both the near and distant witnesses of his demise fell silent whenever they saw this gap. If a fire devoured a house in a row of houses in a street, the charred site remained empty for a long time. For the bricklayers worked slowly and leisurely, and when the closest neighbours as well as casual passers-by looked at the empty lot, they remembered the shape and the walls of the vanished house. That was now things were back then. Anything that grew took its time growing, and anything that perished took a long time to be forgotten. But everything that had once existed left its traces, and people lived on memories just as they now live on the ability to forget quickly and emphatically.*

**John.Steven.** I understand from this, that the institutionalised forgetting of the dead, and a concomitant shift in emphasis to *moving on*, announces the passage of social reproduction into a new phase. From that moment, the earlier, haphazard, patchwork pattern of accumulation is supplanted by a strategic programming of relations as a means to stabilise and secure the accumulation of forces.

**Joseph.** All social power, until 1914, had been orchestrated around great squanderings of life – that *brute* which could afford, and survive, the greatest quantity of death was, by the principle of last man standing, *the greatest power*. With the commencement of war in 1914, and with a final tragic irony, this grandest of squanderings marked the expulsion of the *ancien regime's* last residues - it took a war of attrition to undo the institutions of *life as attrition*. The archaic global cult of death was then superseded by a systematic interference in the processes of life to the end of *conserving* forces. From that moment, the state began to realise its true function as strategist of the

security of social relations (i.e. it began to seek out *certainty* in the long term reproduction of labour power from which it could secure longer and longer lines of credit). Thus, the great advance within capitalist relations is located in its momentous reorientation towards *life*. Ideologically, after 1918, this is presented in the widely repeated slogan, *Never Again*. In order to permanently by-pass cyclical spirals into irrational capital destruction and the resultant resetting of social relations to the *status quo ante*, the state found its true purpose in redirecting social institutions towards securing the *value* of life as an exploitable, quantifiable and inexhaustible resource. By this means, it successfully navigated the *Northwest Passage* to biopower.

**Jack.** Obviously, the nostalgia in Roth is *ironic*, particularly in relation to the myth at the centre of *The Radetzky March*, but even so, he locates a genuine faultline in the Real.

**Joseph.** Yes, the description of an emergent logistics by which the dead are mechanically *replaced* by the living, as if it were a matter of replenishing supermarket shelves, creates a powerful impression of the progress in the assumption of interchangeability amongst living beings, and the level of violent abstraction in society that would be necessary to achieve this. This motif of infinite substitution reappears throughout social existence from 'mega-farms' to 'unlimited lives' in video-games.

**Jack.** The transformation of social process also changed the mechanism of change itself.

**Joseph.** The ground on which the 'revolutionaries', those emigrants of time, stood in 1914 broke off from the world and floated away, whilst they continued to rage at the receding coastline of the old world, to which they would never return. The revolt against death, that is against the power of causing death, ideologically represented by 'tyranny', lost its focus. Capitalism was not simply *killing* people but orchestrating material scarcity *in relation* to the surplus population it had generated.

**John.Steven.** This is well worn now, but if we rehearse it briefly: an imagined overthrow of *repression* (or tyranny) has always been the

standard mythos of revolution, but from 1914, the mythos itself no longer connected with the production of actual relations. From that juncture, apparatuses directed towards *exploitation of life* were supplanting repressive institutions and the ongoing revolt against repression only served to 'autonomously' enable this process.

**Joseph.** In the previous century, the revolutionaries, like alchemists before them, had created their *own field*. They were the most keenly understanding of social process being themselves an expression of change. Suddenly the ground shifted and they became mere practitioners of an obsolete symbolic system which was consequently incorporated as a *lost art* within social reproduction - meanwhile, social scientists expropriated society as an object of knowledge and manipulation.

**John.Steven.** Revolutionaries became uncomprehending of actual social forces.

**Joseph.** They preferred to replay the narrative which set themselves against the oppressive archetypes of the old world which continued to emerge from their unconscious. They carried on attacking that which 'capitalism' was already destroying.

**Jack.** We have heard from you about nihilist communism, imaginary communism, impossible communists, anti-political communists, cosmic communism, whimsical tragical communism... who are you now?

**Joseph.** Today, we have our *last communists'* hat on. By this I mean, *we* are the last communists, and so are *you*. The difference between us is that *we* have tried to include this as a factor in our reflections but *you* have not - on the other hand, this difference is not so very significant.

**John.Steven.** So, we are all last communists. I can guess at what you mean: maybe, that we have reached the final permutation in the performance of ultraleftism's theoretical contortions - and now we must disappear in a puff of smoke. Your spiritual forebear, uncle PKD wrote, 'The universe has a habit of deleting anachronisms.'

**Joseph.** Cue my mirthless laughter. *Valis* certainly seems to anticipate our every argument - it is a black mirror of *discomfortment* which anticipates and thus diminishes the entire repertoire of the escape artist. But still, we press on. We explore the dead ends, and include the new confirmations of our old dreads. We produce a record.

**Jack.** Like the alchemists.

**John.Steven.** Precisely. Don't you think you fall into the fallacy of end days thinking? You are merely the present representative of successive generations which have assumed historic process must conclude with them.

**Jack.** Agreed, the real problem has been their failure to recognise their place as a moment in the continuum. We can easily imagine how capitalism, as you characterise it, could pass once again from a system of exploitation to repression.

**John.Steven.** In fact, this is happening now. It is being driven by an increasing global population, of which an increasing proportion is redundant and unemployed. The correlation between this population and capital's ongoing problem of realising surplus value (in circumstances driven by the inexorable increase in proportion of constant capital within the productive process) could easily indicate an already established spiral of breakdown and regression back through the phases of domestication, real domination and then to something like formal domination, i.e. a direct class struggle between two expropriating classes.

**Jack.** And where this occurs might not an 'outside' re-establish itself within the surplus communities. I mean a clear 'relation' between the proletarianised class of humanity and capital... and might not communism reappear within those communities as an expression of this relation?

**Joseph.** Simply, in terms of human suffering, capital destruction or the collapse of systems of dependence is nothing to be hoped for... the return of repression would indicate an end for capitalism but not necessarily a liberation from the autonomising environment of ex-

ploitation. The production of surplus population is not a true return to an earlier moment but merely the cyclical reversion to a particularly wintry configuration of a highly advanced form of domination. Already, we see how wealth and power may be directly extracted from 'being' rather than from 'activity' - it is true that this process could not be characterised as real 'capitalism', but on the other hand it would probably not create an opening for communist consciousness (i.e. the freedom to sell or withhold labour has become irrelevant in circumstances of an unemployed 'outside' - and this removes the opportunity for commencing the upward spiral of a self-valorising world-producing identity).

**John.Steven.** I suppose the content of the *last communists'* reflections concerns the historical probability of an objective historical communist event.

**Joseph.** Of course. We conclude that this has become progressively less probable over the last hundred years. Specifically, the defeat of the workers' movement in 1914 (which it registered practically as the failure to realise its programme from 1917-1920) indicates the precise moment where communism became historically untenable.

**Jack.** Why?

**Joseph.** In practical terms, the working class ceased to adequately antagonise capital's domination within the social relation. At that point, capital passed into a stage of *real domination* where it progressively incorporated the workerist values of the *Republic of labour* in the form of the *Community of Capital*. Yet another threshold was passed in 1945 when 'real domination' accelerated into what we might call 'real exploitation' or *domestication*. By this term we refer to an environmental imperative that we are still adapting to, but which is akin to the seeming paradox of free range factory farming.

**Jack.** But why does that make communism impracticable?

**Joseph.** The runaway of capital, i.e. the unbalanced series of progressive adaptations within human society that were set in motion since 1914, has caused the historical disappearance of a viable revolution-

ary subject from the world. In short, the ongoing modifications of society have first inhibited, then banished, and finally engineered away the capacity of human beings to take conscious control of the relational systems which produce them - this unfortunate turn of events implies that any revolt against some or other tyrant only serves to remove the barriers which had previously held back the flooding of society by global capital.

**Jack.** So the Arab Spring indicates the passage from manifest repression to a subliminal exploitative process.

**Joseph.** The *given forms* of revolt now facilitate rather than restrict the decisive mode of power - under current conditions, the only object of revolt is to remove little dictators, it gains no purchase on global social process. We can understand this process, which we call domestication, as a circuit of mutually conditioning components - at the lowest level, the life-concerns of life-forms are channelled into the apparatus of domination. People now desire, rather than refuse, their own integration.

**John.Steven.** 'Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?'

**Joseph.** It is only in their revolt that people formulate the desire for their own repression because it is only in repressive relations that *permission* plays a significant role. Hypersensitive responses to exploitative algorithms (these cannot be called productive 'relations') tend to take a repressive ideological pathway because the processes which trigger intolerances operate *beneath* the threshold of permissions - they function immanently, immersively and create a disturbing sense of de-realisation and alienation. Thus, the desire for self-repression is an attempt to flood that foreboding before an amorphous and unopposable processive *vapour* (e.g. cloud computing) with tangible *relations*... within which the self-repressed figure at least appears to itself as significant, human, and thus retains some sense of *power*, i.e. the power located within the downtrodden. Self-repression is minimally preferable to that sense of self-dispersal which is the consequence of submergence within networks of subliminal exploitation. In a situation where the self cannot even register that which feeds upon it, it

finds itself incapable of formulating arguments against, for example, 'social media' (that liberating acid of totalisation which has dissolved the mechanics of human repression.)

**John.Steven.** Why can't we communalise *domesticating* technology and appropriate it for our own ends?

**Joseph.** Automation is realised as the compression of command chains in technological process. The advent of 'scientific management' integrated the multiples of discreet command chains into a complex 'food net' which further removed productive relations into the abstract. The emergence of a *sentient* food net only served to augment barriers against communist possibility by removing the productive process as a physical site for conscious intervention. We find that we cannot take control of certain processes *for* communism when those processes by their very architecture are programmed to realise the *prevention* of communism. As human beings of the present moment we are manufactured to be incompatible with obsolescent social forms like communism. On broader terms, automation materialises both the removal and inhibition of conscious interference - but communism is *nothing but* conscious interference in process.

**Jack.** The other version is that automation liberates us from what is tedious and backbreaking.

**Joseph.** No doubt. That which is automated is removed from conscious vigilance. However, on a large scale this removal also indicates the problem of *bringing consciousness back*...

**Jack.** Because, I assume, consciousness appears only where there is disruption to process, and as consciousness costs energy, our preference is to not think directly *into* the world but allow machines to take the strain.

**Joseph.** A return to consciousness from immanent repose supposes a willed struggle through states of drugged inertia, avoidance rituals, and hostile resistance. It is painful to bring consciousness into the world and change direction - it is always preferable to allow things to take their course.

**John.Steven.** But to return to the earlier question. Why *last communists* and not *nihilist communists*?

**Joseph.** I think the object is different. Ha ha, the word is not the thing. There is no 'nihilist communism', it is a term for two incompatibilities linked together. On the one side there is individuated 'nihilism', this may only find resolution, on other terms than its own, i.e. by social forces appearing as 'communism'. On the other side, socialised 'communism' stumbles before the problem of a non-abstract equality between different individuals. Nihilist communism supposes two trajectories that indicate a lived contradiction between social imperative and lived existence, and which, we have found, finally, cannot be overcome.

**John.Steven.** So you mean there are no real 'last communists', it is just a label for a point you want to make?

**Joseph.** Ha ha. Um, well, all communists are last communists.

**Jack.** Explain.

**Joseph.** Nihilist communism contained a fundamental inconsistency in its theory which nobody much engaged with because they were too busy with *that* title.

**Jack.** Which was?

**Joseph.** The term 'pro-revolutionary'. It signified both those who were simply 'in favour' of revolution and those who could no longer seriously identify themselves as the subjective agents of revolution (for the latter, the prefix pro indicated a relinquishment of an otherwise assumed relation with a particular term). The theory became complicated due to lack of clarity in who was being referred to, i.e. those who identified themselves as revolutionaries, or those who identified themselves as occupying a specific space for being not-revolutionaries.

**Jack.** And the designation 'last communist' clarifies this how?

**Joseph.** It does not clarify that problem at all. My point is that the

term is directed at another problem. I mean, the problem of nihilist communism is the definition of who is and who is not a revolutionary - i.e. no agency is adequate to the role of revolutionising social relations. The problem for the last communists is the processive dematerialisation of communism from history despite the vigilant attention to detail of the communists.

**John.Steven.** Okay. Then why 'last' exactly?

**Joseph.** It is a matter of recording as simply as possible a relation to an object that is no longer present, and which applies appropriately for all those existing objectively in relation to that object.

**John.Steven.** The object being 'communism'?

**Joseph.** We should say, *historical communism*.

**John.Steven.** And the relation specifically is defined by the disappearance of communism from history?

**Joseph.** I would say, *set in motion*, rather than defined. Just as the object of Christianity has receded into the distant past as a result of a parallax-type movement within historical social relations, and which has caused all those who maintain the Christian life-world to appear in the actual world as *last Christians*, so the realisable object of communism has leaked out of its theoretical framing, even though the frame itself has, to some extent, survived. We should note here before getting too far into this, that 'last' does not suppose an imminent demise... a last relation to an object may survive for millennia.

**Jack.** How does this relate to Marx's famous comment on the real power of Apollo in Greek life?

**Joseph.** I think that is somewhat of a distraction, or at least we could get bogged down in it. But the issue could be framed along the lines of: what does it mean for those who fall into existence within an apollonian life-world to continue to live there *after* the advent of their disbelief in Apollo (i.e. after they accept Apollo is not there)?

**Jack.** And, what is the significance of that question?

**Joseph.** For example, it is well known that the *rationale* of science first utilised already established theological procedures rather than the supposed ‘scientific method’ – the findings of science appeared as irreducible anomalies within the dominant life-world, even within the life-world of the scientists themselves. Thus, the *form* of scientific practice for hundreds of years was essentially theological, specifically neo-platonist, but proceeded with a god-shaped hole at its centre. The vaunted *scientific method* was incorporated into the neo-platonist frame as a retroactive *demonstrative* device, whilst actual discoveries continued to be produced within the scientific domain *theologically*.

**Jack.** Then the communist ‘life-world’ operates with a communism shaped hole in it.

**Joseph.** Communism has become objectively impossible - as communists, we are living with the acceptance of the non-existence of Apollo. And yet we carry on. The life-world survives. The moment for communism’s appearance is now nearly a hundred years past - for many years an afterimage of its possibility survived (until 1945), and was maintained subjectively. But that too has now faded and an absence is fully established at the centre of communist consciousness - the struggle of the ‘ultraleft’ has been to incorporate the impossibility of communism into its project.

**Jack.** A rather difficult undertaking given the emphasis on ‘praxis’.

**Joseph.** All permutations have now been explored, and the ultra-left cannot honestly *not* orient itself towards the absence of Apollo. There is compulsion, a pressure from the external world, for a recalibration of the communist life-world and for the removal of the category of ‘realisation’.

**Jack.** Then why not simply abandon the ultraleft ‘life-world’ of theory and casting the net for a revolutionary subject?

**Joseph.** Well yes, why not? And yet we do not abandon it. The object of Christianity has been *literally* absent from the centre of its conceptual frame for two thousand years, and it has been *historically*

absent for several hundred. However, the frame itself, the life-world, even taking into consideration the tacit acceptance that Christ will never rise again, has survived. There has been a convoluted passage into gall-like domains, outgrowths, of ethics, metaphor, ontology, politics, narrative and science.

**Jack.** But to what purpose, self-deception, mystification? Christian ethics is bad ethics, Christian metaphor, ontology, politics science is merely bad metaphor, ontology, politics, science.

**Joseph.** Mystification is a major factor, of course it is. But it is not the *main* factor. The frame continues to produce materials of experience in the world that are considered worthwhile; these materials *sustain* the given life form. In particular, the Christian life-world processes the stuff of loss, grief, meaning, relations and so on. As to your other point, we might also observe that *communist* politics, ethics, metaphor, science are all ‘bad’. In practice, it turns out that even pure science, objective ethics, the most conscious and transparent politics, also turn out to be ‘bad’, if by this we mean that all praxis is splattered with the gore of unintended consequence.

**John.Steven.** But communism cannot be simply relegated to an ersatz Christianity, a means for framing humanity’s ‘issues’. The real problematic of communism has always been its realisation.

**Joseph.** Well, we cannot know which demon might advance towards us *because of* the conceptual constraints of our undertaking, as is illustrated in MRR James’ *The Mezzotint*. The point is that Christianity pushed science and atheism out from the constraints of its own life-world, and into the objective world - these exaptations took shape as a form of knowledge *in relation* to those earlier constraints but really only actualised under later, and altered, conditions.

**Jack.** Perhaps all that has proved a distraction too far. The term ‘last communists’ is not clear, and was lost early in the rather verbose account of the pro-revolutionary ambiguity.

**Joseph.** The *lost* communists are those who, knowingly or unknowingly, appear in the *last* possible relation to the final phase of their



object, which is its absence or removal from their immediate intimacy with it.

**Jack.** They are last because there can be no other relation to their object?

**Joseph.** They are in the process of introjecting the irreducibility of a communism-shaped hole into the conditions of their practice... conditions which otherwise absolutely assumed the *possibility* of communism. In a similar way, Christians no longer believe in a literal Bible, a literal Resurrection, a literal Day of Judgement - the last relation is a lost relation, or a cutting loose from that which initially set the body in motion.

**Jack.** You should get out more. I think literalist fundamentalism is not as rare as you might think.

**Joseph.** That is second order literalism, which appears post-refutation, it is reaction. The perverse fanaticism of revivalists proves them to be the true unbelievers, they revel satanically in their error. Their arguments are based in a refusal of that which they secretly know to be true, they draw their energy from an external force and it appears as *denunciation, anathema, fatwa*. Their's is a sick flourishing at the end, a last flaring up. They know their doctrine to be *disconnected* from the world and yet are also allowed by the world to advance their arguments from strategically irrelevant caves, because no living force in the world can be bothered to contradict them. This fate is also enjoyed by the communists.

**John.Steven.** We are the last communists because the last few strands of our attachment are to be severed, but from *the other end*.

**Jack.** We are also the lost communists because the last few strands of attachment must be severed from *our end*.

**Joseph.** Passage into the last phase depends entirely upon a severance event. The manner in which the umbilicus is cut is decisive for what must happen next. It is a matter of relinquishment, of letting go but also of being cut adrift, marooned.

**Jack.** What is the gain for those communists who continue as if they are persuaded that communism is a real movement? What is the reason for them not to suspend their performance?

**Stephen.** They *know*, we all know, communism is not possible and yet *they* cannot reconcile this with their practice.

**Joseph.** The problematic is similar to that in method acting - how real do you have to get to really *get real*? As dear Larry once observed *vis-à-vis* 'the method': *Acting is illusion, as much illusion as magic is — and not so much a matter of being real.*

**John.Steven.** And yet communists are caught between 'pretending' (i.e. going through the motions of what Blanchot calls *insufficiency* at the heart of the elective community) and taking their project *for real*. Can one, as if by sleight of hand, deceive others with the image of 'another world is possible' and also *believe* in that to which the trick alludes?

**Jack.** Put another way, what is in it for the communists who really believe? What is the reward that might be extracted for carrying on as if the communism-shaped hole were not there?

**Joseph.** It is the reward extracted by all congregations where two or three are gathered together in the transcendent term's name. Just as 'faith communities' cannot relinquish the reality of God, so communists find it difficult in relation to their ultimate goal. The role of the transcendent term, which is fervently asserted as not only a real term but as *realising* of all other terms, is to mediate the actual social relations which are undertaken within its domain. Of course, these assertions of possibility are made by individuals who, like Peter before the cockerel crows, and in divergent contexts, wholly accept them to be fraudulent. This is precisely the behavioural circuit which underlies 'fetishism'. In short, faith communities derive compensation from the *esprit de corps* which is generated by their direct internal relations (and the relation of these relations to the external world) which they then misattribute to the agency of the transcendent term.

**John.Steven.** Why can't they sever their relation to the transcendent

and simply extract the same compensations from the immanent social intercourse of the congregation? What would be the cost of abandoning their willed delusion?

**Joseph.** That is the great mystery. When relations are rationalised to the status of *nothing but direct relations* (where all terms are rationally present to the participants), they lose their compulsive lustre. The disillusioned community drifts apart. Something similar is encountered in the problematic of transference where simple knowledge of the operative mechanism within an inappropriate relation is insufficient to relieve its compulsive allure.

**John.Steven.** In other words, a transcendent term always takes on a threefold form: it is necessary, it is an illusion, but it is also unhealthy.

**Joseph.** Compulsion, or a 'traumatic kernel', is intrinsic to all relations. This component cannot be *undone* but may, perhaps, only be dispersed into other and further mediating regimes.

**John.Steven.** Then it is a matter of deciding upon the character of engagement, in particular between *knowing pretence* and *the method*, locating a register somewhere between Olivier and Artaud.

**Joseph.** *Knowing pretence* is preferable, but a pinch of both madness and *method* is necessary - after all theatre *is* real.

**Jack.** Are you advocating that communists should put away childish things, adopt a pragmatic approach, and adapt to the world as it is. Doesn't 'last communist' suggest 'post-communist.'

**Joseph.** Absolutely not. We are for *le communisme pour le communisme* my dear fellows and nothing less.

**John.Steven.** It comes down to antirealism: nothing is possible, nothing is realisable from within the 'communist life-world' but, by some twisted path, this turns out to be precisely the true end of social existence.

**Joseph.** I do not know if a prize of truth can be claimed. However, communists, or indeed anarchists, are compelled to maintain their

life-world, come what may and in terms of universality.

**John.Steven.** Where you are acknowledged at all, I suppose the term 'beautiful soul' has been applied to you. Do you think it is appropriate that your argument concerning the severance of communist consciousness from world process is dismissed as 'purism' - and indicative of a reluctance to get your hands dirty? With reference to this the following paragraph must have been quoted more than once at you:

*It lives in dread of staining the radiance of its inner being by action and existence. And to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with actuality, and steadfastly perseveres in a state of self-willed impotence to renounce a self which is pared away to the last point of abstraction, and to give itself substantial existence, or, in other words, to transform its thought into being, and commit itself to absolute distinction [that between thought and being]. The hollow object, which it produces, now fills it, therefore, with the feeling of emptiness. Its activity consists in yearning, which merely loses itself in becoming an unsubstantial shadowy object, and, rising above this loss and falling back on itself, finds itself merely as lost. In this transparent purity of its moments it becomes a sorrow-laden "beautiful soul", as it is called; its light dims and dies within it, and it vanishes as a shapeless vapour dissolving into thin air.*

**Joseph.** The powerful ambivalence in Hegel's sketch (what is this passage exactly: a warning? A repudiation?), which draws from the relinquishment of his earlier *embrace* of the beautiful soul, if considered with its place in romantic consciousness, together with its anticipation of later forms of decadence, takes on a magical resonance. It is enchanting, captivating. It is a siren's song.

**John.Steven.** I agree. Maybe it is so powerful because the *figure* denounced is inseparable from the denunciation.

**Joseph.** The intimacy between Hegel's *mood of conceptualisation* and his personified concept causes the latter to appear, in the case of the beautiful soul, fatally draped in a guise of that which must not be countenanced even though its allure cannot be denied.

**John.Steven.** I don't know. I am also unable to read that text, part paen, part eulogy, part renunciation, part castigation and not become entranced by it.

**Joseph.** After all, the soul, whose beauty exemplifies the counter-term to Hegel's instrumentalising ideal, is both properly *named* and yet if it had not been negatively presented, would not have sung so affectingly: the beautiful soul is a warning that is also the trap. So much of the *Impermissible Ideal* is channelled into Hegel's description that the figure is altered by the pressure into a sort of outcast, a character from Büchner or Hoffman.

**John.Steven.** I swoon. I wear a frilled blouse open to the navel. I cannot help but *desire* it to be who I am.

**Joseph.** Is not the beautiful soul conflictedly beautiful, in truth a locus of contradiction (a beauty that appears only by denunciation), and therefore, archetypically *sublime*?

**Jack.** And I was thinking it was a convenient pressure valve in Hegel's argumentation to prevent idealist runaway. But what does it mean to identify with the beautiful soul in full knowledge that it may only appear as that which must be discounted in advance?

**Joseph.** The beautiful soul is a divine but fallen soul, which must be saved if *it* is to save... empathy with the beautiful soul, the work of *saving the saver* is the task of the *ugly soul*. He who knowingly takes up the mask of the beautiful soul is presented with a quite different problematic of redemption than he who stands accused of *being* the *beautiful soul*.

**John.Steven.** The beautiful soul refuses the historical task of participation in history, it casts about for an essence *outside* of process.

**Joseph.** The beautiful soul stands back from the full realisation of the bourgeois forces articulated by the Enlightenment - for whatever reason (probably sentimentality or narcissism), it balks at *process*, it is the very *thought of the diverticulum*. Even so, the trauma at the heart of the beautiful soul, which causes it to hold back and refuse

movement, still places it *in advance of Marxism*. However, by contrast, the ugly soul recognises that inaction is imposed from the outside. Or, more accurately, the ugly soul is aware how its potential for 'action' remains but also recognises that all the acts open to it only further contribute to the circumstances which it refuses - it is caught in *zugzwang*.

**Jack.** But people still try to improve their situation and resist the further encroachments of exploitative processes into their lives.

**Joseph.** I would never argue against the proletariat's defence of its own interest. But we are talking here about communists, a non-economic formation, and the problematic of the *salvator salvandus* - he who must be saved in order to perform his saving purpose.

**Jack.** Is there is no path from the flexing of economic self-interest to communist consciousness?

**Joseph.** In practice, communists have attempted to lay such paths by participating in reformist campaigns. Unfortunately, the worth of their efforts is established *for others* by the intensity of their commitment - they're the guys who are prepared to clean the toilets of the struggle. But their contribution is never registered at the level of their theoretical input, i.e. within the category where their difference makes a difference.

**Jack.** They are communists in motive but are constrained by circumstance to behave as reformists.

**John.Steven.** Communists do not bring the *quality* of communism to the struggle but only the *quantity* of their energy.

**Joseph.** Revolutionary reformism, or Marxism, can be understood precisely in terms of energy conversion where a precious quality of consciousness is transformed into a willingness to undertake unrewarding and eventually futile tasks in the cause of 'realisation.'

**John.Steven.** Militants are only ever present because of an ulterior motive... they're the *nutters*, they're the *fanatics*, the *loonies*, the *fringe*. They perform a role but not that which they have set themselves.

**Jack.** I do accept that that has often proved to be the case - but if they were not *in place*, then they would not be in position to introduce the transcendent term if opportunity should present itself.

**Joseph.** But even then, the problem does not lie within the struggle to formulate an authentic and effective movement of consciousness into the world, which might broadly be termed 'communisation'. The real problem is located in the paradox of self-abolition - which in its essence is also the paradox of the *redeemed redeemer*.

**Jack.** You mean, we cannot assert ourselves and also disappear.

**John.Steven.** He means that if communism is the key that will release the world from its prison, then someone or something must first unlock the cell which constrains communism.

**Joseph.** We are capitalised beings, we embody abstract domination in our social relations. We might intellectually grasp the necessity of our disappearance from the world as domesticated creatures but we are also driven by a *lust for life*. And it is at the level of our life-signs, our appetites, that we are tracked, modified, directed and exploited in the life-world. Our opposition to dependancy, being dependent in itself, only colonises opposition with the opposed logic.

**John.Steven.** That argument is evidence to support the allegation of your 'literary turn'. Why should communists hold onto the communist life-world if it is unrealisable?

**Joseph.** It is a question of subjective maturation in relation to the realisability of the ideal object. That a set of principles may not be realised in the world is not necessarily a sufficient blow against maintaining those principles - the real issue is whether they *work*; whether they are theoretically *compelling*; whether they produce findings that are worthy of further investigation - whether they draw attention, attract energy, *razzle-dazzle 'em*.

**John.Steven.** But don't these activities lose all relevance if the ultimate goal becomes utopian?

**Joseph.** On the contrary, the refusal of that convenient instrumental-

isation into 'ends and means' causes the means to become intrinsically prizable, and re-presents the end as a glittering ideal.

**John.Steven.** As in Wilde's map that must include Utopia?

**Joseph.** Nobody ever thought *Formulary for a New Urbanism* was a realisable blueprint. It indicated a different orientation between **i.** presence in this world, **ii.** the impossible and **iii.** the transcendent term.

**John.Steven.** There is a strand of Kleinianism running through that argument.

**Joseph.** I agree. It is a matter of relinquishing the part-object of communism, which turns out only to have been a subjective representation, and not communism itself. We must learn our most difficult lesson: *Communism is not what is represented by communists*.

**Jack.** Just as there will be no believers in heaven, there can be no communists in communism?

**Joseph.** They are like clumsy lovers, they crush the object of their adoration.

**Jack.** Communists destroy communism.

**Joseph.** Historically, communists have suppressed communism so as to save it.

**John.Steven.** But still, you seem to be suggesting a *love by other means*. Is there a backdoor to communism which by-passes the impotent representations of the communists?

**Joseph.** That is not my concern. I am interested in preventing communists *controlling* the representation of their object. It is necessary for communism to become a free floating and invisible planet. The object may only become truly autonomous when it has become truly unrealisable, when it has become *archaic*, in possession of the other, entirely alien. Communists must come to terms with the termination of their desire by the dematerialisation of its object.

**Jack.** Are you suggesting that if they maintain their *life-world* as communists, then something else will appear within it, some other and unexpected object for which they alone are prepared?

**Joseph.** Not at all. I have given the wrong impression. No. If anything other than communism appears within the communist life-world, the communists themselves will not recognise it except as an incompatible presence, all teeth and claws, that is 'burrowing his way slowly and stealthily straight toward me.'

**Jack.** Then, I still fail to see why they should 'maintain the life-world' - particularly if this routine of maintenance produces false representations.

**Joseph.** As they pass into the phase of the last relation, their discipline consists entirely of tending to their arguments and incorporating the knowledge that the object of those arguments is no longer accessible to them.

**Jack.** Again and again, I keep coming back to the question, *why not give up if there is no hope of success?*

**Joseph.** Hope was never the decisive element. It is not because someone has hoped that their goal becomes attainable. To include the code for relinquishing hope within the programme changes nothing objectively that was not already there, but it *does* clarify things programmatically.

**Jack.** You mean, by removing insupportable components, the machine runs more efficiently?

**Joseph.** The nonsense of realisation, of communisation, of praxis, of radical subjectivity, of joining theory with practice - all of that may now be set to one side if it was ever thought that it truly contributed anything. The burden of realisation is lifted.

**Jack.** But that was all there was to communism, *the point is to change the world.*

**Joseph.** Not at all. Anyway, communists cannot *give up* by act of

will, they may only be defeated, crushed, abolished - the life-world breached. Before that eventuality, their purpose is to defensively modify the communist burrow so that they can no longer be caught out by external attacks and internal failures. Even as the life-world shrinks, the core must still be defended... i.e. the conditions of the life-world's own (and not communism's) autonomous possibility. Practically, the life-world must maintain its programme but at the same time engage the world without self-delusion.

**Jack.** You seem to be talking about the *last monks* not the last communists.

**Joseph.** Perhaps - but we are not referring to a voluntary undertaking. This is a historical matter of what is left to us. The problem we have all been wrestling is that we cannot overcome by our own efforts that which has been placed in our way. For decades now, the ultra-left has engaged the problematic of communism without movement, of revolution without subject. There is no evidence whatsoever that it has got anywhere at all. On the contrary, the holding out for 'Bolshevism without a party' has only caused it to wither more rapidly.

**Jack.** But still, you give no indication of what it is that the last communists are *for*. What do they do?

**Joseph.** They are scattered like island croutons of attachment disorder; an archipelago of deep fried processeive bread cubes, oscillating between rapt attention and low intensity detachment. They are caught in the surface of a cooling soup system which cycles endlessly through its sub-programmes of minimal preference. Will that do?

**Jack.** Try again.

**Joseph.** I clear my throat:

*For when the traveller returns from the mountain-slopes into the valley,*

*he brings, not a handful of earth, unsayable to others, but instead*

*some word he has gained, some pure word, the yellow and blue  
gentian. Perhaps we are here in order to say: house,  
bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window—  
at most: column, tower. . . . But to say them, you must under-  
stand,  
oh to say them more intensely than the Things themselves  
ever dreamed of existing.*

**Jack.** I don't know if that really describes what it is you are referring to, or whether it is a case of misdirection by association. However, on a different tack, what is it that differentiates your approach to that of communisation?

**Joseph.** The 'communising' current has sought to rationalise the dual separation of historic communist consciousness from its natural carrier (i.e. the proletariat) and from the site where this separation must be overcome, but instead has been reinforced and institutionalised (as social reproduction).

**John.Steven.** By 1920, neither the proletariat nor the industrial terrain, in which it was located, survived?

**Joseph.** The communisation current argues that communism until 1920 could only ever take the form of a 'republic of labour' in which all life was reduced to the question of production. Further to this, it is supposed, within this current, that the critique of *workerism* and of work only became feasible during the later decades of the Twentieth Century - as a result of proletarian struggles against the procedural form imposed on those struggles.

**John.Steven.** Is that not at least plausible?

**Joseph.** Well, in contradistinction to the analysis, *communism* as the object of struggle against capitalism has bled out of the world. Before you can evaluate its claims you really have to keep in mind what

communisation theory is addressing.

**Jack.** OK, I suppose you are going to say *a lack*, as that is the stuff of all theory.

**Joseph.** Communisation theory has had to *compensate* for the disappearance of a discernible communist movement and yet at the same time maintain its historicist framing of the developments in the relations of production. In short, there is no adequate, self-describing communist agency in the world, so communisation theory seeks to supplant the role of this agency by identifying a pattern of conflict at the level of social production, which otherwise would go unrecorded. The argument is that developments in social relations are driven by the proletariat's struggles against those constraints that once contained it. The runaway in disciplinary infrastructure indicates the increasing problems of *containment* of populations within the social relation.

**John.Steven.** You evidently don't agree, if you did, we would not be having this discussion.

**Joseph.** Well, the claims of communisation theory are untestable. We find ourselves, at one level, trapped into observing 'he would say that wouldn't he?' At another level, we can see that it is compelled to operate to preserve itself and its organs on its own terms. It elaborates a self-containing life-world and seeks to defend the integrity of its labyrinthine burrow which sustains, conditions and constrains its presence in the external world.

**Jack.** We will talk about life-world later, but what are the actual arguments against communisation theory's historicist analysis?

**Joseph.** We have covered this ground before and now we are free of it, we no longer have to repair the walls of *our* burrow against it. Communisation theory enjoyed the short season of its blooming like a rare desert plant - in a sense it has been too successful. It has since lost impetus as a plausible theory, and now awaits the invading creature which has tunneled down into its tunnels.

**Jack.** No, but what are the arguments.

**Joseph.** In *measurable* reality, (i.e. by the rate of appearance of communist arguments in the world) the territory and practice of communism, its material relevance in society, has continued to shrink since the death of *workerism* even as communist ideas strain towards theoretical perfection - i.e. the decline of workerism has not facilitated the possibility of a more fully elaborated *for-itself* communism. On the contrary, that trace which survives of communism, its utopian essence, has become irrevocably separated from, and irrelevant to, world process - the purity of theoretical communism now demonstrates its unrealisability.

**Jack.** Respond to the claims concerning the proletariat.

**Joseph.** The passing of the repressive phase of workerism is not the indicator of a 'critique' but of a collapse. For decades now workers have taken the injunction 'its up to you not to heed the call up' to heart, and yet this has resulted only in a diminishment in the capacity of autonomous self-discipline.

**Jack.** You think repressive structuring is necessary for communist consciousness?

**Joseph.** I cannot answer that, but the subversion of repressive mechanisms by capital has not facilitated the appearance of 'uncontrollables', only those who are disciplined remotely, and beneath the threshold of their awareness: salt, sugar, fat.

**Jack.** What has the end of repression 'facilitated.'

**Joseph.** We can measure the terms of the external world against the terms of our life-world. We find that the absence of communism from the world is everywhere demonstrable. We also find that the presence of communism in the world is nowhere demonstrable. Therefore, to insist on communism's continued relevance requires the mechanism of self-deception common to all irrational belief systems - i.e. that disappearance indicates emergence, that no evidence is highest evidence etc. For this reason, it is necessary to turn *com-*

*munisation theory* on its head, in order to come to terms with the disappearance of communism from the world.

**Jack.** What does that mean, *turn on its head*?

**Joseph.** The idea that the social relation is increasingly unstable. That this instability has engendered and is exacerbated by a progressively uncontrollable proletariat. That this uncontrollability in itself is an embodied argument against the social category of proletariat. That it is but one step from the critique of proletariat to that of the act of expropriation. That expropriation, i.e. theft, indicates an initial movement towards communising consciousness. That this move will only accelerate as it is realised autonomously at numerous flash-points. That communisation will begin within this process. All this must be turned upside down and reconsidered through the hypothesis of *domestication*.

**John.Steven.** You think it is a mistake for the theory of communist revolution to take a convoluted turn?

**Joseph.** Certainly. Communisation theory flagrantly violates the rule of Occam's razor. It takes a very complicated and counterintuitive route to end up at its desired destination - communisation theory finds what it wanted to find. We must suppose that the reason for the particular framing of its analysis is to reproduce itself unchanged. It calls upon the theme of historical movement purely as a means for establishing external verification. In this case, as in so many others, *correlation does not imply causation*.

**Jack.** Just now, you said communisation theory was *too successful*. I understand what you mean, or at least I think I do. The communising current theorises formal *breaks* between periods of class conflict, this contrasts within syndicalist arguments for continuity. For the syndicalists, social change is always a matter of exacerbation: increasing demands, involving more people, expanding the organisation, spreading the core ideas and practical forms, and ratchetting up class polarisation. However, the recent Grangemouth dispute indicates how a militant workforce and its basic syndicalist tactic of solidarity can now be outmanoeuvred by militant capitalism. It

seems that communisation theory *does* anticipate the defeat of the Grangemouth militants on the grounds that their militancy is in itself *obsolete*.

**Joseph.** I think that is a good example... and communisation theory demonstrates itself to be *too successful* because really, *there is no viable alternative* at the level of agency. There is no communising capacity amongst human beings embedded at the heart of industry. They require the throwing of the switch which will release them from their fascination. Something, an event, must first cause gravity to shut down *before* they will move away from their set patterns.

**Jack.** We will run from the eruption only when we see the lava coming down the slope towards us... otherwise, we are easily habituated to the rumblings and the smoke.

**John.Steven.** To return to finding patterns that we are conditioned to find. What is your intuition about *elaboration* in theory.

**Joseph.** Evidently, it occurs where theory encounters obstacles. In practical terms, we cannot allow ourselves to become vulnerable in those places where communism has sought to 'analyse' the working class but has succeeded only in projecting its own desires onto objective transformations in the productive relation.

**John.Steven.** What does maintaining the life-world involve?

**Joseph.** Orwell's refrain on dignity is one component - the continence of the life-world is vital to its continued function. But the concept of life-world is derived from Jakob von Uexküll's theory of *umwelt* by which he theorised a specific environmental space of relations, resources, signs, behaviours which surround the individuals of every species - every form of being inhabits its own particular sphere (remember Borges contemplation on the hell of Pascal which has *its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere*). We are already familiar with the terms 'discursive domain' and *dispositif*. However, life-world seems more appropriate to our purpose because it refers to the autonomous activity of the life form at the centre of its own self-producing mechanism. This activity is directed towards main-

taining, not itself exactly, but the specific context in which it appears.

**John.Steven.** If the *alienating* mechanism of social production summarised in the concept of *dispositif* could be expressed by *Sound and Vision* then wouldn't *umwelt* find its best exposition in *In my room*?

**Joseph.** From my notebook, I see that the life-world is a *protective shield* and a stage for performance. It is a plane of existence inserted into reality. It is a necessary defence mechanism (*reizschutz*) that functions to conserve vital processes. Obviously, defences sometimes turn against and trap that which is defended, as in *The Burrow*. And Freud describes the constraints of perception and its conservational function, as if it were a life-world by which he means both a protective shield and a filtering mechanism:

*For the living organism protection against stimuli is almost a more important task than reception of stimuli; the protective barrier is equipped with its own store of energy and must above all endeavour to protect the special forms of energy-transformations going on within itself from the equalising and therefore destructive influence of the enormous energies at work in the outer world.*

**John.Steven.** What about the people who *have* chosen to quit the milieu?

**Joseph.** They did not leave. There is no choice in the matter. They were simultaneously abolished and expelled by the life-world.

**John.Steven.** But then, what about those who might enter the *umwelt* and seek to make themselves at home. Do you hope to achieve, to reach out?

**Joseph.** These nibbling creatures, who Kafka dismisses as 'small fry', and who we take also to be the terrifying creatures outside the burrow, are all wholly unsuspecting... they are not motivated by the enticements of *our world* but fall in accidentally, or are simply drawn into the labyrinth for some other reason - following a length of thread. Nobody is ever persuaded to become a communist.



**Jack.** Are you coming to the end of the project you have set yourself for describing the communist life-world?

**Joseph.** I don't know. There is a loss of energy. There are fewer and fewer readers and even less who are willing to negotiate with us. We are passing into a state of *unrecognisability*. Nobody talks to us now. Nobody even bothers to denounce us. For reason of our isolation we have less and less to say. We have wandered far out, onto the thin ice. Even now, we are drifting, or so it seems, so many, so many, light years from home.

**John.Steven.** Your discourse elicits no response from the expected source.

**All.** It receives no answer at all.

**John.Steven.** And consciousness is a wound to the world from which life energy flows.

**All** It may be cleaned and tended but does heal.

**John.Steven.** What follows the last?

**All.** At the end is released pure content. Which is unknown.

**John.Steven.** From which there follows elaboration. Which is unknown.

**All.** But not for us as we are fixed in final relation.

**John.Steven.** As the last in relation to the last.

**Joseph.** If the last adventure was revolution, then we are presented with non-adventure as the true last relation to the world.

**Jack.** That is not very appealing.

**Joseph.** We are not *in* advertising. Communism is a mode of organisation which requires no permissions, nor agreements to operate as a transcendent term, but on the contrary, conditions what is to be permitted as social intercourse.

**Jack.** There is always a return to your fascination with constraint.

**Joseph.** It is constraints and not 'possibilities' that are decisive... this is not about persuading or selling - we are not looking to manipulate the 'affect switch' in human beings. Anyone who agrees with communism can later disagree with it... that is a very flimsy sort of relation to life-world. It is not possible to 'choose' a life-world but only maintain it, like a creature in a burrow.

**Jack.** But human beings must produce the conditions of communism?

**Joseph.** Communism is not made 'possible' through the actions of human beings but it is a frame for constraining human actions.

**John.Steven.** Which is why you reference the image of the 'saved saviour', i.e. salvation must have occurred before there can be salvation.

**Joseph.** The fallen term is to be raised up by unknown means *before* it becomes autonomously viable. The saviour who appears *prematurely*, within the created world, and thus not upon the plane of salvation, undertakes what is merely a 'reform' function. Under such conditions he saves souls 'for' the world as it is. There are acts of salvation all the time but they feed into the fallen world of creation. Similarly, *le communisme pour le communisme* cannot be 'achieved' by conscious effort, and nor can it 'achieve' itself by objective movement. The mystery lies in the thought of the *relation of communism* sheered away from the *process of communism*. Mystifyingly, we await an event of the uncaused caused.



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