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People of the World, One More Effort!

Raoul Vaneigem

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April 10, 2020

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"Please distribute this text and, if possible, print it for people who do not have access to the Internet or distrust it." Translated from the French by NOT BORED! on 12 April 2020. All footnotes by the translator. Note that Vaneigem's title echoes Sade's famous manifesto, "One more effort, Frenchmen, if you would be republicans!" (1795).

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the errors of the past. Self-management is the seed in the insurrection of everyday life. Let us remember that it was Communist duplicity that destroyed and stopped the experiments of the libertarian collectives in the Spanish Revolution.

I am not asking anyone to approve of me and even less to follow me. I make my own way. Everyone is free to do the same. The desire for life is limitless. Our true homeland is everywhere that the freedom to live is threatened. Our land is a homeland without borders.

clarity and mobilize a veritable *healthcare self-defense*. Isn't this an experience that heralds extensions of self-managing practices?

Nothing is more important than preparing ourselves to take charge of the public sectors, previously managed by the State, before the dictatorship of profit scrapped them.

The State and the rapacity of its patrons have brought everything to a stop, paralyzed everything, save for the enrichment of the rich. It is one of history's ironies that pauperization is now the basis for a general reconstruction of society. How can someone who has confronted death fear the State and its cops?

Our wealth is our will to live. Refusing to pay taxes and fees has ceased to belong [exclusively] to the repertoire of subversive incitements. How will the millions of people who lack the means of subsistence be in a position to pay them, while money – counted in the billions – continues to be swallowed up by the abyss of financial malfeasance and the debt worsened by it? Let us not forget that it is the priority accorded to profit that gives rise to pandemics and the inability to treat them. Will we remain in the position of the “mad cow”¹⁶ without drawing any lessons from the experience? Will we finally admit that the market and its managers are the virus to be eradicated?

The time for indignation, lamentation, and the assessments of intellectual disarray has passed. I insist on the importance of decisions taken “by the people and for the people” in local and federated assemblies where matters of food, housing, transportation, healthcare, education, monetary cooperatives and the improvement of the human, animal and vegetal environments are concerned.

Let's move ahead, even if we have to grope to find our way. Better to meander in our experimentation than to regress and repeat

¹⁶ Bovine spongiform encephalopathy is a neurodegenerative disease that affects cattle. Caused by the consumption of meat-and-bone meal, “mad cow disease” broke into public consciousness in 1990s.

The world changes from the bottom up

The shock of the coronavirus¹ has only carried out the judgment that the totalitarian economy founded on the exploitation of people and nature has announced against itself.

The old world is fainting and collapsing. The new one, dismayed by the heaping up of the ruins, doesn't dare clear them out. More frightened than resolved, it struggles to find the boldness of the child who learns to walk. As if screaming about the disaster for so long has left the people without a voice.

And yet those who have escaped from the deadly tentacles of the commodity are standing up amidst the rubble. They have awoken to the reality of an existence that will no longer be the same. They want to free themselves from the nightmare that the denaturation of the earth and its inhabitants has brought down upon them.

Isn't this proof of the indestructibility of life? Isn't it on this fact that the lies from above and the denunciations from below are shattered in the same backwash?

The struggle to live has no need for justifications. The reclamation of the sovereignty of life is able to destroy the empire of the commodity, the institutions of which are being shaken up globally.

Until now, we have only battled to survive. We have remained confined in a social jungle in which the law of the strongest and craftiest has reigned. Will we leave behind the imprisonment in which the epidemic of the coronavirus has held us, only to return to the *danse macabre* of prey and predator? Isn't it obvious to everyone that the insurrection of everyday life, of which the Yellow Vests² have been the harbinger in France, is nothing other than the overcoming of the survival that this society of predation hasn't stopped imposing on us daily and militarily?

¹ Cf. Vaneigem's previous statement, “Coronavirus,” dated 17 March 2020, and translated into English here: www.notbored.org.

² Cf. Vaneigem's “Concerning the ‘Yellow Vests,’” dated 11 December 2018, and translated into English here: www.notbored.org.

That which we no longer want is the seed of what we do want

Life is a natural phenomenon that is at a permanent state of experimental boiling. Life is neither good nor bad. Its manna gives us [edible] morels as well as [poisonous] *Amanite phalloides*.³ Life is in us and in the universe like a blind force. But it has endowed the human species with the ability to distinguish the morel from the death cap and a little more besides that! It has armed us with consciousness; it has given us the ability to create ourselves by recreating the world.

To make us forget about this extraordinary aptitude, it has been necessary to weigh us down with the weight of a history that begins with the first City-States and that ends – even quicker than otherwise if we get our hands on it – with the crumbling of market globalization.

Life is not a speculative enterprise. It only cares about signs of respect, reverence and worship. It has no other meaning or direction [sens] than human consciousness, which life has given our species in order to illuminate it.

Life and its human sense [sens] are the poetry made by one and by all.⁴ This poetry has always shined with its radiance in the great uprisings of freedom. We no longer want it to be an ephemeral flash, as it has been in the past. We want to put into play a permanent insurrection, one just like the passionate fire of life, which dies down but never dies out.

It is now the entire world that is improvising a song of the trails.⁵ It is here that our will to live forges itself by breaking the chains of power and predation – the chains that we, men and women, have forged for our misfortunes.

³ Also known as “death cap” mushrooms.

⁴ An echo of Lautreamont’s famous slogan, “Poetry should be made by all and not by one.”

⁵ An allusion to the title of Bruce Chatwin’s book, *Un chant des pistes* (1987).

Enough of these electoral farces and cheap diatribes! May these elected representatives, who are conjoined by financial interests, be swept away like trash and disappear from our horizon in the same way that the portion of life that gives them their human appearance has also disappeared.

We do not want to judge and condemn the oppressive system that condemns us to death. We want to destroy it.

How can we not end up returning to this world that is collapsing, in us and before us, if we don’t construct a [new] society with the humanity that remains within our reach, with individual and collective solidarity? The awareness of an economy that is managed by the people and for the people implies the destruction of the mechanisms of the market economy.

As part of its final feat, the State hasn’t been contented with merely taking its citizens hostage and imprisoning them. Its non-assistance to people at risk is killing them by the thousands.

The State and its patrons have wrecked the public services. Nothing works anymore. We are certain about it: the only thing that continues to function is the criminal organization of profit-making.

The State and its patrons have conducted their affairs with no regard for the people; the results are deplorable. It is up to the people to take care of their own affairs by ruining theirs. It is up to us to make everything get going again on new roads.

The more exchange-value prevails over use-value, the more the reign of the commodity imposes itself. The more we give priority to the use that we want to make of our lives and our environments, the more the commodity loses its biting intensity. What’s free [*la gratuité*] will deal it a deathblow.

Self-management marks the end of the State, the bankruptcy and noxiousness of which the pandemic has highlighted. The protagonists of parliamentary democracy are the undertakers of a society dehumanized for profit.

On the other hand, we have seen the people, confronted with the deficiencies of their governments, demonstrate an unfailing soli-

What must be eradicated is the system of dehumanization that is put into place and applied ferociously by those who defend it because of their taste for power and money. Capitalism was judged and condemned a long time ago. We are weighed down by the plethora of the defense's arguments. We've heard enough.

Capitalist imagery identifies its death throes with the death throes of the entire world. The specter of the coronavirus has been, if not the premeditated result, then at least the precise illustration of capitalism's absurd curse. The cause is understood. The exploitation of people by people, of which capitalism is the avatar, is an experiment that has turned out badly. Let us make sure than the sinister joke of its being the sorcerer's apprentice is devoured by a past from which it should never have emerged.

Only the exuberance of rediscovered life can break both the handcuffs of market barbarity and the characterological armoring that stamps the mark of what's economically correct into the living flesh of each and every person.

Self-managed democracy annuls parliamentary democracy

It is no longer a question of tolerating the fact that, perched at all levels of their national, European, trans-Atlantic and global commissions, the leaders come before us to play the roles of guilty and not guilty. The economic bubble, which they have inflated with virtual debts and fictitious money, is imploding and collapsing right before our eyes. The economy is paralyzed.

Well before the coronavirus revealed the extent of the disaster, the authorities at the "senior levels" seized hold of and stopped the machine, more surely so than the strikes and social movements that, though very useful as protests, remained much less effective than they needed to be.

Here we are, at the heart of a transformation that is social, economic, political and existential. This is the moment of *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*,⁶ "here is Rhodes, here you jump." It is not an order to reconquer the world from which we have been chased. It is the breath of life that the irresistible impulse of the people will restore to its absolute rights.

Alliance with nature demands the end of its lucrative exploitation

We haven't fully understood the concomitant relationship between the violence exercised by the economy against nature, which it pillages, and the violence with which the patriarchy has struck women ever since it was established, three or four thousand years before the advent of the so-called Christian era.

With the advent of so-called "green" capitalism [*le capitalisme vert-dollar*], the brutal pillaging of terrestrial resources has tended to give way to subornation on a grand scale. Though the name of the game is protecting nature, it is still nature that pays the price. Thus things proceed as they do in simulations of love in which the rapist dolls himself up as a seducer in order to better grab hold of his prey. Predation has long used the practice of the velvet glove to get what it wants.

We are at a moment when a new alliance with nature takes on the utmost importance. It is obviously not a question – how could it be? – of returning to a symbiosis with the natural world in which the hunter-gatherer civilizations evolved before they were supplanted by a civilization founded on commerce, intensive agriculture, patriarchal society and hierarchical power.

It is rather, as one will certainly understand, a question of restoring a natural world in which life is possible, the air is breathable,

⁶ Latin in original.

the water drinkable, agriculture is practiced without the use of poisons, the freedom of commerce is revoked by the freedom of living beings, the patriarchy is dismembered and all hierarchies are abolished.

The effects of dehumanization and of the attacks systematically conducted against the environment have had no need of the coronavirus to demonstrate the toxicity of market oppression.⁷ On the other hand, the catastrophic management of the catastrophe has shown the inability of the State to demonstrate the slightest efficiency outside of the only functions that it is able to exercise: repression and the militarization of individuals and societies.

The struggle against denaturation has nothing to do with promises and commendable rhetorical intentions, whether or not they are bribed by the market in renewable energy. It is actually based upon a practical project that bets on the inventiveness of individuals and collectivities. The permaculture that renatures the lands poisoned by the market in pesticides is only a testimony to the creativity of people who have everything to gain by destroying that which has conspired to bring about its loss. It is time to ban the concentration-camp livestock farms in which the abuse of animals has notably been the cause of swine fever, Avian flu and cows driven crazy by the madness of fetishized money that economic reason will once again try to get us to ingest, if not digest.

Do these caged animals who leave their confinement to enter the slaughterhouse have a destiny that is so different from ours? Do we not live in a society that pays dividends to the business parasites and let the men, women and children who lack proper medical care die? An unanswerable economic logic reduces

⁷ In my opinion, a better way to have phrased this would have been: “the coronavirus wasn’t necessary to demonstrate the toxicity of market oppression: the effects of dehumanization and of the attacks systematically conducted against the environment were enough.” But, of course, I’m just the translator of this text, not its author.

The absurd inhumanity that has sickened us for so long has exploded like an abscess in the confinement into which the politics of lucrative assassination (cynically practiced by the financial mafias) have led us.

Death is the final indignity that human beings inflict on each other. Not due to the effects of a [divine] curse, but because of the denaturation that was forced upon them.

When we break the chains that we have forged out of fear and guilt, we will not be motivated by fear or guilt, but by life rediscovered and restored. Doesn’t this show, in these times of extreme oppression, the invincible power of mutual aid and solidarity?

A form of education repeated for millennia has taught us to repress our emotions, to shatter our life impulses. Under it, we have been told that the animal in us must become an angel *at any cost*.

Our schools are lairs for hypocrites, inhibited people, and thoughtful torturers. The last ones who are impassioned by knowledge flounder around there with the courage of despair. Upon leaving our prison cells, we will finally learn to free science from the fetters of its lucrative utility? Will we devote ourselves to refining our emotions instead of repressing them? Will we rehabilitate our animal nature, not tame it, the way we tame our allegedly inferior brothers and sisters in the animal world?

Here I am not encouraging anyone to practice perpetual ethical and psychological goodwill; I am merely pointing my finger at the fear market in which security makes the noise of its boots heard. I am drawing attention to the manipulation of emotions that stultifies and stupefies the masses; I am guarding against the guilt-tripping that prowls in search of scapegoats.

“Down with the old people, the unemployed, the undocumented immigrants, the homeless, the Yellow Vests – throw them out!” It is the roaring of these stockholders in nothingness who shop for the coronavirus in order to propagate the emotional plague. The mercenaries of death only obey the orders of the dominant logic.

which relentless competition, rivalry and the pushiness of “get out of my way” [*pousse-toi de là que je m’y mette*] have confined us to the barracks.

Voluntary servitude is a mob of unruly soldiers who march in step. A step to the left, a step to the right?¹⁴ Does it matter? They both remain in the order of things.

Anyone who accepts being barked at, whether it is from above or from below, has no other future than that of a slave.

Leaving the morbid¹⁵ world and the end of market civilization

Life is a world that opens up and it is an opening upon the world. It has certainly often been subjected to the terrible phenomenon of inversion in which love changes into hatred, in which the passion for living becomes an instinct for death. For centuries, life has been reduced to enslavement, colonized by the crude necessity of having to work and survive in the manner of an animal.

And yet we have never before seen such confinement, in isolation cells, of millions of couples, families and solitary individuals, whom the failure of the health services have convinced to accept their lot, if not docilely then at least with contained rage.

Each person finds him- or herself alone, confronted with an existence in which it is tempting to disentangle servile work from crazy desire. Is the boredom of consumable pleasures compatible with the elation of the dreams that childhood left cruelly unfulfilled?

The dictatorship of profit-making has resolved to take everything from us at the very moment in which its powerlessness is spreading globally and exposes it to potential destruction.

¹⁴ Cf. David Bowie, “Fashion” (1980): “Fashion! Turn to the left. Fashion! Turn to the right. Oooh, fashion! We are the goon squad and we’re coming to town.”

¹⁵ The French word used here, *morbide*, can also mean sick or unhealthy.

budgetary resources due to the growing number of old people. It foresees a final solution that with impunity condemns them to die in retirement homes deprived of resources and caregivers. In Nancy, France a high-ranking health official recently declared that the [coronavirus] epidemic isn’t a valid reason for not continuing to reduce hospital beds and medical personnel in accordance with previously made plans.⁸ Nobody kicked his ass. These economic assassins cause less commotion than a mentally ill person running through the streets brandishing the knife of religious illumination.

I am not appealing to popular justice; I am not encouraging the massacre of the dirt-bags of business turnover.⁹ I’m only asking that human generosity makes the return of market reason impossible.

All the methods of governing that we have known have gone bankrupt, disintegrated by their cruel absurdity. It is the people who must implement the project of a society that restores to the human, the animal, the vegetal and the mineral their fundamental unity.

The lie that describes such a project as “utopian” hasn’t resisted the shock of reality. History has struck the market civilization of obsolescence and insanity. The construction of a human civilization hasn’t simply become possible; it now clears the way for the unique road – passionately and desperately dreamed of by innumerable generations – that opens upon the end of our nightmares.

Because despair has changed sides; it belongs to the past. The passion of a present to be constructed remains with us. We will

⁸ His name is Christophe Lannelongue, the director of the Regional Health Agency of the Grand Est. He made these remarks on 3 April 2020. See this news report (French only): www.rtl.fr-supprimer-des-postes-a-l-hopital-colere-chez-les-soignants-et-les-elus-7800364774.

⁹ The French here, *septembriser les pouacres du chiffre d’affaire*, echoes the massacres carried out in September 1797 during the French Revolution.

take the time to abolish the *time is money*¹⁰ that is the time of programmed death.

Renaturation is a broth of new cultures in which we will have to fumble around between confusion and innovations in the most varied domains of activity. Haven't we accorded too much credit to a mechanistic medical practice that often treats the body like a mechanic treats the car in his garage? How can we not distrust an expert who repairs us so that we can get sent back to work?

Hasn't the dogma of anti-nature, for so long hammered into us by production-centered imperatives, contributed to the exasperation of our emotional reactions, to the propagation of panic and security-conscious hysteria, thus exacerbating the conflict with a virus that the *immune systems* of our bodies would have had some chance of softening or rendering less aggressive, if they hadn't been weakened by market totalitarianism, to which nothing inhuman is foreign?¹¹

We have been completely drenched with the progress of technology. To end up with what? Heavenly flights to Mars and the terrestrial absence of beds and respirators in the hospitals.

Assuredly there will be more to marvel at, in the discoveries of a life of which we know nothing or almost nothing. Who could doubt it? No one will, except for the oligarchs and their lackeys, whom mercantile diarrhea will empty of their substance and whom we will confine to their latrines.

To have done with the militarization of the body, morals and mentalities

Repression is the State's final reason for existing. The State itself is subjected to it under the pressure of the multinationals, which

¹⁰ English in original.

¹¹ Cf. the writings of Michel Bounan, especially *Le Temp du Sida* (1990).

impose their diktats upon the earth and life. The foreseeable questioning of the governments' decisions will respond to this question: would confinement have been relevant [with respect to stopping the spread of the coronavirus] if the medical infrastructure had remained efficient and hadn't experienced its well-known dilapidation, which was decreed by the *obligation to be profitable*?

Meanwhile – there is no denying it – the current militarization and ferocious security-consciousness have only adopted the ongoing repression imposed all over the world. The democratic order couldn't have asked for a better pretext for protecting itself against the anger of the people. Isn't imprisonment at home the goal of those in power, worried about the weariness of their assault teams of police clubbers, eye-pokers and salaried killers? A nice dress rehearsal of the netting tactic now employed against peaceful demonstrators, demanding the rehabilitation of the hospitals, among other things.

At least we have been warned: the governments will now try everything to make us go from confinement to the doghouse. But who will accept going docilely from penal austerity to the comforts of patched-together servility?

It is probable that the rage of those who are caged will seize the occasion to denounce the tyrannical and aberrant system that treats the coronavirus in the fashion of the multi-colored terrorism¹² with which the market in fear has had a field day.

Reflection doesn't stop here. Think of the schoolchildren who, in the country of the Rights of Man,¹³ have been forced to kneel down before the State's cops. Think of the education system in which, for centuries, professorial authoritarianism has shackled the spontaneous curiosity of the children and prevented the generosity of knowledge from being freely propagated. Think of the extent to

¹² Terrorism of all political stripes.

¹³ That would be France, where "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" was promulgated in 1798.