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## Letter into the Void

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We live a life that condemns us to death from the beginning. We're born with the certainty of our end. And this life that demands so much from us, that loads so much weight on our shoulders, that resists our free choices and actions, can lead quite a few to pull the emergency brakes prematurely, when no strength and joy can be found to carry on the prescribed path to its end.

The impotence, disgust and exhaustion from existence can also stem from something outside of society, but I want to point to the social relations that give rise to the individual circumstances that drive the individual to suicide.

The lack of emotions and sensations seems to be a rather legitimate reaction to a surrounding that seeps a deep grey into our perceptions. Tied down by constraints - money, efficiency, exploitation - we're kept away from the places, persons and experiences that we long for. We're trotting along worn out paths instead of making our own discoveries, deviations and orientations. This is a world in which our paths channel us through a sea of concrete and asphalt, in which our senses are tortured, in which we cannot call time our own. In which each morning the alarm clock wakes us from dreams full of promise. We get driven from A to B in over-

loaded means of transport. And each evening we stumble totally exhausted into bed. While too often the money in the bank account even isn't enough for the rent. The question of meaning – in which the desire for life can push back the aversion of mere survival – doesn't seem to be possible to be answered in this constant fight for survival and conservation. In Germany each year around 10,000 persons commit suicide, and depression and burn-out seem to be the diseases of the 21st century. Doesn't that make us understand that we're not deranged, but the conditions in which we're living are?

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Our inexisting freedom and the alienation of our lives are so all-encompassing that even our death, our end cannot lie in our own hands. Suicidals are chastised as deserters; moral repression and social norms are the consequences. If we're anyhow here then we seem to be forced to submit to our duty to live. How can we expect from tired, exhausted and haggard persons that they discover joy and an appetite for life – for which the only alternatives seem to be some pharmaceuticals or rehabilitation measures – for a life that isn't ours?

Human misery, the painful process of converging and separating, venturing into new ways, changing ourselves or making choices... all are vulnerable moments; we can feel confused, overpowered, intimidated, crippled or lonely. Most particularly when we are persuaded that we cannot comprehend our own feelings, reactions and motives, that our own power of judgement is unreliable, that our mental processes are false and that we can only have hope of betterment through the aid of experts. Through the assignment in categories like "normal" and "abnormal" can the fear of being "sick" or not "normal" lead to paranoia. The fear of losing your social surroundings, of being seen as a burden or just of somehow being locked up. Agonies, "mental illness", feelings of – for example – alienation, loneliness and isolation are the destructive consequences of a society that suffocates our individuality.

The belief that it is somehow “false”, that it should be “corrected” (or at least suppressed) can only lead to the self-alienation of people and to feeling themselves to be miserable and worthless. However, mental illness and their diagnostic categories are societal constructions. The border between the norm (“normality”) and deviation (“mental illness”) is partly a random attribution, based on conventions. While new legislation is drawn up constantly, to ever more tighten the corset of legality, new mental disorders are “discovered” to create new categories of “madness”, to open up new markets for the pharmaceutical industry and to force people into an always smaller spectrum of “healthy”. Also the new police mandates show how tightly intertwined these two things are – the repressive, policing structuring of the outside, the material world and the inner, mental world. The “Bavarian Mental-Illness-Assistance-Bill” foresees that any cop can lock up in a psychiatric institution someone who causes trouble or doesn’t fit in the picture.

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Psychiatry is a repressive instrument, equipped with state and police power, with locks and bars, with psychotropic drugs and tools of torture. It incorporates a certain idea, namely the assumption that the individual is a carrier of an invisible illness or an inherited strain which can be discovered by experts and “healed” through the use of force. Psychiatry becomes a means of social control and state power, endowed with authority, and which denies the individual with its own will and desires. For example the heretics, witches, prostitutes, “deranged” and in fact all “social deviants” who were “treated” (tortured, exorcised, burned) by the Inquisition, shows well how the myth of “mental illness” is used by the system to repress. It is claimed that one is possessed by demons, which should be driven out and eliminated by whatever coercive means. Some switched from witch-hunting to psychiatry when the church began to lose its power, to basically do the same work; to

take on the “possessed” and to try to adapt them to the societal standards. These standards change over time and space.

Behind the ideas of mental health and mental illness is a massive industry. A total surveillance system with closed sections and corresponding means; security personnel and technological devices, manufacturers of tools for recording, controlling and electroshocking and of course the pharmaceutical industry itself.

How can we recover, become “healthy” in a world that is sick, in institutions that lock us up, make us swallow drugs against our will and deny our own will? We cannot expect to find joy and wholeness without changing our surroundings, without changing this dreary reality. Every real, profound change also means necessarily a change of society as a whole. This society in which we can only choose between holding out or caving in, has to die so that we can live. So that we can take each others hand in the madness of being, without constraint or pressure.