

Art and Revolt

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If the theme of this conference was pure Art, this hall would be filled with artists and the group of men who invited you tonight would be sitting next to you in the audience rather than up here on the stage. As is the case with you, so it is for the members of Arte Social: we have little respect for those dilettantes who, despite their disdain for the bourgeoisie—in comparison to whom they are often inferior—nonetheless do not hesitate to appropriate their passions, and like them seek to make their fortune, voluntarily emulating their social vices in order to acquire some advantage; they are, definitely, the most entrenched supporters of the capitalist oligarchy.

No. This group of men in whose name I address you, they are of the people, and not just by birth—many of those people to whom I just referred have forgotten and denied their origins—but through the community of shared sufferings and feelings, through an equal thirst for revolt against iniquity, through a selfsame aspiration for a social state in which each individual, with full awareness, can find the satisfaction of his needs in the satisfaction of the needs of others. They do not separate art from socialism, and unlike those who, believing that the multitude is incapable of intellectual sensations, refuse to write for them, they desire, alongside the communism of bread, the communism of artistic pleasures. In order to more clearly enunciate these feelings, the members of Arte Social have chosen to hold the group's first public meeting in a revolutionary neighborhood; they have entrusted the exposition of their principles to a militant of the syndicalist army; and have chosen to inaugurate their future labors with the topic: Art and Revolt.

Ah! Do not believe that they are your worst enemies, those men of such narrow spiritual horizons, of limited desires, who only think of their immediate profit and do not want to know anything about social affairs besides commercial transactions. If only they stood between you and capitalist society, your emancipation would be imminent, because the strength of your muscles and the power of your vital energy would soon overwhelm them. Their base appetites blind them, they do not see the constant progress of the people's movement, social evolution escapes their vigilance, and they are very surprised when you tell them: "while you thought of nothing but pleasure, the minds of the people opened up to the light. The day approaches when that part of the goods that your egoism has stolen from the multitude, the multitude will take back from you." And if by chance a few of them reflect upon the danger that threatens the capitalist social order, they soon shrug their shoulders and scornfully repeat the old refrain: "It won't happen during my lifetime!"

Your more dangerous enemies are those who, while themselves thinking about pleasure, endeavor to deprive others of the desire to enjoy pleasure, who have for centuries been persuading you—to your shame—that you need rich people in order to give work and livelihood to the poor, those who have told you that “the sufferings endured in this life will be the measure of the pleasures you can expect in the next life”; those who, in short, knowing how much the thirst for freedom (for moral freedom as much as for material freedom) develops in the man of intellectual culture, undertake unprecedented efforts to keep you in ignorance, deceptively interpreting for your benefit the evangelical doctrine: blessed are the poor in spirit! By every means available and in all circumstances, they have endeavored, on the one hand, to instill in the people the idea that social inequality is the consequence of natural and therefore unchangeable laws, and, on the other hand, to make their fate more miserable every day, so that in addition to the resignation and moral feebleness caused by ignorance, physical weakness is added, in order to squelch any revolt even before it can arise. This is how they have been able to enjoy life in peace, and have even won the respect of the multitude, for the honor of exploiting them.

Ignorance, then, is what has created resignation. It is to Art that the noble task of transforming this resignation into rebellion falls. To the still confused perception of the inequality of rights, art must contribute its assistance and destroy, by tearing off the veil that conceals what is ridiculous and hateful, the respect mixed with fear that the multitude still feels for the morals invented by human duplicity.

For everything is already in place. Remove the veil from social lies, and then you can point out how and why religions were created, how the patriotic cult was created, how the family was built on the model of government, how the need for masters was inculcated. This is the goal of revolutionary Art. For as long as the shadow of prejudice clouds the spirit of man, we can make revolutionaries, change the useless political scripts to one extent or another, even overthrow empires, but the social Revolution will still not have taken place.

Perhaps this very necessary labor is too difficult? No, of course not, because despite the resistance of the privileged class, even without taking the latter into account, events have themselves brought about the lion’s share of social disintegration. For now we see that the need to curry favor with the public in order to capture power or to stay in power has obliged the competing political factions to concede to the public a small part, undoubtedly a very small but appreciable one, of that education which has until only very recently been the exclusive patrimony of the rich. As the needs determined by the consciousness of their rights expands geometrically, though they have hardly been provided with the rudiments of science the people have in fact taken a giant step on the road to moral emancipation. Public education has only just recently been implemented. Yet even though it has been allocated in very minute shares to the working classes, it has already produced that sum of demands that has crystallized under the name of socialism.

Furthermore, the rapid and unconstrained growth of pleasures, brought about by the development of mechanical industry, has caused the ruling classes to forget the caution they once employed in the presentation and dissimulation of their egotistical feelings, once the instincts and the enjoyment and the hustle and bustle of life had silenced all scruples, and they no longer feared the cynical and ostentatious display, against the background of the misery of the multitude, of the luxury and depravity of the privileged. In the hunt for lucre men have been pitted against each other. Many have fallen by the wayside exhausted, others have stumbled and fallen within inches of the goal, while the strongest stayed the course without feeling any compassion for the fallen. Once victorious, crazed by success, eager to enjoy what seemed to them to be such

precarious good luck, they shed the veneer of elegance with which the society of the past had disguised its vices, and now present their appetites in all their repugnant unvarnished nakedness.

This gave the people food for thought. Recently enlightened as to their rights, they compared the share that they received from the social wealth with what the rich appropriated, and articulated their grievance, thinking that a society in which wealth is distributed in inverse proportion to labor is a bad society.

Then the following dual movement began: the spirit of revolt growing along with the totality of iniquities, and the totality of iniquities growing—as occurs in every moribund society—with the manifestations of revolt. The more the grievances and demands of the multitude increased, and with them the threat of a cataclysm, the more the feverish desire of the rich for pleasures increased.

And what outrage have the privileged classes not dared to commit on a daily basis? In all the branches of the State we witness the same scorn for justice, property and duty. How passionate is the life that has no time for justice!

“A defendant,” we read in the *Temps*, “was brought to court. In order to better prove the case for his guilt, which was otherwise unimpressive, the judge thought it convenient to recite the bad habits of the defendant’s mother, who had nothing to do with the trial. The allegations, which were utterly irrelevant, were in addition completely false as well. The defendant, who is a good son, indignantly protested in such energetic terms, that the presiding judge felt it necessary to convene a new trial for insulting a judge during the exercise of his judicial functions. The court, however, more severe, postponed the issue for another session. The result: three months preventive detention added to the sufferings of the accused.”

“Such were, in all their nakedness, the events that just took place in the court at Bône. Various newspapers expressed their indignation, and not without reason, and public opinion was in its entirety on the side of the press. In this incident, which was very much like others of a similar kind, was revealed an extraordinary spiritual condition of the judicial world.”

“It must be confessed that the evil is very ancient, and what is most tragic is the fact that repeated protests articulated on different occasions have not led to a revision of the deplorable but common traditions in the halls of justice. Whether dealing with a criminal trial or a civil proceeding, it seems that for the men of the robe the people who appear in their presence are prisoners who can be devoured or treated unscrupulously.”

“As soon as it is necessary to prove the guilt of an individual in a murder, for example, and lacking sufficient direct proof, it is discovered that 15 or 20 years previously the accused was convicted of some minor delinquency or another, or as in the case we are discussing, he is crushed with true or false prior misdeeds, committed by his ancestors or his relatives, so that, in the end, the defense attorney seeks to establish the innocence of his client by hurling a flood of defamations and malicious insinuations against his adversary that have nothing in common with the case as it was presented before the court.”

“Jurors and judges, all of them seem to act as if they had been given the watchword to judge and to condemn without concerning themselves in the least with the enormous evil they are inflicting on the parties to the trial and the damage they are causing to justice itself..”

This is from the *Temps*, written with an eloquence that does honor to the feelings of the author. But we see other mischief done, which is even much more serious, because it appears to sanctify, by declaring that it is necessary, the subordination of the slave to the master. A glassworker appeared before the civil court at Avesnes, a man named Portal, who was fired for not having

saluted his boss, and who had been vindicated by appeal to the jurisdiction of the *Prud'hommes*. What did the civil court decree? “Considering ... the fact that a worker who does not salute his boss commits not just an act of disrespect but exhibits an injurious and provocative attitude that militates against the discipline of the establishment and the authority of the owner, the judgment of the council of the *Prud'hommes* is hereby annulled.”

“The world of the Halls of Justice,” Clemenceau said, “is a very strange world. When I have to pay a visit to its august vaults, I never fail to meet, dressed all in black and looking very serious, madmen whom I knew many years ago in the Latin Quarter, and who now exercise the profession of judges of men.”

“Above all they condemn them. Eternal distributors of punishments are not familiar with the pleasure of lavishing rewards. The French Academy with its prizes for virtue, the government with its decorations and its medals, reward the good, while the men in the red and black of the courts make the bad men tremble in fear. If on some occasion it should happen that a reward should be conferred upon an individual unworthy of it, this is often enough balanced by punishment being meted out to the innocent, so that the overall sum averages out to the justice of which we are so proud. So the bad tremble in fear ... and the good tremble in fear, too, just to be on the safe side. All these predatory thugs, cowering behind their sinister platforms, have sharp claws and pointed tusks. Society manufactures them in that way for the defendants, just as God made the cat for the mice. Be careful where you go, little mice.”

“To speak truly, if we were to know the uncountable traps that are set everywhere in the name of the law, we would never set one foot outside our door. Open the Legal Code and peruse the list of things that you cannot do. Before you get to the tenth page, you will be discouraged...”

“That is how the world is, however. One judges and another is judged; both are attached to the two ends of the same chain, pulling hard but unable to break a single link. In addition, custom makes all things bearable. One is brutalized in his cell while the other becomes calloused on his judicial bench...”

That is how the magistracy behaves. Those who have not had the opportunity to get to know the judicial world might imagine that before donning his robe the judge acquires a profound understanding of his function; that, humbled by the extravagant privilege of judging his own kind, fallible as he is, he leaves his passions, his prejudices and his grudges at the doors of the Court-house; that, at the very least, he clears his mind of the depressing concerns of his elevated status... What a misconception! This official, as León Daudet has written, “seated behind the bench and which only a very fragile barrier of education has perhaps prevented his being seated on the other side of the bench”, who has not abandoned his friendships, his opinions, and his interests, is a judge without ceasing to be a man. How could it be that the class to which he belongs, the individuals of his milieu, and the things he loves, would not be favored by his discretionary authority? Deaf to the complaints of a mutilated justice, he flatters, he praises, he congratulates, he absolves, all by virtue of the paramount principle that the social hierarchy, the supreme guarantee of public tranquility, must be preserved intact. And this explains the scandalous verdicts that are pronounced in favor of so many well known financial corporations—all-too well known—and so many famous individuals who have defrauded investors.

The poor get a different kind of treatment. They can suffer the most rigorous punishments without, so it is thought, threatening the stability of the capitalist edifice. They are not nobles, or priests, or men of means. They do not dispense favors; they are not Pillars of Society. It is permissible, indeed it is necessary, to treat them with just as much severity as the others are

treated with indulgence. And this is why the judges who are called upon to preside over the trials of the poor harm them without even being aware of it, convinced that they are making a pious offering to Justice and Order. So it was in the times of Rabelais, so it still is everywhere, and legislation, bad by its nature, is made still worse by passing through the filter of its interpretation. “The laws are spider webs that catch flies and moths, but are effortlessly rent asunder by birds of prey.”

In literature and art, the same scorn for justice and rights, the same cooperation in the oppressive labor of the bourgeois class. We shall not speak, however, of the immeasurable vanity that this or that writer displays, Enrique Beranger, for example, when they impute to socialism the goal of the creation of an aristocracy of artists and literati. These pretensions are so innocent that they make you smile. Nor shall we speak of the clamor that greets this or that writer when he announces his famous conferences with such gripping themes as: *princes and princesses who are writers*, as if it was not universally known that royal hands never so much as touched the pen that signed their works. We shall also have little enough to say about that low intellectual level that has caused thought and study to have to yield to the “spiritual manure” secreted by those who were once dubbed by a worthy man as “clowns”. All of these things are of minor significance.

What is more serious, and against which revolutionary thinkers and artists must immediately react, is the perversion of those writers, who are unfortunately talented, who devote their efforts to sowing and planting seeds in the minds of men. Attacks on common sense, charlatanism, madness, eroticism ... these are weapons that are more reliable and penetrating than steel, the weapons they use (those mediocre defenders of a society that they scorn) to wound the victims of the bourgeois Minotaur. And how much damage these weapons have done!

Suddenly, alongside the sober advice lavished on the poor, we have these stimuli to the dishonesty (already too easy) of the powerful.

Everyone will undoubtedly recall (although these days scandals follow one another in rapid succession) the collapse of the Discount Bank. A person named Emilio Clerc improperly deposited, in the name of the Mortgage Department, considerable sums in said Bank, which led to a trial. With regard to this trial, *Le Figaro* attempted to calm the spirit of indignation with the following words:

“How could Mr. Emilio Clerc have committed thirty-four million to the operations of the Discount Bank? The judges who questioned him yesterday did not take very long to discover that his situation was singularly difficult... Mr. Clerc, named by Mr. de Soubeyron as administrator of the Mortgage Department was, in effect, the employee of Mr. de Sonbayrosa in the Discount Bank, and as the director of this second establishment could not therefore (pay close attention to this) oppose any of the decisions made by these two establishments.”

In plain language, *Le Figaro* wants to say that a depository is not responsible for the diversion of all or part of the deposit entrusted to its custody, if this is requested by a superior, that is, that self-interest can in certain instances be a legitimate reason for one to act contrary to one’s duty. Someone else may have sacrificed his fortune to his honor and let Soubeyron take personal responsibility for robbing the Mortgage fund, his “gambling fund” as he called it. But this solution is no longer fashionable, and for the bourgeoisie it is very deplorable. Mister Clerc, who undoubtedly had confidence in the lucky star of his boss and hoped to be compensated for his services, preferred the other, more modern and more aristocratic option which in other circumstances would have proven more advantageous.

But it gets better. Mr. de Soubeyron (we are speaking through the mouth of *Le Figaro*, which knows the bank's high-level officers quite well) was previously obliged to resign the position that he held at Crédit Foncier as a result of certain speculative activities that may have compromised our biggest credit establishment. But due to this forced resignation he would always nourish resentment against that institution, which he still wanted to manage, and today's disaster certainly derives, in part, from the campaign to discredit Foncier that he engaged in with some other people a few days before in which the stocks of the latter began to recover their former ascendancy...

We therefore see that today's society is formed in such a way that an unscrupulous crook can with impunity compromise the funds entrusted to his management and ruin a public company out of vengeance. It was quite satisfying for him to get vengeance for a deserved humiliation, and under the indifferent gaze of power, this rogue encompassed the loss of millions belonging to small farmers and the worst thing is that, as the owner of more considerable capital than that held by the Discount Bank, he would get what he wanted.

What is the bourgeois class doing to punish such a scoundrel? It would be conceivable that they would not want him to be convicted, since those who stand in judgment of him could themselves also be incriminated. Is it to be believed that, at the very least, they could constrain him in such a way so as to prevent him from doing any more harm? A mistaken assumption! "Some powerful financiers," according to *Le Figaro*, "attempted to rescue this incorrigible player, the House of Rothschild among others, as they have done so generously on other occasions." And since the enormous quantity of capital devoured rendered all bailout attempts impossible, an effort was made to at least save the thief. The journalist from *Le Figaro* predicted, as if it were something that was simple, logical and just, that: "this catastrophe will be forgotten just like those that preceded it, and this forgetting will pardon all errors... and later no one will remember the Baron Soubeyron except as a powerful mover and shaker, a man of ideas and of action, possessed of a mad passion in his struggle but whose dreams were terribly disappointed..." But let us continue.

We also have the prodigious production of mysticism, mad enterprises whose authors are justified because they only imagine them with the object of amazing their clients more than ever, but which also has the effect of causing them to lose at an ever-increasing rate what little brains they had. Every day a new religion pops up: the resurrection of Buddhism, a new version of occultism and the Kabala, an imitation of the symbolism of the Rosicrucians, the mysteries of Isis.

"I never would have believed," said León Rosny, "that Buddhism would have had such success in France, or that it would have aroused such passions and enthusiasm. To what factors must this be attributed? Without a doubt, it is due to the restless spirit of our time, to the desire of the soul to find a belief and to find repose in faith after a period of doubts and uncertainties... I will forego the opportunity to extend the scope of my lecture to touch upon those who have nothing to do but to engage in the scientific study of Buddha and the exegesis of his texts. But my audience evidently expects something else... what it wants, I understand quite well, is to penetrate the mystery of Indian religion. It has a thirst for the supernatural. And it is in these aspects, in this mystical tendency of the modern spiritualists towards occultism, that the danger of the Buddhist movement currently resides... Tormented spirits, overexcited minds."

"The worst extravagances are to be expected... Do I have to say it? Every day I am visited by eminent men who confess to me that they are practicing and convinced Buddhists. One of them assured me that there are thirty thousand Buddhists in Paris."

“Alongside those who are seekers of religions, we can place those who are seekers of the immaterial, the theosophers, as they modestly call themselves, who ‘want to extend as far as possible research in the field of nature in order to try to understand its laws and to discover the psychological powers latent in man’.”

We may pass over the devotees of the Black Mass who in honor of Satan celebrate the ceremonies of the Catholics who honor God; the fabricators of voodoo dolls, which they strike and destroy, believing that they are punishing their enemies; those who ... but what use is a list of lunatics to us?

Jules Bois has collected in one book the one thousand lunacies that flourish in the unbalanced brains of every century, and all are the creation of writers or artists who could not produce healthy or strong works, or else were prodded to such creations by the desire for immediate fame (always available to those who excite the public), to produce horrible and sick works.

To the contempt for the common morality, dispensed by the rich for the benefit of the poor, in addition to mysticism, add the demoralization engendered by the lubricity of books, stage shows, paintings and even music. Books no longer inspire reflection, they prepare one for sexual intercourse; stage shows are no longer for artistic pleasure and intellectual repose, but are the elixirs that stimulate one for carnal exploits; paintings are no longer the sedating and exalting depictions of marvelous countries and harmonious nudity, but are cunning artifices for stripping away the flesh by setting the mind and the nether regions on fire.

What books do people read? *Charlot Has Some Fun*, *The Brothers Vatard*, *Madame La Bola*, *Madame Factón*, *The Two Friends* ... and this is read and accepted. This realism that talent cannot ennoble does not arouse contempt, while the healthy realism and the powers of Zola stimulate disapproval.

What stage shows do we watch? Here we can see five or six seated women, with cigarettes hanging from their lips, almost totally nude under their long gowns, with fishnet stockings that show much of what lies beneath; elsewhere, we see a woman who slowly undresses, piece by piece, uncovering one part of her body after another, distilling desire, or just as slowly taking off a beautiful dress; or an exotic woman, in a short dress, standing on the knees of a Spanish cyclist.

What paintings are exhibited? “A bed of pain: a young woman lying on her back, with unnaturally open eyes, her lips trembling. At her side her mother and her husband are grasping her hands and trying to encourage her; the midwife, her head between the sheets, is trying to help the girl by advising her to keep trying; finally, two maids illuminate the scene, and by watching lose whatever illusions they may have had about the poetry of life, if indeed they had not already lost more than their illusions. The public huddles around the scene of childbirth. In order to admire the delicate coloration, the delicious harmony of natural and artificial lighting that washes over the white sheets, or the skill of the design that makes the painting so sympathetic? Not at all. Looking at this painting, the women who are mothers are struck by painful memories, the young girls are shocked and the semi-virgins ... that will be decided, and there will be no lack of uneducated men to drag them by the ear into the muck. Is this what art should be for?”

What songs afflict our ears? A few little ditties with some idiotic rhymes about Alsace and Lorraine, revenge and the return of the soldier, you will listen to obscenities while gestures interpret the author’s accomplishment of having concentrated all his art into the hips and the breasts of the artiste.

It is of no use for us to say that our indignation is not caused by the injuries inflicted by this indecent assault, since for us the assault is nothing but an obscenity. But, always driven towards

the carnal act, the people end up by sacrificing to it their generous desires of emancipation; deceived by the stooping posture of the ruling classes they end up believing they are satisfied with the petty delights offered to their manly appetites.

We therefore face a situation where in every case, Art, or what passes for Art (since in the general disequilibrium that characterizes our time even words have lost their meaning) has become the servant and accomplice of bourgeois society, and has become even more dangerous than capitalist exploitation itself. The ruthless factory owner exercises pressure on the producer, but by pressuring him excites him to revolt. When his blows exceed the capacity for resignation of his victims, the latter raise their fists and return blows with blows. But what defense can be mounted against the seductions of modern Art? Who among those victims of life, of those men who, exhausted by a day of hard labor, will not allow themselves to be further weakened by the coarse pleasures afforded by such reading material and such spectacles offered to human curiosity? The brutality of the rich awakens the energy and triggers revolts, but those unhealthy pleasures drown the former and repress the latter. Depressed during the day by labor and brutalized during the night by impure alcoholic beverages and obscene spectacles, the multitude has neither the time nor the freedom of spirit necessary for reflection upon their fate, and this explains the indifference and the cowardice with which the people who once rose in revolt now endure the worst outrages. Wash away the slap in the face with absinthe; the uncertainty of tomorrow will be forgotten at the show; the virility of the insurrection will be brought to the brothel.

Whenever one considers that the exploiters are an insignificant minority and the exploited a vast multitude, that in every one of our great cities a few thousand soldiers more or less loyal to the social order restrain by their presence ten times as many brave and hearty men, and that, nonetheless, the millions of the exploited hope for, with an always growing humility and tranquility, the good will of their exploiters, the spirit is shocked and the reason is indignant.

It is enough for a few men to say to this multitude: “think this”, for the multitude to think it; “do this”, for the multitude to do it; “work for us”, for the multitude to offer their labors; “come here”, for the multitude to run to them; “go away”, for the multitude to go, and such is the ease with which their obedience is secured that the rich do not even have to take the kind of precautions, while dictating their orders, that one would take with a domesticated but surly dog. The bourgeoisie no longer has to put the people in harness; it is enough for it to blow its whistle to make the people obey.

But how simple it would be to establish the harmonious society towards which all of us, who suffer in our needs and our aspirations, strive with our might and our main! What would the multitude not be capable of doing to those mercenaries were it merely to resolve to assure their own welfare despite the formidable power of capitalism! We are no sooner accused of wanting to make mankind regress to primitive and barbaric times, than we have to face the accusation that we are dreaming of such a perfect state of society that it can be considered to be a chimera. It is necessary to go into details. The society we dream of is as distant from the first societies, where force was the final arbiter of everything, as it is from the ideal City imagined by our precursors. What do we want? The perfection of current society, the utilization of the marvelous resources that could be put at the service of human activity, the equal benefit for all from the aid these resources contribute to physical labor, the reasonable and equitable employment of society’s intelligence, its powers and its discoveries, and, at the same time, the suppression of the means by which society has authorized the individual appropriation of the common fruits, that is, the

suppression of Money and Authority. Does this mean that when this transformation has been brought about, that man will have disencumbered himself of his passions, suppressed his egoism, and destroyed his violent instincts, and that he will have found happiness? We have never proclaimed such foolishness. We clearly believe that when man is born he is a blank slate upon which either good or bad passions can be inscribed, virtues as well as vices and that, as a result, it is the social and family environment that decides the outcome of his existence, situating him in healthy surroundings after having supplied him with a good education, he will be, so to speak, compelled to live an honorable and dignified life. We are not, however, so crazy as to believe that his moral transformation will be effected as quickly as his social transformation. In the early stages of the society that we want to establish there will be, as before, violent and egotistical people. But it is our intention that the suppression of money and authority (that instrument, that consecration of egoism, of fraud and of suffering) will prevent these passions from being translated into actions. Evil will still exist, but its manifestations will have been reduced in number. Will that not be result enough for our desires? With regard to happiness, we do not possess and we believe that no one will ever possess its formula. Most likely, there will always be moral, intellectual and physical miseries such as we have known until today: suffering, frustrated desires, faded illusions. We shall have the opportunity to enjoy, or rather society will allow us to have the opportunity to enjoy, well-being. We shall seek to confer this well-being on everything that lives and thinks, and once this is achieved, we will have fulfilled our duty.

And however pessimistic we may become faced with the daily spectacle of so many social infamies, we should derive some consolation from an evaluation of the progress attained by the ideas of revolt. How many moralities have disappeared! How many prejudices have faded away in this execrable social order; everything is in motion. This is not one of those sudden shipwrecks, one of those social death-crises in which the sublime defies the horrific and whose memory is preserved because they disturb the universe and instruct man regarding his insignificance in the evolution of the planets. It is neither the fall of Sparta, nor the entombment of Pompey, nor the sudden collapse of the empires of Alexander and Napoleon. It is the decrepitude of Byzantium, the decline of Rome, but even of lesser stature, it is a wave of mud that is composed of the mixture of broken prejudices, beliefs and moralities.

In the countries of the blazing sun there are certain unhealthy fruits that ripen quickly and rot just as quickly, plants whose life is nothing but a rush towards death and that shine all the more brilliantly the more ephemeral their existence. These plants and fruits are our bourgeoisie. No sooner is it born than it becomes rich and powerful. During an age when races and castes had to face the possibility of a drastic turn for the worse in their fortunes and the instability of power, our bourgeoisie was in full possession of its force. It has lived for fifty years and is already dying. What a terrible lesson!

Seeking the cause of this fatal condition afflicting capitalism outside of capitalism itself, would be a vain enterprise. One hundred years ago, the peoples still had the same respect for governments, religions, family and fatherland that they had three thousand years ago. They overthrew dynasties, beheaded kings, destroyed altars and pillaged entire regions, but they still bowed to authority. They killed their master and at the same time they shouted, long live the master! One god disappeared and people were down on their knees before other gods and the fatherland was for the peoples the Hindu monster whose appetite for blood was considered to be a great gift. That is how it was one hundred years ago. It is true that we still have rulers, but we scoff at authority and spit in the faces of the owners. It is true that religions still exist, but God has died

and the believer has given way to the skeptic. It is true that the family still exists, but Authority has been banished from it and a man says: "I will love whoever loves me, who it is does not matter, even if they are of my blood, my affection is not just for those who deserve it." It is true that nations still exist and that sometimes race hatred is expressed; but patriotism is disappearing and one hair on our head seems more precious to us than the conquest of an empire.

Where did all of this come from? Where? From the fact that a hundred years ago the men who overthrew the old society in order to rejuvenate the world, restore self-sacrifice and heroism, and reestablish the noble religions and healthy moralities, went on to build a new society where self-sacrifice was the perpetual sacrifice of the weak to the powerful, heroism was the obligation of the simple people, prudence the duty of the working men, and the noble religions and healthy moralities consisted of resignation on the part of the victims and insolence and rudeness on the part of the oppressors.

They said: "The owners are the tyrants who are extinguishing everything: lives, labor and wealth." We must overthrow the owners, and the peoples will be free to live, to work and to enjoy life.

They said: "The priests are a bunch of Simonists and their god is a monster." We will throw out the priests and the people will discover the moral god who gives health and inspires valor and honor.

They said: "Warriors are an execrable race who foster in man the wicked fermentations with which they augment their appetite for murder and rapine." So throw out the warriors, and the peoples will live in peace, devoted afterwards to the defense of this short existence that the warriors wanted to destroy.

And the people, who believed them, contributed their strength so that the kings, the priests and the warriors could be banished.

And what did the men who led the revolt against the old society do? Having been transformed into kings, they gave the people freedom to work, but it was the duty of the people to give them the best fruits of their labor in exchange.

Having been transformed into priests (a religion that was even more deferential to the caprices of the powerful than the one that they just overthrew, and just as hypocritical under the mask of free discussion), they preached to the people that God wanted the shepherds of men to be fat and lazy and their herds thin and industrious.

Having been transformed into conquerors, they called their wealth "the national patrimony" and confided its custody to the people by persuading them—stupid dolts!—that they would lose everything they had if they let the foreigner rob them.

And the people suffered more in one hundred years than they suffered during the previous one thousand years: they ate their hard bread while tables full of delicious delicacies lay before their eyes; they froze in the winter and roasted in the summer, and even if they had heat in the winter they still devoted their lives, as before, to the service of cruel and despicable masters. Is it so strange, then, that their disillusionment should have been so sudden and that, all faith having died in their hearts, the day of the outbreak of their revolt should have come closer? When they get out of bed every morning, people have to ask themselves when the wind of hatred would blow that day.

A physiologist has said that man does not die; he kills himself. So it is with the bourgeois caste. Previous regimes knew how to maintain themselves in power; they only abandoned themselves to the passions during their vigorous years, they understood the art of disguising oppression and

this explains why they lasted so long. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, lusting for pleasure, did not wait for the passage of centuries to exercise its rule. Immediately after taking power it was delivered over to tyranny and became drunk with despotism, and committed one outrage after another at a stage in its development when its predecessors were still flattering the people so as to secure their bondage; in a word, men have not become slowly habituated to its rule.

And this is why its existence will be short-lived. Born yesterday, it will disappear tomorrow, covered in opprobrium, and its death will put an end to the age of slave societies.

What role must revolutionary art play in this labor? A preponderant role, in our view. Just as bourgeois art did more to ensure the preservation of the capitalist regime than all other social forces combined—government, army, police and courts—social and revolutionary art will do more to hasten the advent of communism than all acts of revolt inspired by an excess of suffering. That the oppressed worker, the researcher whose noble investigations are subordinated to the need for his daily bread, or the intellectual or the artist vanquished in the painful struggle for existence, shall rise against Capital, and spit their long simmering hatred in its face, will all be for the better because the multitude of the impoverished, unfortunately too docile under the social yoke, will learn from the example of their revolt the consciousness of their manhood and the thirst for their ideal of independence. But what would be better than the instinctive outbreaks of hatred, and what would lead us to the social revolution, would be to mould minds of the people so that they lose respect for prejudices and laws, and this moulding can only be effected by art.

Writers: express your rage against all iniquities during all your waking hours. Demolish with your pens that Power which, without even the shadow of a pretext that could veil its crimes, suppresses opinions in the name of force, insults the most respectable and the most private feelings and violates even the most trivial rights. Flog the judges who save for the powerful and the rich all their indulgence and compassion and all their rudeness, their vulgarity and their cruelty for the humble and the unknown. Brand with hot iron the faces of those brilliant warriors who wasted the life and the honor of the peoples on the battlefields.

Painters: bring back to life, with your talent and your heart, the memory of the great revolts. Paint the eternal slaves shaking with vengeance and rage, constrained by chains they vainly try to break and who will have to shake the world to its foundations.

Poets and musicians: launch your vibrant stanzas that awaken in the soul of the humble a sense of impatience with their servitude and, during those all-too-frequent moments of discouragement, refresh the ardor of the strong.

Intellectuals: put yourself at the service of the weak. Meditate upon this; this is the really urgent work. The inflammatory word of the orator, the violent pastiche of the satirist, the song of war, must also be our weapons, and while not disdaining to use other ones, it is from these that we expect more than we do from the weapons wielded by our glorious martyrs.

Don't you see how much the hatred entailed in the battles of the pen, with which you are all familiar, must increase, that in the last few years has with such eloquence depicted the ignoble Calvary of the prison? Don't you see how contempt for the justice system must constantly grow as a result of the accounts of the infamies committed by the men whose responsibility is to punish? Don't you see the growing loss of respect that was previously given with such devotion to Capital, due to the wise words of men like Vidal, Pecqueur, Louis Blanc, and Karl Marx? Don't you see, finally, how the impulse of the aspiration for integral and serene freedom as set forth by the likes of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, along with those whom our friendship does not allow us to name and who inspired the group, Arte Social, must grow? And now that this

trail they blazed for us, this road that was so full of obstacles when they began their journey, is so clear that we can see the end of our trials on the horizon, can we abandon it? By no means. From the efforts of our predecessors we draw the model of the efforts that we still have to carry out, with courage and obstinacy, without asking ourselves if our feet will ever tread the land of Liberty some day or whether we shall succumb before having conquered repose, we devote ourselves to human emancipation.

As for those who are blinded by social prejudice or are held captive by fear of the bold deeds of socialism, ponder these words of a wise philosopher. You will undoubtedly derive from them the conviction that your own interests necessarily will lead you to join with our labors.

In our social conditions, said doctor Büchner, intellectual labor is usually becoming less lucrative to the degree that it addresses the most important human problems and attains a more ideal character. Philosophers and poets are obligatory proletarians, and it is not surprising that wealth has laughed at them from the cradle, and, even in this kind of labor, the more painful and exhausting work is ordinarily carried out by those who are paid the least. It is sad advice indeed, and above all advice without any basis, to say “need drives great minds to invent extraordinary works, and that, on the other hand, wealth and comfort cause men to avoid such works”. Anyone who is diverted from intellectual production by wealth and comfort, is so diverted because they do not have within themselves the stamp of an elevated and creative mind that radiates the light it bears over humanity, driven by a need just as imperative as eating, drinking and sleeping. Poverty, however, leads to individuals whose spirits are melancholic, indolent and lazy; as a result, the poor lack the internal and external stimuli that are so absolutely necessary for intellectual development, even for the greatest minds. Furthermore, the comforts that are indispensable for poets, philosophers and sages, are not enjoyed by those who are crushed by their need for and worries over bread. The resulting overtaxing of their energies absolutely prevents them from reaching, or causes a long delay in their advance towards that which constitutes and must constitute, for a creative spirit, an exciting milestone of progress, that is, *success*. Naturally, as long as the currently prevailing social principles continue to rule over the struggle for existence, one must not even dream of improving this state of affairs, because only those intellectual labors which result or appear to result in an immediate material usefulness are remunerated. The fact that this has weighed, and indeed now weighs with the most pernicious effects upon our modern literature, is so obvious that we need only refer to it in passing. The detailed work carried out in the manner of a skilled laborer, the works finished under pressure of a deadline, the literary manufactured product speculating on the stock exchange of the reader and, consequently, the reader’s servile submission, his level of ability or his tastes: these are the characteristic traits of our literature. Meanwhile, good sense and real philosophical convictions collide everywhere with the insuperable obstacles posed by vileness, ignorance and willfulness.

Who will deny the accuracy of these observations? Do they disregard, those *arriviste* writers or those who aspire to become such, those favored by fortune or those who strive for the favors of the godlike bourgeoisie, do they disregard the obstacles that have been raised or are being raised in their path by literary commercialism, the fruit of our economic system: the contempt that the industrialists of journalism or the bookstore feel towards every form of art which, unknown to the multitude, does not immediately make money, and, on the other hand, the respect they have for that kind of product that, whether of any value or not, honorable or base, dominates the great print runs of our publishing houses?

And their current fear of the angry nobles, their fear of the wicked possessors from whom they hope to get assistance, will they get their marching orders, tomorrow, against those same men responsible for having thwarted their desires? And the roads closed to the young, the castrated thought, the mockery of youthful enthusiasm? And the healthy and robust work of the scorned unknown, even if the author pays to have it read, and the work of the famous publicist accepted with closed eyes, without even being read? And the strong ones defeated after ten years of struggle and relegated to manual labor, and the other ones undergoing the torture, now that they are rich, of being debased by the inevitable task of having to burn in middle age what they worshipped when they were young?

Should I recite names? That of the wandering soul indignant at our literary paganism, who found all the doors of publicity closed to him by a conspiracy of powerful acrobats; or the one who reached the summit of his Calvary and thought he could denounce the social vices of our time and had to lay down his whip, because of the wishes of a paper merchant; or another, whose words were incisive and whose gestures were haughty, who was publicly defeated by the clergy before the eyes of all the defeated fighters, who had to witness his repentant rise to the splendors of luxury and the admiration of all those flexible and audacious worshippers of the big world and the bank?

For all of these maladies, isn't socialism the cure? For all these iniquities, isn't it socialism that has to make them disappear, by crushing the powerful and the owning castes? All of you, workers, artists, intellectuals, who hate evil and feel the desire for and are anxious for a state of material and intellectual emancipation, come and fight at our side, because we share in common the source of our miseries. All of us are the victims of the monopoly exercised by a clique of men over the common goods of humanity. We shall therefore restore to all, what should be the property of all. We shall overthrow the masters, we shall freely associate for the labor and for the pleasures of life, we shall realize this possible dream; communism based on integral freedom.

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Fernand Pelloutier
Art and Revolt
1896

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Text of a speech delivered on behalf of the group, Arte Social, in Paris in 1896, in which one of the founders of French revolutionary syndicalism expresses his views on art and revolution, discusses the decadence of bourgeois morality and illustrates its deleterious effects on the morale of the working class by means of colorful anecdotes drawn from contemporary newspaper reports, and proclaims that “the goal of revolutionary art” is to “remove the veil from social lies”.

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