

# **A Warning to Students of All Ages**

Raoul Vaneigem

1995

# Contents

<b>Chapter 1: A warning to students of all ages.</b>	<b>3</b>
A SCHOOL IN WHICH LIFE BECOMES BORING TEACHES NOTHING BUT BARBARISM . . . . .	3
<b>Chapter 2: To have done with carceral education and the castration of desire</b>	<b>8</b>
A SCHOOL THAT HINDERS DESIRES STIMULATES AGGRESSIVENESS . . . . .	8
HOW CAN ONE GET TO KNOW THINGS WHEN OPPRESSION EXISTS? . . . . .	9
TO LEARN WITHOUT DESIRE IS TO UNLEARN HOW TO DESIRE . . . . .	10
ERROR IS NOT CULPABILITY . . . . .	12
ONLY THOSE WHO POSSESS THE KEYS TO NATURE AND DREAMS WILL OPEN THE SCHOOL TO AN OPEN SOCIETY . . . . .	13
<b>Chapter 3: Demilitarize the teaching profession</b>	<b>16</b>
WHOEVER TEACHES WITH FEAR RENDERS KNOWLEDGE TIMID . . . . .	16
LIBERATE THE DESIRE TO KNOW FROM CONSTRAINT . . . . .	17
<b>Chapter 4: Make school into a center for the creation of the living, not the antechamber for a parasitic commodity society</b>	<b>19</b>
RECRUITS NEEDED TO MANAGE BANKRUPTCY . . . . .	19
THE END OF FORCED LABOR WILL INAUGURATE THE ERA OF CREATIVITY . .	21
GIVE FAVOR TO QUALITY . . . . .	22
<b>Chapter 5: Learn autonomy, not dependence</b>	<b>25</b>
AN ALLIANCE WITH CHILDREN IS AN ALLIANCE WITH NATURE . . . . .	26
FROM INDISPENSABLE AID TO THE REFUSAL OF PERMANENT ASSISTANCE . .	27
PUBLIC SERVICE FUNDS SHOULD NOT BE AT THE SERVICE OF MONEY . . . . .	28

# Chapter 1: A warning to students of all ages.

The school, the family, the factory, the barracks, and, by proxy, the hospital and the prison, have been the inevitable passages by which commodity society has bent to its profit the destiny of the so-called "human" being.

The government that this society exercises over human nature, which is still in love with the freedom of childhood, puts in their proper places the growth and happiness that precede – and delay to diverse degrees – the familial enclosure, the workshop or office, the military institution, the clinic, the houses of the condemned.

Has schooling lost the repulsive character that it had in the 19th and 20th centuries, when it broke spirits and bodies upon the hard realities of efficiency and servitude, making it glorious to educate by forced labor, authority and austerity, and never by pleasure or passion? Nothing is surer, and it can't be denied that, in all the apparent eagerness of modernity, a whole lot of archaic ideas continue to scandalize the lives of schoolchildren.

Hasn't the scholastic enterprise obeyed, up to this very day, one dominant preoccupation: improve the techniques of training so that the animal would become a profitable investment?

No child crosses the threshold of a school door without being exposed to the risk of losing him or herself. Losing, that is, exuberant life, filled with new knowledge and marvels, that would be excited to receive nourishment, if it were not sterilized and made hopeless under the boring work of abstract knowledge. What a terrible affirmation, to see those shining looks so suddenly tarnished!

Here are four walls. The general consensus suits the hypocrites; within these walls, one is imprisoned, constrained, blamed, judged, honored, chastised, humiliated, labeled, manipulated, fondled, violated, treated abortively and left begging for aid and assistance.

"What are you complaining about?" object the makers of laws and decrees. "Isn't this the best way to initiate the youth into the immutable laws that rule the world and existence?" Doubtless. But why should the young accommodate themselves any longer to a society without joy and without a future, a society whose adults have nothing but their defeated resignation, which they support with a mix of bitterness and discomfort?

## **A SCHOOL IN WHICH LIFE BECOMES BORING TEACHES NOTHING BUT BARBARISM**

The world has changed more in the last thirty years than in the last three thousand. Never – in Western Europe, at the very least – has the sensibility of children so diverged from the old predator reflexes that made the human animal the most ferocious and destructive of the terrestrial species.

However, intelligence remains fossilized, almost powerless to perceive the mutation that is taking place before our eyes. A mutation comparable to the ancient invention of the tool, which

produced the work of exploiting nature and engendered a society composed of masters and slaves. A mutation revealing the real meaning of the term "human": not the production of a feudalized survival within the imperatives of a lucrative economy, but the creation of a reality favorable to a more intense and rich life.

Our educational system used to pride itself on having responded efficaciously to the exigencies of a society that was formerly under the yoke of the all-powerful rule of the Father. In this aspect, such glory is both repugnant and accomplished.

What does patriarchal power support itself on? the tyranny of the father? the potency of the male? Not so much on these as on a hierarchical structure, the cult of the boss, the scorn of women, the devastation of nations, rape, and oppressive violence. History has abandoned this patriarchal power in an advanced state of dilapidation: In the European Community, dictatorial regimes have dissolved into the troubled waters of business; paternal absolutism has become nothing but a memory of a puppet show.

We have to cultivate the silliness of a ministerial baking party if we wish to save from oblivion this pedagogy, which is still perfectly good for mixing with the ignoble yeast of despotism, forced labor and military discipline; the resulting abstraction, the etymology of which (*abstrahere*, to pull out) speaks of the exile of humanity from itself, the separation from life.

This society will agonize, in the end; this society in which the individual never begins to live unless he or she is learning to die. In that agony, life rekindles its rights timidly, and, as if it were for the first time in history, life is inspired by eternal spring instead of withering in an endless winter.

Hating yesterday, school is nothing but ridicule. It functioned and functions implacably according to the machinery and gears of an order that believed itself to be immutable. Its mechanical perfection shatters exuberance, curiosity, and the generosity of adolescents, for the purposes of better integrating them into the drawers of a dresser, which the usury of work changes little by little into a coffin. The power of things prevails over the desire of beings.

The logic of such a flourishing economy was still fallible, however, like the dull clicking of the hours of survival, sounding constantly the clarion call of death. The influence of prejudice, the force of inertia, and the customary resignation, all rather commonly exercised their mastery over the ensemble of citizens. Apart from the few who are unsubdued, who are in love with independence, the majority of people find their reckoning in the miserable waiting for and expectation of social promotions and guaranteed careers all the way to retirement.

Excellent reasons, then, are not lacking to set the infant on the righteous path of decencies and convenience, seeing that, when following it, he or she blindly hands him or herself over to the professors' authority and tries hard for the honor of that supreme compensation, the certitude of employment and a salary.

Pedagogues write dissertations about the checkmate schooling is in, but they don't worry much about what's checking it, nor about the fact that the checkmated is encroaching on everyday existence, advancing at every turn towards the dominion of the anguish of worthiness and unworthiness, profit and loss, honor and dishonor. A dismaying banality reigns over ideas and behaviors, over the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the cunning and imbecilic, the lucky and the unfortunate.

Certainly, the perspective engendered by having to pass away one's life in a factory or an office in order to make the month's rent money is not one that is inclined towards the exaltation of dreams of happiness and the harmony that nourishes infancy. Such a life produces instead

a chain of dissatisfied adults, frustrated by a destiny that they would have wished to be more abundant, more generous. Deceived and instructed by the lessons of bitterness, they often find no better outlet for their resentment than in absurd problems and quarrels with others, sustained and caused by the most wonderful reasons in the world. Their religious, ideological and political confrontations procure for them their alibis and Causes, which hide, in fact, the somber violence of the evil of the survival from which they suffer.

And so their existence flows away into the frozen shadow of an absent life. But when there are plague-ridden times, the exterminators make the law. The inhuman despotic principles that administer teaching and inculcate in infants the bloody vanities of adulthood, which Jean Vigo heckles in his film *Zero de conduite*, participate in the coherence of the dominant system. They respond to the imperatives of a society that recognizes no other driving forces but power and profit.

Henceforth, if education refuses to obey the same motors that drive the rest of society, the trash compactor will be put out of order: there'll be less and less to win, and more and more life will sneak in to the mix and steal from the deep hidden corners of the drawer.

The insupportable preeminence of financial interests over the desire to live isn't going to wait anymore to give back the change. The daily clanging of the attraction, the bait, the female charms of gain, resound absurdly in proportion to the devaluation of money; in proportion to the common bankruptcy of state capitalism and private capitalism; in proportion to the circling toward the sewer drain of the patriarchal values of master and slave and of the ideologies of right and left, collectivism and liberalism, all that – in the name of the all-holy, sacrosanct commodity – is built upon the violation and rape of human and terrestrial nature.

A new style is being born, which alone disperses the shadow of a colossus whose feet of clay have already begun to break up. The school remains confined in the anti-days of the collapsing Old World.

Is its destruction necessary? This is a doubly absurd question.

First, the school is already destroyed. Since professors and students are less and less concerned with what they teach and study – and, above all, with the manner in which they institute teaching and self-instruction – why aren't these people running to save the old pedagogical passenger-boat, which is leaking water from all sides?

Boredom engenders violence. The ugliness of buildings excites vandalism. Modern constructions, cemented with the contempt of real estate agents, bask idly in the sun, crumble, and catch fire, according to the programmed usury of their shoddy materials.

Next, the question of the destruction of the school is absurd because the destruction-reflex is a registered part of the death logic of commodity society, whose profitable and lucrative necessities weaken, degrade, pollute, and kill the life of beings and things.

To accentuate the ruination does not only profit the carrion crows otherwise known as property owners, their ideologues of fear and security, and their parties of hate, exclusion, and ignorance; it pays the wages of the real estate agents, who never seem to stop changing their "new" habits and masking their nullity beneath reforms as spectacular as they are ephemeral.

School is the center of a turbulent zone in which the young years drown in moodiness, in which the conjugal neurosis of the teacher and the student imprint their movements on the pendulum of resignation and revolt, frustration and rage.

School is also the privileged place of rebirth. Pregnant, it carries within it the conscience at the heart of our epoch, which is to assure the priority of living over the economy of survival.

The school retains the key to wandering in a world without dreams: the resolution to erase boredom from a luxurious landscape. The will to be happy will banish polluting factories, intensive agriculture, prisons of all kinds, maggoty business offices, warehouses of adulterated products, and the pulpits of political, bureaucratic, ecclesiastic "truths" that call the spirit to mechanize the body and condemn it to rot away in the inhuman.

Stimulated by experiences of revolution, Saint-Just wrote: "Happiness is a new idea in Europe." He wrote this line two centuries before the idea became a desire and demanded an individual and collective self-realization.

Thus, each infant, each adolescent, each adult finds him or herself faced with a choice: check into a world that rings up the logic of "sell it at any price," or create his or her own life by creating an environment that assures him or her of plentitude in harmony. Everyday existence cannot be confused any longer with this adaptive survival in which people have been reduced to the production of commodities and to being produced by them.

We do not want a school in which one learns to survive by unlearning how to live. The majority of human beings have been nothing but spiritualized animals, capable of putting technology at the service of their predator interests, but incapable of refining humanly the art of living and thus becoming truly worthy of being called a man, a woman, a child.

Following their frenetic paths towards profit, the rats in jeans and three-piece suits discover that now there's nothing left of the earth but a chunk of cheese that they've gnawed on all sides. These rats either need to progress even further in their gnawing or undergo a mutation that will render them human.

It is time that lived moments replace the dead memory that has stamped acquaintance with the hidden restriction that nothing can ever be experienced.

We have for too long allowed ourselves to be persuaded that there is nothing to look forward to in life but common decay and death. This is a vision of prematurely old people, of golden boys fallen into precocious senility because they preferred money to youth. Let it be soon that these phantoms of the present married to the past cease to hide the will to live that searches out in each one of us the path of its sovereignty!

The new society begins where the experiencing of omnipresent life begins. A life in which one perceives and comprehends in rocks, vegetables and animals the rule that human beings have issued and enforced, that they carry within themselves with so much unconsciousness and contempt. But also a life founded upon creativity, not on work; on authenticity, not on appearances; on the luxuriance of desires, not on mechanisms of forcing ideas back and then pulling them out. A life free of fear, constraint, culpability, exchange, and dependency, because it would be a life that would be married to, and inseparable from, a consciousness and enjoyment of the self and the world.

A woman who had the misfortune to live in a country that is gangrenous with barbarism and obscurantism once wrote, "In Algeria, one learns from childhood to wash a dead man's body; myself, however, I want to teach him the gestures of love." Without writing such morbid verse, our pedagogy has too often been, beneath its apparent elegance, nothing but a toilet bowl full of corpses. Now it is a matter of finding, deep within the check-writing of knowledge, the gestures of love: the key to exploration and the key to the fields in which affection is offered without reserve.

Childhood is caught in the trap of schools that kill the marvelous instead of exalting it. This indicates, well enough, the kind of urgent situation in which teaching finds itself: the burden of

creating a world where it would be permitted to marvel at oneself, instead of sinking further into the barbarism of boredom.

Watch out so that you are not tricked into waiting for help or panaceas from some Supreme Savior. It would assuredly be in vain to accord credit to a government or some political faction that is gathering together people concerned above all with sustaining their own shaky power. Nor does it make sense to trust in tribunals of masters of thought or media personalities who multiply their images in order to consummate the nullity that the mirror of their everyday existence reflects. But, above all, it would be self-betrayal to kneel down and beg, stand at attention or think of oneself as inferior. Education's goal, after all, should really be nothing but autonomy, independence, the creation of the self – without which there are no such things as true mutual aid, authentic solidarity or collectivity without oppression.

A society that has no other responses to misery but clientelism, charity and tricks is a Mafioso society. To put school under the shrine of competitiveness is to incite corruption, which is the morality of business.

The only dignified things one should be "in on" are the things that one needs to move oneself by one's own means. If school doesn't teach you how to struggle to unleash your potentially vibrant will, it will condemn future generations to resignation, servitude, and suicidal revolt. It will turn to the dust of death and barbarism the most living and human part of each person.

I do not imply the establishment of any other educative project, except that which creates itself in the love and exploration of the living. Outside of a "school for truants" in which life looks for itself and finds itself without end – outside of the art of loving with speculative mathematics – there is nothing but the dead weight of a totalitarian past.

## Chapter 2: To have done with carceral education and the castration of desire

Instilled since early youth, the feeling of guilt raises around everyone the most sure of prisons in which desires are walled in. Over the course of the millennia, the idea of a nature that would be exploitable and capable of being made to do chores has condemned the simple inclination towards enjoying all the pleasures of life to feelings of sinfulness, remorse and a need for penitence, and to a bitter intake of ideas and a compulsive spouting off of them.

What should the essential preoccupation of teaching be? To help the child in his or her approach to life so that the child can learn to know what he or she wants and want what he or she knows; that is, to satisfy his or her desires, and not in some apathetic, animal doze, but according to the refinements of human consciousness.

The opposite produces itself, however. Learning is currently founded upon the repression of desires. The child is dressed in angelic habits, beneath which he or she doesn't cease doing stupid things, and denatured stupid things at that. How could one be surprised that schools imitate so well, in their architectural and mental conceptions, the island prisons on which the punished are exiled from the ordinary joys of existence?

### A SCHOOL THAT HINDERS DESIRES STIMULATES AGGRESSIVENESS

The ancient school walls never seem to stop evoking the walls of penitentiaries. The high-placed windows make sure that the student sees nothing but a little bit of the sky, a unique space reserved for the happiness of souls, if not bodies. The body, immobilized in a study hall that quickly turns into a torture chamber, suffers its earthly destiny in the ordinary style.

The opinion still prevails that in order to learn to learn (or become beautiful), it is necessary to learn to suffer. To enter into adult age . . . wasn't that to renounce the pleasures of infancy in order to progress into a valley of tears, decrepitude, and death?

The pedagogues have always affirmed that discipline and the maintenance of order were the necessary conditions for all education. Today it is easy to see the degree to which their pretend-science was really nothing but a cover-up for an insidiously repressive practice: to encourage scorn of the self and bully the "carnal appetites," so as to raise humanity to the seventh heaven of spirit, all the while dragging it down to earthly materiality.

Once the body is reduced to the state of being an object, and in this case a piece of material to be schooled, the instructor is all the better prepared to drive into schoolkids' heads the respectable notion of respect for authority. Soliciting abstract intelligence and "objective" reason contributes to the concealment of that sensible and sensual intelligence which is tied to the desires of the little light in the heart that flickers whenever the child, finding him or herself again alone, asks



him or herself the question, "How's all this knowledge I got stuck in my head by constraint and menace going to help me feel good in my own skin, live more happily, and become what I am?"

The educational method renounced corporal punishment at the time when the slap and kick in the ass stopped constituting the essential part of a familial education which, in the words of the torturers, had already proved itself valuable. And how!

This does not mean that the body from then on escaped the harassment, mortifying fear, and scorn heaped upon it. Isn't it true that the senses are placed under rather high surveillance during the hours of study in the rooms that are reserved for it? The eye has to rivet itself to the gestures of the masters so homework can be done. The mouth never opens except at the invitation of the mentor, and it had better be ever-wary as to what it dares to utter! An incorrect response, a bad-sounding remark, and the volley of blows from the green wood would be provoked: mockery, rebuffing, humiliation – is it any different today? At the same time, relevant or servile words attract the praise that fills out the promotional balance sheets at the end of the year. In the end, the hand raises itself politely to solicit the attention of the scholar making needless and inopportune displays of his or her learning, insisting upon the importance of trifling points in his or her scholarship. Not so long ago, the hand that raised itself risked getting wrapped on the knuckles with the ruler of righteous good sense.

One perceives, with the passage of time, that schoolkids have been treated according to the manufacturing processes employed by the Stalinist savant Pavlov, who gave his laboratory dogs compensatory bits of sugar for good behavior and would sanction bad behavior with electric shocks. Wasn't it necessary that scorn be the norm of the age in which pedagogues advocated an educational method that a single human being deserving of the name today would never inflict upon a dog? Isn't it clear that school remains, as a result of the cowardice of a general assent, a place of dog-training and conditioning, to which the culture of pretext and the economy of reality are tightened like screws?

## **HOW CAN ONE GET TO KNOW THINGS WHEN OPPRESSION EXISTS?**

Maintained by the fear of having to get around in a prison of tetanus-ridden muscles, compressed emotions install between the oppressor and the oppressed a logic of destruction and self-destruction that breaks all forms of enlightened communication.

To the idiotic expected-salary of the master, who reigns tyrannically over his class, responds with an equal idiocy the uproar and hullabaloo that serve to release the students' repressed energies.

All over the prison and the ghetto, character-armoring imposes its strategy of confinement, and the momentum of hopelessness prepares the fist of the rioter. The hand of the schoolkid avenges itself by mutilating tables and chairs, scrawling insolent marks on insolent walls, ripping up the rags of ugliness, sanctifying a vandalism in which the rage of destruction pays off the debt of feeling that you've been violently destroyed, ransacked by the everyday pedagogical trap.

The students' mouths open in ferocious attacks of protest, their eyes draw from the challenge they've made the glimmer of enthusiasm that they were denied. But these movements of contestation periodically arouse the interest of the managers of bureaucratic "unions" and government authority-figures, and these movements – having found themselves, because of their dependency

upon those managers, with an absence of creativity – sink into the same dullness and stupidity as the doddering, buffoon-like, hierarchical power that originally provoked them. Why wait for gregarious mass manifestations when the intelligence of individuals, having failed to make a project of radical change, has been stifling itself according to the common denominator of the crowd, at the lowest level of comprehension?

To avoid explosions of desires acted upon without any thought behind them, the authorities knew it would be necessary to prepare decompressive safety valves and controlled demonstrations. When they cut you slack with a reform, it's not a breath of liberty, it's the respiration of tyranny.

The playgrounds sported by prisons, barracks and schools permit libidinal energies – otherwise compromised by the rigors of discipline – to release themselves in leisure. This "exercise" preserves the separation between the head – the "boss" – and the rest of the body. On the "playing field," the body is submissive to the head in principle, but the hierarchical order instituted during study time is in fact reversed. The last becomes the first: The dunce and the muscled brute dominate on the pavement, making the better students shake. Nothing is changed by the reversal; it's just the oppressed urges of life relieving themselves in death-urges.

Once the parenthesis of tolerated disorder is closed up again, the spirit rekindles its rights and starts again its mission of reigning over the chaos. Those whom professorial power has crowned with the holiness of knowledge once again take their places at the head of the pack. Their intellectuality vomits into the darkness the ugliness that lurks in the depths of their beings, while their superiority affirms itself over the unruly, the bad students, the dunces, the ones dismissed as idiots according to an insult that deserves to be analyzed closer (as long as one is conscious of the fact that to repudiate the animality of urges, instead of refining them, doesn't so much give one a greater humanity, but rather a bestiality with a human look to it).

Evidently there exists a natural rhythm of effort and rest, concentration and relaxation, but the reigning social organization of work has substituted for the simple alternation between contraction and release the psychological mechanism of repression and release of thought. The ordinary behavior of the exploiters, who accord to the exploited only enough relaxation to render them fresh for the factory and office, is precisely expressed in the statement of General de Gaulle, irritated by the revolution of 1968: "It is time to whistle the dogs that their recreation time is over."

## **TO LEARN WITHOUT DESIRE IS TO UNLEARN HOW TO DESIRE**

The scorn of oneself and others is inherent in the exploitation of earthly, human work. The fact that scorn is a part of common practice in exchanges between professors and students explains why so few dream of becoming indignant. It would be illusory to believe that a practice so intolerable would cease before any kind of ethical choice, a will to courtesy, of whatever formula or style, has taken place – "I would remind you not to speak to me in that tone of voice." A really good game would be the radical overhaul of society and teaching methods that have still not discovered that each child, each adolescent, possesses in a brute state the unique richness of humanity: its creativity.

How can one excite curiosity when there are so many beings tormented by the anguish of guilt and the fear of sanctions? There certainly exist professors who are enthusiastic enough about

imbuing their auditorium with passion, and who make forgotten for an instant the detestable conditions that degrade their job. But how many, and for how many years?

Enumerate, on the one hand, the bureaucrats who terrorize their classes and are terrorized by them, and, on the other, the artists, jugglers, and tightrope walkers of knowledge, who are capable of captivating their students without ever having to transform themselves into guard dogs or adjutant bosses.

We are not talking about judging people here, nor about entering into the imbecilic practice of awarding merit and demerit by reviling the good students and praising the bad ones. No, what is important here is to bring everything into play, so that teaching keeps awake that curiosity, so natural and filled with life, from which Sheherazade was able to hold in check death, with which a tyrant menaced her.

Over the centuries, the aberration of a world upside-down has weighed heavily upon children's education.

That so many efforts and so much fatigue is required of both master and student to revive the eagerness to learn, which has been pointed out quite frenetically by observers of those of tender age, says enough to prove that this is a brutally interrupted evolution. Curiosity is usually suffocated, just as it tries to come out, at the most important points in the child's ludic development, when it is amusing to ask questions; the questions are answered in such a way that the basis of a happy knowing is thrown away. All this because that happy knowing would be incompatible with the vision of some austere adults, who say that science is important because it endows one with the seriousness of business, and that learning should be propagated with dry, boring, abstract truths.

Do you remember the thousands of questions that a child – marveling without end – asks about him or herself and about the world that he or she discovers? "Why does it rain?" "Why is the ocean blue?" "How come my brother stole my toys?" The responses that he or she received were most often nothing but evasive words and abrupt refusals. Eventually wearied by a conduct that makes him or her feel unsuitable, the child lets him or herself become susceptible to the impression that he or she is not worthy nor capable of understanding. As if all steps of psychological development did not have their own adequate mode of comprehension!

Meanwhile, disheartened in the end by so many interrogations judged without interest, the child enters in the cycles of study, in which he or she looks for answers that he or she has deep-down-inside lost the desire to find by him or herself. What the child passionately wished to acquaint him or herself with a few years previously, he or she – yawning with boredom – is today constrained to study today by force.

The diversity of happy and unhappy sensations created in the child that experimental consciousness which permitted him or her to cultivate certain of those sensations and avoid altogether certain others. If that consciousness is maintained in the child by a parental teaching method filled with attention, solicitude and affection, the child is filled with a psychological motivation that enthuses him or her to desire without end, to want to know more and more, to engage the world with a curiosity without limits. All this for the simple reason that awareness then obeys the most natural of solicitations: rendering oneself happy.

If teaching is received with reticence or repugnance, this is because the knowledge filtered through school programs carries the mark of an ancient wound; it has already had its original sensuality castrated.

Knowledge of the world without a consciousness of the desires of life is dead knowledge. It has no use except at the service of those mechanisms that transform society according to the necessities of the economy. The artificial sweetness that dead knowledge brings to the fate of human beings delivers them into the world begrudgingly, and consistently menaced by new rigors that soon efface the pleasant aftertaste.

After having stolen from the schoolkid his or her urge to live, the educational system starts artificially force-feeding the student in order to send him or her on the path towards work, along which he or she will continue to mumble, all the way to complete disillusionment, the leit-motif of his or her young years: "let the best man win!"

Win what? More sensible intelligence, more affection, more serenity, more lucidity in self and circumstance, more ways to act upon one's own existence, more creativity? No, just more money and power in a world that uses money and power by being used by them.

## **ERROR IS NOT CULPABILITY**

The educational system does not simply content itself with containing the desires of childhood in character armor, in which clenched muscles, a heart gone cold and a spirit impregnated with anguish don't really favor exuberance and enlightenment. The system is not satisfied with cornering the schoolkid in battles without joy, which inevitably end in a whack on the head, in case that the student might forget that he or she is not there to be amused. The system suspends above the student's head the ridiculous and menacing sword of a verdict.

Whether he or she likes it or not, each day the student enters into a parole room in which he or she is to appear in front of judges and in answer to the accusation of presumed ignorance. Then the child has to prove his or her innocence by regurgitating on demand the theories, rules, dates and definitions that contribute so much to his or her relaxation at the end of the year.

The expression "undergo examinations," that is, in criminal parlance, proceed with a suspect's interrogation and arraignment when the charges are read, evokes well the judiciary reality of school, since it is really the same thing when a student gets written or oral examinations inflicted upon him or her.

No one these days would dream of denying the utility of controlling a person's assimilation of knowledge, degree of comprehension and experimental ability. But is it necessary to dress teachers and students, who really just want to instruct and be instructed, in the garb of Judge and Guilty Party, respectively? What despotic and outdated spirit do the pedagogues claim authorizes them to erect a tribunal and then cut into such vibrant, lively flesh with the double-edged blade of merit and demerit, honor and dishonor, salute and damnation? What personal neuroses and obsessions do they obey when they dare to blemish with fear and the menace of suspension from school the progress of children and adolescents, who only need attention, patience, encouragement and that affection which carries the secret of obtaining so much by demanding so little?

Isn't it true that the educational system persists in basing itself on the ignoble principle, descended from a society which assumed that pleasure only exists on the screens of a sadomasochistic relationship between masters and slaves, "I'm only punishing you because I love you. . . ."?

It is an effect of the will to power, not the will to live, that motivates people to try to determine by judgment the fate of others.

Judging prevents one from understanding the person one presumes to rehabilitate. The behavior of judges, who are themselves scared by the fear that comes with being a judge, redirects to their own ends some of the convicted student's indispensable qualities, which would have helped the student in his or her long, poetic journey towards autonomy: that is, obstinate determination, a sense of effort, an awakening sensibility, a nimble intelligence, a constantly trained memory, the perception of the living in all forms, and the attentive hold over his or her own consciousness that allows the student to perceive what helps in his or her progress, what slows him or her down, what his or her errors are, and what their corrections would be.

To help a child or an adolescent assure for him or herself the greatest possible autonomy – this implies without any doubt a constant lucidity in the awareness of the degree of development of the student's capacities and the orientation that will favor them. But what has this in common with the control to which the student is submitted, once he or she is ready to get through a period of learning, when he or she is put in front of a professorial cross-examination? Leave, therefore, the culpability to those religious spirits who do not dream of anything but tormenting themselves by tormenting others.

Religions need misery to perpetuate themselves; they maintain misery so as to lend more glamour to their acts of charity. Oh, well. Could the educational system, which assumes in the student a constitutive weakness, which is always suspicious of his or her supposed sins of laziness and ignorance, and which refuses to dismiss the case until the student says that the professor is a sacred being – could this system do anything else but perpetuate misery? It is time to finish with this puke of the past!!!

Each individual possesses his or her own creativity, and that creativity is suffocated when mistakes are treated like punishable offenses. This must no longer be tolerated. There is no such thing as guilt, there are only errors; and errors correct themselves.

## **ONLY THOSE WHO POSSESS THE KEYS TO NATURE AND DREAMS WILL OPEN THE SCHOOL TO AN OPEN SOCIETY**

The perspective of marketability-at-any-cost is the iron curtain of a world closed-in by the economy. The perspective of life opens upon a world where everything is there to be explored and created. Today, the institution of school belongs to the business crowd, who, cynically, would like to manage it, without burdening themselves anymore with the old humanitarian formalities. We'll see whether or not students and teachers allow themselves to be reduced to the function of lucrative cogwheels. What if they, not foreseeing anything good in the administration (to which they are invited) of a universe in ruins, develop the desire to learn how to live instead of economizing on themselves?

Today the game is staked entirely on a change of mentality, of vision, of perspective.

Pinning down a butterfly is not the best way to get to know it. The person who transforms the living into a dead thing, under whatever pretext, only demonstrates that his or her knowledge has not made him or her a human being.

There exists, on the other hand, an approach that reveals the radiance of life in the heart of a crystal, a poem, an equation, a chemical formula, a plant, a manufactured object. It establishes between the observer and the observed an osmotic relationship in which everything is distinct without everything being separate.

Doesn't the consciousness of a living presence in the subject and in the object naturally manifest what there is of the teacher in the student and of the student in the teacher? Where there is a lack of the intelligence of life, there is nothing but the relations of brutes. Whatever doesn't come from and return us to the most vibrant and living part of us only diverts us towards death, for the greater glory of armies and technologies of profit. That's why the majority of schools are battlefields on which scorn, hate, and devastating violence ring up the bankruptcy of an educational system that constrains the teachers to despotism and the taught to servility.

What resignation exists in the supposedly studious confinement in which the student takes the offer to sacrifice him or herself and slams the door of renunciation on his or her own happiness! And how would the educator, who is no more capable than his or her students of becoming a child again by being reborn each day, instruct them? Whoever carries in his or her heart the dead corpse of his or her youth never educates anything but dead souls.

To dispense knowledge is to awaken the hope of a marvelous world, which nourishes humanity and is nourished by the dreams of youth. At the same time, it is still necessary to shatter the curse of received ideas and to make fun of those accountants of power and profit who have excluded the marvelous from their reality so well that infantile impatience relegates it to the kingdom of fairies and the impotent marshes of utopia.

The human body, animal behaviors, flowers, philosophical speculation, the cultivation of wheat, water, stone, fire, electricity, woodworking, horseback riding, quantum physics, astronomy, music, a suddenly privileged moment in everyday life – everything becomes marvelous again, but not due to contemplative mysticism, but because people, once they've made the choice to give preeminence to the living, stop complying with the imperatives of lucrative exploitation. When forests are the lungs of the earth and not things to be purchased per acre or spaces to be devastated by real estate interests, one gets the human sense of a Nature that energetically offers its resources to whoever approaches but does not rape her.

Learning about life is a walk through the universe of gift-giving, a certain kind of mycological stroll, on which the guide teaches how to distinguish between edible mushrooms and others, unsuitable for consumption, mortally poisonous in fact, but which, with proper treatment, possess very healing qualities.

Instead of an entrenched camp in which reserve workers sadly stagnate, why not make school an amusement park of knowledge, an open place in which creative people come to discuss their practices, their passion for their experiences, and what they hold close to their hearts? A luthier, a farmer, a cabinet maker, a painter or a biologist surely have more to teach than those businessmen who come to advocate adaptation to the random laws of the market.

It is clear that an awakening to the cultures of the world would also be an awakening to the diversity of age groups! Why limit to the young the right to be instructed and exclude those adults who are concerned with their lack of knowledge about literature or mathematics? Doesn't everyone feel the need to make that contact which shatters the artificial opposition between age groups?

But there is no prescription nor panacea. It is solely the job of each person's will to live to open that which was closed by the violence of economic totalitarianism. It's on the level of the individual that the imagination will make a show of its force.

Every year dozens of institute authorities and inventive professors do not suggest new methods of teaching founded on new accords between beings and things. You who complain about the number of bureaucrats who are usurping the positions of teachers, and who throw out across

the planet the cold stare of statistical figures in order to limit their significance to paycheck cards: when have you demanded that the ideas of Freinet or any of the many others be taken further forward towards the erection of a generous knowledge? When did you ever oppose the distillers of boredom who rule over the constantly blooming projects of ludic and living education? Have you never thought about undertaking a substitution of the hierarchical connection between masters and slaves for a relation no longer founded upon obedience, but on the exercise of individual and collective creativity?

When politicians of dismaying mediocrity invite you to submit to them your revindications, don't they have the satisfaction of discovering that you are just as poverty-stricken as they are, if not financially, then at least intellectually and in terms of imagination? Do not doubt that the discount price at which you allowed yourself to be sold gave them enough left over to accord you, without further bargaining, the right to heckle them in grand, cathartic demonstrations.

The worst resignation is that which provides an alibi for revolt. Do you respect yourself so little that you wouldn't even take the time to figure out what your life's desires are, that you don't even know what kind of existence you'd like to conduct? Do you not see any other choice beside the one you are officially presented with, the "choice" between the poverty of wealth and the misery of poverty?

Does it seem to you that the disappointing future of a life passed making the month's rent money seems bright, because the shadow of joblessness is growing longer everywhere under the mediated sun of full employment? Nothing kills more surely than becoming content with survival.

## Chapter 3: Demilitarize the teaching profession

The spirit of the barracks has reigned sovereignly in schools. One marched at a snail's pace, complying with the orders of peons who merely lacked uniforms and rank stripes. The configuration of the battlement obeyed the laws of the right angle and the rectilinear structure. Thus was architecture employed in the surveillance of spaces for controlled roaming by the righteous, Spartan authorities.

Up to the sixties, the educational institution remained petrified with its warlike virtues, preparing kids to go die at the frontier, just as they began to devote themselves to love and happiness. Such an injunction would drown in ridicule today, but, despite the mutation initiated in May 1968 and the discredit into which the standing, combatless army of Europe has fallen (though there are a few exceptional local wars into which it disdains to intervene), it would be excessive to pretend that the tradition of the vociferous injunction, the barked insult, orders without responses and insubordination (which is the appropriate response) have become outdated.

The nearly absolute authority with which the schoolmaster is invested serves better the expression of neurotic behaviors than the diffusion of knowledge. The law of the fittest has never made anything of intelligence but a weapon of stupidity. Many, without doubt, are rendered helpless by not having anything but the right to shut up. But as long as communities of interests don't situate at the center of their knowledge the inclinations, doubts, torments, and problems each person feels during the days (that is, the most important part of their lives), there will be nothing but the mortuary the educational system constructs around us and the scorn we have for the institution's constant transmission of messages whose meaning has nothing to do with desiring, living beings.

### WHOEVER TEACHES WITH FEAR RENDERS KNOWLEDGE TIMID

The authority legally accorded to the teacher puts such a bitter taste into knowledge that ignorance sneaks in to crown itself with the bay leaves of revolt. Those who dispense their knowledge through pleasure don't have to do anything to impose it, but the barracks-style warehousing of education is such that it is usually considered necessary to instruct with obligations, not charms.

Try, then, to extol the virtues of mutual comprehension between professors entering their classes like they were going into lion cages, and bunches of schoolkids, exhausted from dodging the whip and ready to devour their trainers! It seems that autocracy has been beaten all over Europe, and yet the school remains dominated by tyranny. Where the barking is the loudest in the amphitheater is where frustrations are so great they are bursting.

Nothing is more ignoble than fear, which belittles humans-turned-beasts and keeps them at bay; and I do not believe that fear should be tolerated by students or professors. Nothing breeds terror like terror itself. When pedagogical directives wear themselves out, favor will come to that principle which says that we should get rid of fear and give reassurance, a principle which seems to me to be a condition for any true learning about life. In order to apply this principle, it would



be necessary to make the school into a place where neither authority nor submission, neither the strong nor the weak, neither the first nor the last, reign. As long as you don't form a community of students and teachers that is actually devoted to perfecting the creativity that everyone has inside themselves, you would be smart to be indignant about all of barbarism's many faces – religious fanaticism, political sectarianism, the hypocrisy and corruption of governments. And yet you will fail to chase away either their mechanisms of integration or the drug and business mafias, because there is an underhanded trick operating within the hierarchical organization of teaching that predisposes us toward falling into the grasp of Mafiosos.

Now that the ideologies of left and right are melting in the sun of their common lie, the only criteria of intelligence and action resides in the everyday life of each person and in the choice between what strengthens one's own life and what destroys it, which is a choice that is confronted at every instant. If so many generous ideas have turned into their opposites, this is simply because the behavior that was working in their favor was negation. A project of autonomy and emancipation cannot base itself on the will to power, which continues to impress upon gestures the furrows of scorn, servitude and death, without wobbling and eventually falling.

I anticipate no other way to finish off fear and the lies that result from it than by a ceaselessly revived will to enjoy oneself and the world. To learn to untangle that which makes us more alive from that which kills us; this is the first lucidity, the lucidity that gives its meaning in the form of knowledge.

The most elaborate techniques put at our disposition a considerable amount of information. All this progress is not negligible, but it results in nothing but a bunch of dead letters if a favorable relation between teachers and little groups of students plugs into the web of abstract knowledge through any other net-work than the one we are interested in: what every individual wants to do with his or her life and destiny.

## **LIBERATE THE DESIRE TO KNOW FROM CONSTRAINT**

The violent exploitation of nature has substituted constraint for desire. It has propagated everywhere the curse of work, both manual and intellectual, and has reduced to a marginal activity the true richness of human beings, i.e., their capacity to recreate themselves as they recreate the world.

By producing an economy that economizes on people until it makes ghosts out of them, human beings have only impeded their own evolution. That's why humanity still needs to be invented.

School carries the sensible mark of a break in the human project. One perceives more and more how and when the creativity of children is smashed by the hammer of work. The old familial litany "First work, you can amuse yourself later" has always expressed the absurdity of a society that calls for a renunciation of life in order to better consecrate toiling, which drains life and keeps pleasure from resembling anything but the colors of death.

One would have to possess the combined stupidity of all the specialized pedagogues in order to be surprised by the fact that the prodigious efforts and fatigues inflicted upon students have such mediocre results. What is there to hope for, when there's no heart in it, or when there's no more heart to put into it?

Charles Fourier, observing, during an insurrection, the care and ardor with which rioters ripped the pavement from a road and put up a barricade in a few hours, remarked that, to do

the same work during "normal times," it would have taken a team of terracers, working under the order of a boss, three days. Wage-slave workers would have had no other interest in the job besides the pay, while the insurgents were animated by the passion for freedom.

Only the pleasure of being yourself and being for yourself will give to your knowledge that passionate attraction which justifies the effort without needing to take recourse in constraint.

To become who one truly is demands the most intransigent of resolutions. It necessitates constancy and obstinance. If we do not want to resign ourselves to acquiring knowledge that reduces us to the miserable state of being consumers, we cannot ignore that we need – in order to leave the mire in which we are bogged down by the society of the past – to take the initiative to increase the pressure with a sense for the contrary. But what? Are there still those of you who would fight and crush others to obtain employment, and yet hesitate to invest in life, which all of your efforts are designed to make something of?

We don't want to be "the best"; we just want to experience the best parts of life to the fullest, according to that principle of inaccessible perfection which revokes dissatisfaction in the name of the insatiable.

## Chapter 4: Make school into a center for the creation of the living, not the antechamber for a parasitic commodity society

In December 1991, the European Commission published a memorandum on higher education. It recommended that universities behave like business enterprises, submissive to the rules of the market. The same document expressed the view that students should be treated like clients, who should be incited not to learn but to consume.

Courses thus become products; the terms "student" and "studies" move aside to be replaced by expressions better suited for the new orientation: "human capital" and "labor market."

In September 1993, this same European Commission came back, like a recurring symptom of disease, with a green book about European education. It specified that it would be necessary, starting from maternity, to accumulate "human resources for the exclusive needs of industry" and to favor "a greater adaptability of behaviors in order to respond to the market's demand for working hands."

We see here only too clearly how the clogged-up flows of the present project into the radiant future the bygone efficiency of the past!

Once the remains of the only-halfway-marketable subjects of yesterday – Latin, Greek, Shakespeare & Co. – are eliminated, students will finally have the privilege of rising to the heights of saving gestures that allow the lucky to balance the market's budget by producing and consuming useless shit.

One is on the right track when one sees that, in whatever diverse forms they are found, governments always adhere to the unanimity of the principle: "Business enterprise should be in accordance with training and training should be in accordance with the needs of business enterprise."

### RECRUITS NEEDED TO MANAGE BANKRUPTCY

To aid in understanding our era, it isn't futile to determine the processes by which the development of capitalism has successfully completed its journey to the level of planetary crisis, which is actually the crisis of the economy in its totalitarian functioning.

Since the start of the 19th century, the ensemble of individual and collective behaviors has been dominated by the necessity to produce. The organization of production with the aid of intellectual and manual labor demanded a method managed by executives and an authoritarian, indeed, a despotic mentality.

This was the period of the military conquest of markets. The industrialized countries unscrupulously pillaged the resources of the new colonies.

When the proletariat undertook a coordination of its revindications, it submitted to, despite its anarchist spontaneity, the clutches of autocracy, which the preeminence of the productive sector had already allowed to arise and become strong. Syndicates and workers' parties took on a bureaucratic structure; soon enough these institutions crippled the working masses, while at the same time they shouted that they were emancipating the workers.

Red power installed itself even easier than it had squeezed a few extra shares of benefits from the exploiting class. These "shares" were translated as wage increases, the opportunity to plan the time of work (the eight-hour-day, paid leave time), and social advantages (welfare, health care).

The years 1920 and 1930 saw the centralization of production reach its greatest heights. The passage from private capitalism to state capitalism was conducted brutally in Italy, Germany, and Russia, where the dictatorship of a unique party – fascist, Nazi, Stalinist – gave the means of production over to state control.

In the countries in which a liberal tradition safeguarded formal democracy, the monopolistic concentration of capital and the state's ascension to a managerial position came about through a process that was slower, more underhanded, and less violent.

It was in the United States that a new economic orientation first manifested itself, when the country dived headlong into a development that would considerably transform mentalities and morals, creating the necessity to consume and making it equal to or even more important than the necessity to produce.

Since 1945, the Marshall Plan, officially designed to aid a Europe devastated by war, opened the road to the society of consumption, which was closely identified with a society of happiness.

The obligation to produce at any cost ceded its place to an enterprise dressed up in the charms of seduction, beneath which was hidden a new primary imperative: consume. It doesn't matter what, just consume.

We now come to an amazing stage of evolution: a hedonism of the supermarket and self-serve democracy, propagating the illusion of pleasures and free choice, managing to undermine the sacrosanct patriarchal, authoritarian, military and religious values that always favored an economy dominated by the imperatives of production, but without having to worry about retaliation from the anarchists of the past.

Today, one sees how much the colonization of the laboring masses by the pressing invitation to consume a high-strung happiness has replaced, and thus loosened, the stranglehold on overseas colonies and has favored struggles of independence.

If the "freedom" of exchange and its indispensable corollary of expansion have contributed to the end of the majority of dictatorial regimes and to the collapse of the communist citadel, they have also rapidly unveiled the limits of consumable happiness.

Frustrated by a happiness that doesn't coincide in the least with increases in useless gadgets and adulterated products, consumers have, since 1968, become conscious of the new alienation whose object they have become. To work for a salary that one then invests in the purchase of commodities with an uncertain use-value suggests less a state of bliss than the disagreeable impression that one has been manipulated in accordance with the exigencies of the market. Those who put up with working in workshops and offices all day don't leave except to enter the factories of the consumable, which are less coercive but more deceitful.

False needs prevail over real ones, the past practice of selling "must have" products has led to a more and more aberrant production of parasitic services, which attach themselves to the citizen

with the mission of securing, training, surrounding, counseling, supporting and guiding him or her, in short to snare him or her in the trap of a constant solicitude and dependency that likens him or her little by little to a handicapped person.

Thus, one has seen the primary sector sacrificed to profit the tertiary sector, which sells its own bureaucratic complexity in the form of aid and protection. Quality agriculture has been crushed under the weight of monoculture food production, which overproduces ersatz cereals, meats, and vegetables. The art of finding accommodations has been buried under dull colorlessness, boredom, and the criminality of the acres of concrete that assure revenues for the business crowd. As for the school, it has been called to serve as a reserve of elite students, who are promised a good career in profitable uselessness or in the mafias of finance. The belt is buckled. The mantra "study in order to find a job," as aberrant as it may be, simply voices the same demand to consume in the sole interest of an economic machine that is jamming up every part of the western world – although every year, the specialists announce its triumphant re-start, because they have supposedly cleared the jam.

We are drowning in the mire of a parasitic and Mafioso-style bureaucracy in which money accumulates and gets caught in a closed circuit, instead of getting invested in quality products, useful for making life and the environment better. As the good teacher knows, money is what we lack the least, contrary to what your elected representatives may tell you, but teaching isn't a marketable sector anyway.

There exists, for all this, an alternative to the economy of decline and its impossible throwbacks. By redirecting the ever-deepening gap between the interests of commodities and the interests of living people, it suddenly becomes plausible to reconvert to the service of humanity a technology that lucrative imperialism has dehumanized – and to expose things like nuclear fission and genetic experimentation more clearly as the redoubtable menaces they really are. This alternative demands that priority be given to the quality of life and its basic activities of acquiring lodging, food, transport and accommodations of all sorts, and the needs of health, education and culture, which are exactly what the absurdity of archaic capitalism condemns to self-dismemberment beneath the constant blows of budget restrictions.

A mutation is being primed for explosion before our eyes. Neocapitalism is getting ready to reconstruct what 19th century capitalism ruined. Despite the varied resistance movements of the past, natural energy is being replaced by polluting and devastating means of production.

In the same way that the industrial revolution gave birth, at the beginning of the 19th century, to a considerable number of inventions and innovations – electricity, gas, vaporizers, telecommunications, rapid transport – our age is in need of new creations that will replace those that no longer serve life, but menace it: petroleum, nuclear energy, the pharmaceutical industry, chemical pollutants, experimental biology . . . and the plethora of parasitic services in which and on which bureaucracy proliferates.

## **THE END OF FORCED LABOR WILL INAUGURATE THE ERA OF CREATIVITY**

Work is an aborted creation. The creative genius of humanity has found itself trapped in a system that condemns it to the production of power and profit, and that doesn't allow any restraints to be placed upon its luxuriance, other than art and reverie.

Now this work of exploiting nature, so often exalted like the Promethean power that transforms the world, today delivers to us its invoices for sales in all accounts: a comfortable survival where all resources and the heart are smothered in the vicious cycle of marketability.

How could a concept so useless and harmful to life as work not be smothered in its turn? Yesterday it procured the car and the television, at the price of polluted air and the palliatives of an absent life. Work is today no more than an uncertain life-jacket in a society paralyzed by bureaucratic inflation, where nothing is guaranteed anymore, neither salaries, lodgings, natural products, energy resources, nor social acquisitions.

In an atmosphere made oppressive by the scarcity business, the diminishing of work is evidently resented like a curse. Joblessness is just off-peak work. The same resignation and the same necessity to wait for alms to be given are seen when the worker waits for his or her paycheck to come through, after devoting him or herself to a job that was boring (even though at the time the worker would consider it imprudent to admit it).

While everything goes along with the current hopelessness, which inspires an economically programmed planetary self-destruction, there is an abandoned world waiting to be taken over and occupied so that it can be rehabilitated, restored, divested of its nuisances, and rebuilt for our well-being. As it shatters, the mirror of consumerist illusion puts happiness within our reach, after showing us its deceitful reflections.

Reduce the duration of work in order to better redistribute it? Very well. But from what perspective, and with what conscience? If the aim of the operation is to get the greatest number to produce more goods and services useful for the market and not for life, then, in exchange for a salary that would pay for one's increasing consumption, the old capitalism has done nothing but recuperate to its own profit what it feigned having abandoned to the profit of all.

On the other hand, if the same steps taken obey the solicitations of a Neocapitalism searching out in ecological investments a weapon against the property speculation of an ownership without imagination, all that'll be lacking will be a change of consciousness for a guaranteed salary and a reduced-time workday for the path of free creation and the leisure to find and to be oneself, at last, to be opened for everyone.

Despite the occultation that the bureaucrats of corruption and the business mafiosos carry around with them, there exists a socio-economic demand running counter to the calls for help coming from the ordinary collapse. This demand clamors for an environment that would better the quality of life, for production without oppression and pollution, for authentically human relationships, and for the end of the dictatorship that marketability exercises over life.

It falls to you – and to the new school you'll invent – to prevent creativity, objectively stimulated by the promises of jobs in the public service, from going to hell because of economic alienation or because it sliced itself open in trying to create itself.

If you forget what you are and what kind of life you would like to lead, you can not hope for any other fate besides that of being a good commodity that is discarded as soon as the toll booth is passed and the toll is paid.

## **GIVE FAVOR TO QUALITY**

Forced to obey the criteria of quantity, the road to profit lapses into the absurdity of overproduction. Yesterday, to produce a lot augmented the surplus value accumulated by bosses, who

did not hesitate to destroy surpluses of coffee, meat, wheat and corn, so that they could prevent a drop in market price.

In reaching a larger segment of the populace, the development of consumption has permitted the absorption, up to a certain point, of an increasing quantity of commodities conceived of less for their practical uses than for their effect of bringing in money. The quality of a product has been treated in such an off-handed manner that it is no longer the quality that determines the sales tag, but rather the bullshit publicity that dolls up the commodity to seduce the client.

But as the highest price goes to the one that washes the whitest, so does the lie use itself when its turn comes. Outraged by the excess of scorn, the clientele is finished balking. It arms itself with critique, and refuses to swallow blindly the little spoonfuls of slogans that are fed to him or her at every instant through the eyes, the mouth, the ears, the head.

Many have decided not to let themselves be consumed by an economy that mocks their health and intelligence. In demanding the quality that was offered them, these people find that it's their own quality of being that they discover or rediscover, that their specificity as lucid individuals was occulted by this reduction to the alienated, artificially gregarious state that provokes and maintains consumerist propaganda.

But now that consumers' defense organizations have organized boycotts against products that have had the nature ripped from them by an agriculture that inundates the market with force-grown cereals, fertilizer-ridden vegetables and meats coming from martyred animals in concentration-camp farms, it seems that the individual would be well advised to see that, in the junior and high schools, culture has taken the same path taken by the worst agricultural practices.

If politicians nourished the good intentions with respect to education that they never cease proclaiming, wouldn't they get down to business by assuring its quality? Even if they did, it's a little late to be decreeing the two measures that determine the most important conditions of human learning: an increase in the number of teachers, and a decrease in the number of students per class, so that each person can be treated according to his or her specific needs, and not in the anonymity of a crowd.

Apparently, the concept of "interests" has more of an economic connotation for the politicians than the simple human one. If governments favor the intensive production of students, so that students end up consumable objects for the market, then the principles of a sane administration require that the greatest possible number of heads be stuck into the smallest possible school area and tended by the fewest possible number of personnel. The logic is unanswerable and seemingly unstoppable, and no Society for the Protection of Animals rises up against the forced consumption of knowledge submissive to the law of supply and demand, nor against the morals of the horse dealers who reign over the stables at job fairs.

Resign yourself, then, to the political party, busy with stupidities and tied to the gregarious state, since I can't see how it's possible to educate a class of 30 students without iron rule or tricks.

This is not to declare the material impossibility of promoting a personalized pedagogy. Wouldn't the sophistication of audiovisual techniques permit a large number of students to receive individually what schoolmasters used to repeat over and over until the students had it memorized (orthography, elementary grammar, vocabulary, chemical formulas, theorems, music theory, declination...)? Couldn't one test the degree of assimilation and comprehension in the form of a game?

Liberated from a thankless, mechanical occupation, the teacher would have nothing to do but devote him or herself to the essential part of his or her job: to assure the quality of globally received information, to help in the formation of autonomous individuals, and to give the best of his or her knowledge and experience in helping each person learn to read themselves and to read the world.

Information to the greatest number, training in little groups. Working at the center of a vast irrigation network that diverts the multiplicity of ideas and things that can be known so that it flows toward each student, the educator will have at last the freedom to become what he or she has always dreamed of becoming: the revealer of a creativity to which no one possessed the key, since it was hidden so deeply beneath the weight of the constraints of the past.



## Chapter 5: Learn autonomy, not dependence

Over the centuries, the school has extended the sequestration of the child imposed by the authoritarian, patriarchal family. Now that a rough sketch of mutual understanding, fashioned from affection and progressive autonomy, is being developed between parents and their offspring, it would be regrettable to see that the school ceases to be inspired by familial community.

Paradoxically, the educational system, which teaches youths, i.e., those who change the most, has been the institution that has changed the least of all.

The traditional family would prefer to produce children in a line rather than offer life to two or three little beings to whom it would confer its love and attention without reserve. Those children who do not die at an early age most often hide a secret wound from view. Tyranny, culpability and emotional blackmail engenders the same sorts of mercenaries who, hiding behind their hardness of character an infantilism that enjoins them to look for a substitute for the father and mother in the families-on-loan that constitute all the churches, political parties, sects, "national gregariousness," and army corps of all genres. For all its humanity, history is filled with showoffs who need help. Some cynicism would be necessary to evoke the concept of "natural selection," proper to the animal species; just look at our production of dead flesh, which fills the factories and is spat out by guns. The nature of this "production" implies that we need to correct the statistics coming from this "natural selection," as well as recognize the fact that the economy of familial procreation carries a flaw whereby death settles its accounts.

The evolution of morals makes us regard as a monstrosity today that bestial proliferation of lives irredeemably condemned to be absorbed beneath the blows of the machete of war, massacre, famine and sickness. This evolution does not prevent the stigmatizing of overpopulation in countries where religious obscurantism feeds off of the misery that it knowingly maintains, nor the acceptance in Europe of the same archaic and scornful spirit that continues to treat students like cattle, though that spirit is supposedly relieving students of a life it assumes would be inconsequential without schooling.

The overpopulation in classes not only causes barbarous behaviors, vandalism, delinquency, boredom and hopelessness, it moreover perpetuates the ignoble criteria of competitiveness, the concurrent struggle that eliminates whoever doesn't conform to the exigencies of the market. Ambitious brutes get the better of sensible and generous beings; we see the shadow of the sharks of power calling themselves high-sounding things, as if they were trying to be the brilliant thinkers of olden days, as if they were trying to prove that they were a part of some "natural" selection.

There are no stupid children; there is nothing but imbecilic education. Forcing students to heave themselves up onto the top of the heap contributes to the laborious progress of animal rage and cunning, but surely not to the development of a creative and human intelligence.

You say that nothing is comparable nor reducible to who one is, to what one is. Each individual possesses his or her own qualities; his or her only responsibility is to cultivate them for the sole pleasure of having one's feelings of oneself be in agreement with one's manner of living.

The individual must cease, then, to exclude from the educational path the child who is more interested in hamsters and dreams than in the history of the Roman Empire. For the one who refuses to allow him or herself to be programmed by the logicians of promotional sales, all paths lead towards him or herself and towards creation.

Yesterday, it was necessary to identify with the father, whether he be was a hero or a cretin (such sweet sarcasm came from that ambiguity). Now that fathers notice that their independence progresses with the independence of their children, now that fathers feel enough love for themselves and others to help adolescents get rid of their images – who could still support what the school still proposes as models of accomplishment, i.e., the efficient and maggoty financier, the energetic and senile politician, the Mafioso reigning with clientelism and corruption, the businessman making his final profits from pillaging the planet?

All this is designed to condemn you to never attaining anything, to constantly looking for yourself and your identity in a religion, an ideology, a nationality, a race, a culture, a tradition, a myth, an image. Identifying with the most living facets of your own being and self is the only way to emancipation.

## **AN ALLIANCE WITH CHILDREN IS AN ALLIANCE WITH NATURE**

Violence exercised against the child by the patriarchal family participates in the rape of nature by work and the commodity. The consciousness of planetary pillage has gone from an uncompromising defense of the environment to a nonviolent defense of natural resources, but has not contributed much to the shattering of the yoke that economic exploitation makes weigh so heavily upon man, woman, child, fauna, and flora.

The sentiment that we all issued from a common womb, which is the earth, and whose memory is revived during training in the maternal belly, has fed so well the nostalgia for a Golden Age and original harmony that one realizes suddenly that forced labor separates us from nature and from ourselves with a ripping up felt inside, a discomfort that we had for so long perceived as an existential torment, a suffering of being itself.

The failure of a ransacking, polluting economy and the emergence of a project for the symbiotic recreation of human beings and their natural habitat will henceforth get rid of our paradise lost, the ghost of which has haunted a history that was powerless to construct itself humanly: the myths of the good savage, primitive communism and apocalyptic millenarianism, which, after appearing in the glory days of nazism, reappeared in the name of integrating us better into contemporary society.

At least we will have learned that life is not a regression to some protoplasmic stage, but a process of refinement and the establishment of an organization of desires.

The idea long prevailed that, in the struggle against cancer, it was important to destroy those cells that a sudden and frenetic proliferation had condemned to wither away and die. It is preferable today to reinforce the life-potential of healthy peripheral cells and to favor the reconquering of what is still alive before annihilating those that death has already snatched away. I would be satisfied if such an attitude sovereignly determined our dealings with ourselves, with our fellow human beings and with the world.

We know, after having seen so many idiotic generations make sensibility into a weakness and take up arms only to become bloodthirsty, that love for the living awakens an intelligence that cannot be measured against the underhanded spirit reigning over the totalitarian universes.

A highly respectable ethic – the respect for living beings – prescribes that one not kill a stupid person, and not knock over a tree without being ready to avoid it when it falls. Nevertheless, what such recommendations assume about tricks and constraints will never spirit away conviction like they spirit away the awareness that the prejudice one holds towards the living one also holds towards oneself – that is, if the individual doesn't stand guard, because the living is not an object, but a subject, who merits being treated according to the unalienable right of having been born to live.

## FROM INDISPENSABLE AID TO THE REFUSAL OF PERMANENT ASSISTANCE

The road to autonomy follows the example of the infant who is learning to walk.

Progress doesn't take place without tears and efforts. The risk of falling, bumping into a wall, suffering additionally in the first few steps the shackles of fear. Nonetheless, the existence of affection that encourages you to get back up again, to start again, to devote yourself and to coordinate gestures, demonstrates that mastery of movement is acquired better and faster when you are not locked in the ancient conditions in which one worried, not only about the crusading fires of a mocking vanity, diffuse menaces and the anguish of not being loved anymore if one didn't apply oneself, but also about a certain sickness that is underhandedly maintained by the ambiguity of parents who both desire and doubt that their child will make his or her first steps towards an autonomy that could then be subtracted from their tutelary authority, thus removing from them the feeling of being indispensable.

The teaching of the very young has taken up without difficulty the same familial disposition that put everything into work in order to assure happiness in independence, just as parents only recover happiness, lost since adolescence, when they discover control. Filling themselves with that osmotic comprehension in which one educates by letting him or herself be educated as well, nursery schools have first crack at giving the gift of affection and the opportunity to explore. That affection, which is an invaluable quality in the existence of individuals and collectivities, should supposedly be indebted to the lowest paid governmental businessmen says enough as to what heights of scorn for public utility the logic of profit climbs.

The rupture is brutal from the moment you enter the school. There one regresses into the archaic family, in which the infant can not even learn how to get by alone without signaling the act of eternal recognition for those who had been in charge of his or her training. Confidence in yourself is undermined and compensated for by insolence; school reconstructs the repugnant mixture of the morgue and the servility that composed, in the past, ordinary social behavior.

In the sincere desire to make the adolescent a human being in the full sense, the teacher over-taxes him or herself in a truly uncomfortable exercise of power to which the hierarchical structure constrains him or her. How could teachers not be tempted to make themselves indispensable and to maintain in the student a weakness that renders domination more comfortable? Crutch-sellers have a need for cripples.

If we escape this society, we do so barely and with difficulty. This society has never believed in individuals, and individuals place their belief in the powers that cripple them by forcing them to walk. God, churches, the state, fatherlands, political parties, leaders, and little Fathers of the People – all of them have had enough pretext not to live for themselves. The children who were never told about anything unless it might have made them fall down – it is time to teach them how to teach themselves. In the end, teachers such as ourselves can break the habit of being in demand and start to be on offer. We hope that this miserable society of people, which is on permanent benefits whose passivity gives the corrupt their force, becomes nothing but a thing of the past.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE FUNDS SHOULD NOT BE AT THE SERVICE OF MONEY**

Education has to do with the creation of human beings, not with the production of commodities. Will we have revoked the absurd despotism of gods if we have tolerated the fatalism of an economy that corrupts and degrades life on the planet and in our everyday existence?

The only defense available to us is the will to live, allied with the consciousness that propagates it. Judging by the capacity of human beings to subvert what kills them, this will can be an invincible weapon.

Endeavoring to govern us, the logic of business demands that all remuneration, grants, and charity be paid off with the greatest possible obedience to the commodity system. You have no other choices than to follow it or to refuse it by following your desires. Either you enter like a client into the world market of lucrative knowledge – in other words, like a slave to a parasitic bureaucracy that is condemned to collapse beneath the growing weight of its uselessness – or you will fight for your autonomy, come up with the fundamentals of a new school and a new society, and recuperate the money squandered each day by the ordinary corruption of financial operations in order to invest it into the quality of life. In France (a country much like ours [i.e., Belgium]), "The national union estimated that taxes evaluated at 230 billion francs, being close to the amount of the budget deficit, were instances of fraud imputable to the business milieu; this scandal lifts the veil covering the corrupt practices of the large industrial and financial groups." It is no different here.

The money stolen from life is placed at the service of money itself. Such is the reality hidden by the absurd and menacing shadow of the large economic institutions: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, the European Commission, the Bank of France, the Bank of America, and many others.

Their support for foundations and university research centers implies that, in exchange for support, the evangelism of profit should be propagated, easily transfigured into a universal truth, by the bloody mercenaries of press, radio, and television.

But, as formidable as it may seem, the machine rots from its emptiness, and goes out of order slowly: it will finish, as in Kafka's *Penal Colony*, by engraving its Law into the flesh of its master.

Do we not see a few courageous magistrates, motivated by the desire to gain the favor of an ethical reaction, who are smashing the impunity that financial arrogance has guaranteed? The taxation of huge fortunes – 1% of French people own 25% of the national fortune, whereas 10%

own 55% of the wealth; it is worse in America, where 5% of the population, last time I checked, owned 90% of the wealth – and the prosecution of the most obvious examples of corruption, and only the perceived ones, of course, committed by businessmen, the denunciation of the scandal of representation fees (a scandal ignored in the U.S., where court costs and lawyer costs are higher than anywhere), the fining of corrupt administrators, and the blocking of assets of international fraud – all this indicates well enough, on a card everyone can read, the means of access to the treasure, which the citizens have created and sustained, and from which they are systematically kept. It is no less true that the path gets lost beneath the devastating effect of resignation, that is, if money isn't seized and invested in the only domain that would truly be in the general interest: the quality of everyday life and its environment.

Without doubt, however, the honest magistrates are wearing the robes of justice; you, on the other hand, have nothing, because you have never created anything that could sustain you. You do, however, possess over repression – no matter how just it wants to make itself look – an advantage that it will never be able to prevail over: the generosity of the living, without which there is no creation or human progress.

Teaching has found itself trapped in a realm of unoccupied lodgings that the owners have preferred to abandon and leave to rot, since empty space is marketable, but space that welcomes shelterless men, women and children isn't. Thus *The Economist* states that "the subordination of commerce to the rights of men will have a cost more than it's worth" (April 9, 1994). Nevertheless, to requisition a building to give people shelter from misery – which is relieved due to the simple fact that it's warm inside – in the end doesn't escape the plan of destruction of useful goods, to which the inflation of the parasitic sectors (and the proliferating bureaucracy that this inflation engenders) are so conducive.

What you get out of yourself won't really be yours unless you make it better, in the sense that "to live" means "to live more." Occupy your school; don't let them appropriate you for their programmed dilapidation. Paint the walls, make them beautiful and to your liking, because beauty incites creation and love, and ugliness attracts hate and annihilation.

Transform the schools into creative workshops, into meeting places, into parks of attractive intelligence. Let's make the schools into fountains of happy knowledge, following the example of the vegetable gardens that the homeless, jobless, and the most deprived have occasionally had the imagination to plant in the big cities, after they've smashed up the asphalt and concrete.

The errors and gropings of whoever undertakes to create and to be created are nothing in the face of the privilege that such an undertaking confers, i.e., the revocation of the fear of being oneself, which the forces of repression secretly nourish and solicit.

We are born, said Shakespeare, to tread upon the heads of kings. The kings and their armies of executioners are nothing but dust and ashes. Learn to march alone, and you will walk proudly over those who, in their dying world, have nothing but the ambition to die with it.

In collectives of students and professors, the task of snatching the school from the glaciation of profit and changing it to a place of simple human generosity reappears. Sooner or later, the quality of life will attain the sovereignty denied to it by an economy reduced to selling and valorizing its own collapse.

From the instant that you form the project of a pedagogy founded on a natural pact with life, you will no longer have to beg money from those who exploit and scorn you by marketing you. You will demand that pact because you will know how and why you can seize the freedom that it implies.

One doesn't live as long as expected if one doesn't fully develop one's capacities.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Raoul Vaneigem  
A Warning to Students of All Ages  
1995

<http://www.notbored.org/avertissement.html>  
this pamphlet was originally published in French in 1995. It was translated by JML with NOT  
BORED! in August 2000.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**