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Raoul Vaneigem

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A call for the global creation of collectivities that struggle for
a free and authentic human life

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Abolish Predation, Become Human Again

**A call for the global creation of collectivities that
struggle for a free and authentic human life**

Raoul Vaneigem

2024, January

We have made Mankind the shame of humanity.

From the most ancient times to the present day, no society
has attained the degree of ignominy and abjection reached by
an agro-mercantile civilization that, for two thousand years,
has passed for Civilization *par excellence*.

It is undeniable that, as trans-hominids, we have inherited
an instinct for predation and an instinct for mutual assistance.
They constitute our share of residual animalism. But while
the awareness of an interweaved solidarity has favored our
progressive humanization, predatory aggressiveness has
developed in us a tendency for self-destruction. Is this so
difficult to understand?

The appearance of an economy that sacrifices life for work,
for Power, for Profit, has marked a break with the egalitarian-
ism and the symbiotic evolution of pre-agrarian civilizations.
Agriculture and livestock breeding have privileged the preda-

tory instinct, at the expense of a life drive that has never renounced the reestablishment of its usurped sovereignty.

Appropriation, competition and rivalry have pleased themselves by exalting the “civilized wild animal,” whose spiritual sublimation serves to legitimize their enterprises. In its emblematic form, the lion thus lets one believe that it is *natural* to hunt and oppress the beasts. What is in fact required is *the denaturation of the human being*. In vain does one seek among the most pitiless carnivores the cruelty that is as deliberate or the ferociousness that is as inventive, as those demonstrated by Justice, Religion, Ideology, Empire, State and Bureaucracy.

We must see the fixed grin of the arms dealers at the moment when their billable products are tearing apart women, children, men, animals, forests and [whole] landscapes. “Make do with what you have,”¹ right?

Profit has the cynicism of a done deal [*fait accompli*]. It hides nothing from us about those *heartless restaurants* in which the *fashionable ladies and gentlemen* stuff themselves while their luxury shoes drip blood and excrement.

Why get involved when pre-formatted public opinion takes the side of one or another belligerent, as if it were a soccer match between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine? The bets are on and the cheers of the spectators cover the screams of the massacred crowds.

Simply cursing a foul civilization does not prevent it from perpetuating itself when we let the laws of financial rapacity orchestrate our denaturation, form the patterns of our apathy, and punctuate our frustrations by triggering explosions of a blind and murderous hatred. Add insult to injury? What would be the point? Doing so would only reinforce a personal sense of guilt that is relieved by making the others feel guilty. The predatory reflex would once again find its niche there.

¹ «A la guerre comme à la guerre»: literally “in war as in war.”

confers upon us an awareness that is capable of humanizing it. This is what we are resolved to attempt to bring about.

Let's rebuild the earth and make our communities, our neighborhoods and our regions oases that the living renders invulnerable!

The exhortations addressed to the greatest number of people are subject to a double discredit: on the one hand, the slogans and militant incitements restart the old motor of Power in which *radicalism quickly hinders the radicalism of lived experience*; on the other hand, what chooses to be announced from the podium of generalities is easily diluted in the hodge-podge of ideas cut off from life.

Except, that is, if the reader discovers [in that radicalism] the occasion for an intimate dialogue with herself. In other words, if she drinks from the source of the human consciousness that is in her.

Rather than address myself to the greatest number of people, I prefer to speak directly to *the autonomous individual*. Because she is not ignorant of the fact that my sole intention is to confide my way of seeing things to her, in a fraternal debate in which there is no need to know each other in order to recognize each other.

What better guarantee for the awakening of consciousness is there than mutual aid? It is not by chance that it is reborn spontaneously to the extent that predation ceases to hide the facts that it devours itself and makes its own self-destruction profitable.

The bankruptcy of *having* propagates an ennui that is worse than death, the specter of which it ceaselessly raises. And the breath of life rehabilitates *being*. The subject frees itself from the object, it frees itself from the thing to which reification had reduced it. Isn't this what is implied by the adage "men and women are not commodities"? The simple changing of roles – men taking on femininity and women taking on masculinity – doesn't change anything. From the moment that we spare children from the ravages of predatory education, we have only to leave to their spontaneous radicalism the care of awakening them to their destinies as human beings.

There is no need for prophets to foresee what is going to happen: either the triumph of the idiot who thinks with a blud-

geon or the surging of a life that has regained awareness of the sovereignty that can be exerted by its humanity.

The usefulness of fascism and anti-fascism is that they hide the true final struggle, the one that – inseparably both existential and social – implies the eradication of predation, the disappearance of hierarchical Power, and the end of the barking out of orders.

The lucrative cynicism and absurdity of war, fomented by governmental and global mafias, has ended up tiring even the most obtuse of its pimps. The succession of virtually interchangeable conflicts incites “public” opinion to gradually exit from the chessboard of geopolitical schemes.

It is here and now that the appearance of May 1968,² the Zapatistas,³ the Yellow Vests⁴ and the combatants of Rojava⁵ opens up to life and its awareness a path that the historical derailment of the agro-market Civilization has obstructed and led towards death.

Hoping for nothing does not mean despairing of everything. *The return to life is a violent, natural and spontaneous reaction.* It holds the power to ruin the desertification of the earth, from which profit-making is drawing the last resources. The return to life, to its authenticity, to its awareness, is our real immunological self-defense. Since denaturation hinders the nature present in and around us in the name of Profit, why not bet on it to have done with a hateful civilization? How?

² In France in May-June 1968, a generalized wildcat strike and an widespread occupations movement almost toppled the French government. Vaneigem himself was a participant in this movement.

³ See “The Zapatistas’ Fight is the Universal Fight of Life Against the Desertification of the Earth,” 2019: <https://notbored.org/zapatistas.pdf>.

⁴ See “Concerning the ‘Yellow Vests’: Everything is possible, even self-managing assemblies in the middle of street intersections, villages and neighborhoods,” 2018: <https://notbored.org/yellow-vests.pdf>.

⁵ Rojava is a region in Northern Syria that has been autonomous since 2012.

The anonymity demanded by individuals who struggle for their autonomous solidarity offers an example of a weapon of life. It unites the resistance to oppression. In the same way that the obstinacy of the Yellow Vests no longer needs yellow vests to be propagated, we witness the increasing presence of a life that wants to be free and unencumbered by religions, ideologies, politics, or hierarchical, governmental and globalist structures. *Life above all else is the broken gun that breaks reification* and teaches us how to sabotage the transformation of being into having. It radicalizes the reformist militant by dissuading him from letting the Power that he claims to combat become embedded in him.

The living carries within itself the fertility of desire. No desert can resist its fecundity. In our intimacy, the decision is taken to put an end to the moment that belongs to the time of wear and tear, work, and death and to privilege the moment and the desire for life that manifests itself in the pleasures of lived authenticity. Do you want the proof *a contrario*?¹⁴ At the moment that I write this, we may observe the formidable wave of self-destructive nihilism that is overwhelming the societies eaten away by the cancer of profitability.

I give less importance to the support of a great number of people than to the intelligence of autonomous individuals, which is, due to its *will to authenticity, the antidote to intellectual elitism.*

Slow but inevitable, the reversal of perspective illuminates the renewal; it is the place where the reunification of the existential and the social takes place. Individual combat and the combat for a uniquely human society is one and the same thing.

Life has no need of masters, religious cults or parties.

Pleasure is the peaceful violence of the living that proliferates in and around us. It is the cost-free arrangement that

¹⁴ Latin in original: argument from the contrary.

my awareness of the derisory and pathetic duty to appear; it frees me from the dictatorship of appearances, of the spectacle and of the fear of being weighed and judged that it constantly conveys. Isn't true happiness the rediscovery of the innocence of being oneself, of not having to justify oneself, of *desiring according to the heart without expecting or hoping for anything from the mind*?

We are headed towards a new Renaissance, towards a resurgence of the Enlightenment. Our transversal path will be that of *an openly declared clandestinity*. The fist of profit strikes us everywhere: let's strike back everywhere and dismember it!

Clandestinity begins within us in the "dark room" where we are alone, debating what we do not want and what we endlessly desire. It awakens us to the awareness of our life drives, the pleasures that stimulate it, and the vexations that invert and turn them into death drives.

The paradox of an openly declared clandestinity is also attested to by the anonymity of the Yellow Vests, as by the anonymity that each individual claims when she takes refuge in the dark room of her secret desires – where she alone is able to decide if she will join the system of predation and the egotistical calculus of individualism or if she will instead devote herself to the transmutation of survival into a full and complete life.

In "Fuenteovejuna," the dramatist Lope de Vega¹³ depicts the inhabitants of a village who, tired by the cruelty of an iniquitous governor, assassinate him. Tasked with finding the culprit, judges and executioners put questions to the villagers, but they receive no other response but the name of the village, which is Fuente Ovejuna. Wearied by war, the interrogators order a general amnesty.

¹³ Félix Lope de Vega y Carpio (1562–1635) was Spanish playwright, poet and novelist.

Don't ask me, ask yourself, you who at every instant navigates between lethargy and revolt.

Everywhere signs of distress and jubilation mix together and multiply. Don't be mistaken! The angry refusal of a war waged against a specifically targeted region – Palestine, in this case – goes much further than a singular disavowal. It more and more clearly expresses the execration of a war conducted, not only against the population of a particular area, but also against the people of all the countries on Planet Earth. This rejection of war has understood that, *for totalitarian greed, living is a crime*. This is why the new global insurrections are part of the self-defense of the living. In them are embodied both the will to abrogate a universe of psychopaths who make death profitable and the implementation of a new alliance with nurturing nature.

This is one war too many. Not for the governmental and supra-governmental weapons lobbies, not for the producers of narco-neuroleptics, but for whomever isn't disposed to dying early by joining the party of voluntary servitude and "*viva la muerte!*"⁶

The problem is principally due to the doubts, to the despair, to the disappointments against which life's firm stance collides generation after generation.

Isn't it absurd to expect anything at all from the governmental authorities that make decisions for us and that harass us with their degrees, each one more ridiculously dishonest than its predecessor?

Despite the gloominess of the era, don't we at least have the pleasure of seeing, right before our very eyes, the shriveling up of the Gods – those impostors who for ten thousand years have usurped *the faculty of creating and creating oneself*, while life, in its crazy fecundity, has in fact granted it to the human species?

⁶ "Long Live Death!" was a fascist slogan during the Spanish Civil War.

The time has come to resume the course of our real destiny. The time has come to change the world and become what we want to be: not the owners of a sterile universe, but the inhabitants of a world whose abundance is such that we can enjoy it freely. Enough of this upside-down world in which profit-making becomes impoverished by impoverishing its resources! May the disappearance of harmful [sources of] energy de-pollute the water, the air, the soil, and the land so that our creative ingenuity effaces even the memory of a regrettable diversion of our evolution!

In the intensity of a desire, *the present awakens to the presence of a life* that doesn't care about being measured or programmed. The joy of living initiates the art of harmonization, because it carries within itself the specifically human faculty of creating and creating oneself.

The appropriation of the soil and animal husbandry have implanted in our morals a herd instinct in which the individual sees her intelligence lowered to the level of the flocks that she feeds. What is being sketched out today is the resurgence of the autonomous individual who liberates herself from individualism and its alienated consciousness.

We are at a turning point in history, in which the elaboration of a style of life is supplanting a survival that is condemned to work and opening up an existence devoted to the comfort of palliative care.

The understanding that emanates from our vital drives highlights an incessant conflict between *a perspective of life and a perspective of death*, between the attraction of our desires, illuminated by our sensitive intelligence, and the hold that intellectual intelligence has over them. Because the blockage of our emotions that Wilhelm Reich called character armoring obeys the imperatives of a mechanical efficiency to which the body at work is held. And so, quite obviously, if the pleasure that comes from the cost-free nature of life [*la gratuité du vivant*] has no place in totalitarian greed, this means that restoring the joy of

extenuating circumstances. It doesn't matter if it comes from rich neighborhoods or slums, from conservatives or progressives: NO INHUMANITY IS TOLERABLE. Let this be clear and unambiguous!

We will do everything possible to eradicate from our morals the propensities to kill, injure, rape, or mistreat others, whatever the reasons that are given to explain their emergence or resurgence. We've had enough of the universal tribunal in which weighing, excusing, condemning, punishing, and granting amnesty perpetuate the jumping up and down of impotent indignation. Righteous anger will remain impotent as long as the "*Get out of my way*"¹¹ that condemns us to the social jungle and the predatory reflex remains embedded in each one of us.

We have had enough of the caricature of existence that has been globally popularized by narco-American evangelism! The *self-made man*¹² only builds and propagates his own death. That is his opening bid, gloriously displayed!

Isn't it in the autonomous individual that we see the intensification of the pleasures of not having to answer to anyone, of being alone in the untangling, the debating and, sooner or later, the carrying out, in an alchemical mode, of a transformation of the gloomy survival that stagnates in each of us? To bring about the transmutation of a raw material – condemned to rot – into the full and complete life to which we have always aspired as human beings. *The art of living replaces all that we've learned about dying.* Such is the only form of teaching to which I want to adhere.

Enjoying my lived authenticity, as disordered as it might be, frees me from the obligation to play a role, to which individualism and the herd that guides it are constrained. It raises

¹¹ The French here is *ôte-toi de là que je m'y mette*: literally "get out of there so I can put myself there."

¹² English in original.

universally ensures the promotion of anti-physical values,¹⁰ values that are hostile to nature.

The will to individual autonomy is both alone and accompanied in its fight for the emancipation of the self. Questions of health, stability, immunity, friendship, love, pleasure, and creativity are at the heart of the emancipation of the earth illuminated by the new global insurrections. The stakes are the same: *attaining freedom for the various human desires by creating a society that ensures their harmonization with each other.*

In my daily life, the authenticity of lived experience is the natural guarantee of my desires. Their freedom excludes market freedoms – the freedoms to exploit, to oppress, to kill.

For the individual who seeks autonomy, *freedom and authenticity* constitute *the paradox of an openly declared clandestinity.*

The sermon of good intentions has never been as insufferable as it is in the 21st century, when alienated consciousness no longer uses kid gloves to put words to work. Under the names of terrorist, assassin, psychopath and outlaw, it designates those who, alas, are in *a state of inhumanity that the frenzy of short-term profit aggravates and accelerates to match the pace of its profitable and useless great works.*

I have always defended this principle: *absolute freedom for all opinions, absolute proscription of all instances of inhumanity.* To my mind, this is the only way to broach the questions of religion and ideology. Such a choice frees us from the humanitarian hypocrisy that affects so many ideas and beliefs. It no longer even needs to dwell on the fact that, to this point, freedom of thought has never been anything other than a market freedom.

We do not want to judge inhumanity: we want to condemn and banish it. We have no need of explanations, justifications or

¹⁰ In the works of François Rabelais (1483–1553) *Physis* is joyful and unashamed and *Antiphysis* is hateful and destructive.

living, developing festive combativeness, and reaffirming the innocence of the living, which knows nothing of both masters and slaves, are the weapons that are *of a nature* to bring about the ruin of Profit.

We are in the midst of the turmoil of an enthralling combat. It marks the rebirth of our human consciousness. In it is expressed the resurgence of a dignity that has always been at the heart of our attempts at emancipation, notably in the proletarian project of a classless society. We have seen how the proletariat was dispossessed of its project by the very people who became its [alleged] defenders. It would be better to consider *eradicating from the outset all forms of power* – whether it is that of the mayor, a governmental official, or that of the political militant, an officer of ideology and the contestatory bureaucracy.

Among the self-proclaimed spokespeople for the people, how many are not ready to replace the State's authority with their own?

Isn't it a salutary resolution to desire everything, but to expect nothing? By this I mean relying on our life drives, not as an inevitable destiny, but as a creative presence that we have the freedom to experience by preventing its obstruction, by avoiding a deadly inversion, which generates emotional plagues. We have underestimated the importance of *refining anger* in a way that avoids the traps of urgency, of being drawn onto the terrain of the enemy, of succumbing to the militarization of political militancy. But, principally, the distance that the refinement of the emotions implies is a propitious place for the ripening of creativity. It favors the implementation of a form of guerrilla warfare that only has recourse to weapons that do not kill and are inexhaustible.

Looking back over the centuries, we can see that an awakening of consciousness has rekindled a struggle and that the renewal of mutual aid is gradually clearing away the mists of confusion.

It will be inconceivable to future generations that it took so long for us to realize that life has provided men and women with an exceptional faculty, without which they would not have gone beyond the stage of animalism. In its experimental blindness, this faculty has given us the privilege of creating and recreating the world around us.

Pre-agrarian collectivities evolved in a symbiosis with an environment from which they drew their subsistence. The emergence of the market civilization and its City-States caused a break with nature, which, once a living *subject*, became an *object* of exploitation. A system of authoritarian government endeavored to cover up the creativity of mutual aid that, “from Lucy to Lascaux,”⁷ had guided an evolution that, even today, the sycophants of market civilization still have a great reluctance to uncover.

The notion of Fate prevails. It propagates a spirit of submission; it instills an ontology of accursedness; it spreads the myth of an irremediable Fall, to which we must resign ourselves, just as we must obey the arbitrary requirements of a deified master.

What is now being reborn among those who still aspire to live is the feeling of having been swindled. To the extent that the collapse of patriarchy has completed the burial of the Gods in the latrines of the past, it has also taught us to discover a fundamental difference between Fate and destiny. The scorn for life, programmed by the market civilization, has hidden under the name of *Fate* the active principle that I call *destiny* and that is nothing other than the faculty of creating ourselves by recreating the world.

⁷ Lucy is the name given to the relatively complete fossil of the prehistoric hominid *Australopithecus afarensis*, which was discovered in Ethiopia in 1974. Lascaux is the name of an intermediate warming period during the Würm, which was the last glacial period in the Alpine region of Europe, and the location of famous cave drawings discovered in 1940.

Fate is a matter of Providence; it cannot be discussed; it pleads the Inevitability [*Fatalité*] that brings an appreciable comfort to servility.

Fate is endured; destiny is constructed. There’s nothing metaphysical about this. The atrocious barbarism of our history has never succeeded in stifling the visceral struggle that, from generation to generation, has demonstrated a will to emancipation, which is both timeless and modulated by economic, political, psychological and social fluctuations.

“Fate” and “destiny” are problematic because they have been made to be synonymous. This is why I suggest that, for greater clarity, we retain their French origins.⁸

The radicalism of the struggles for life call for *human destiny* to supplant Fate, Chance and Providence. It flourishes in the midst of a *no man’s land*⁹ where an incontinent civilization empties itself of its existential substance, while a new civilization is struggling in the throes of childbirth.

During the first faltering steps of autonomy, the creative powers of men and women – though they fumble around – suddenly reveal that we are capable of developing ourselves without masters, without gurus, without tutelage. If we have had the opportunity to understand that nothing more surely attracts misfortune than the custom of wallowing in it, we must agree that, on the other hand, the enjoyment of the happiness of life is equally contagious, but in a more amiable fashion.

The unshakeable determination to cultivate our lives and the garden that is our nourishing earth simultaneously offers unstoppable assistance in the struggle against fear, guilt, self-sacrifice, Puritanism, work, power, and money. This determination nourishes the struggle against the mercantile spirit that

⁸ That is to say, *Destin* and *destinée*.

⁹ English in original.