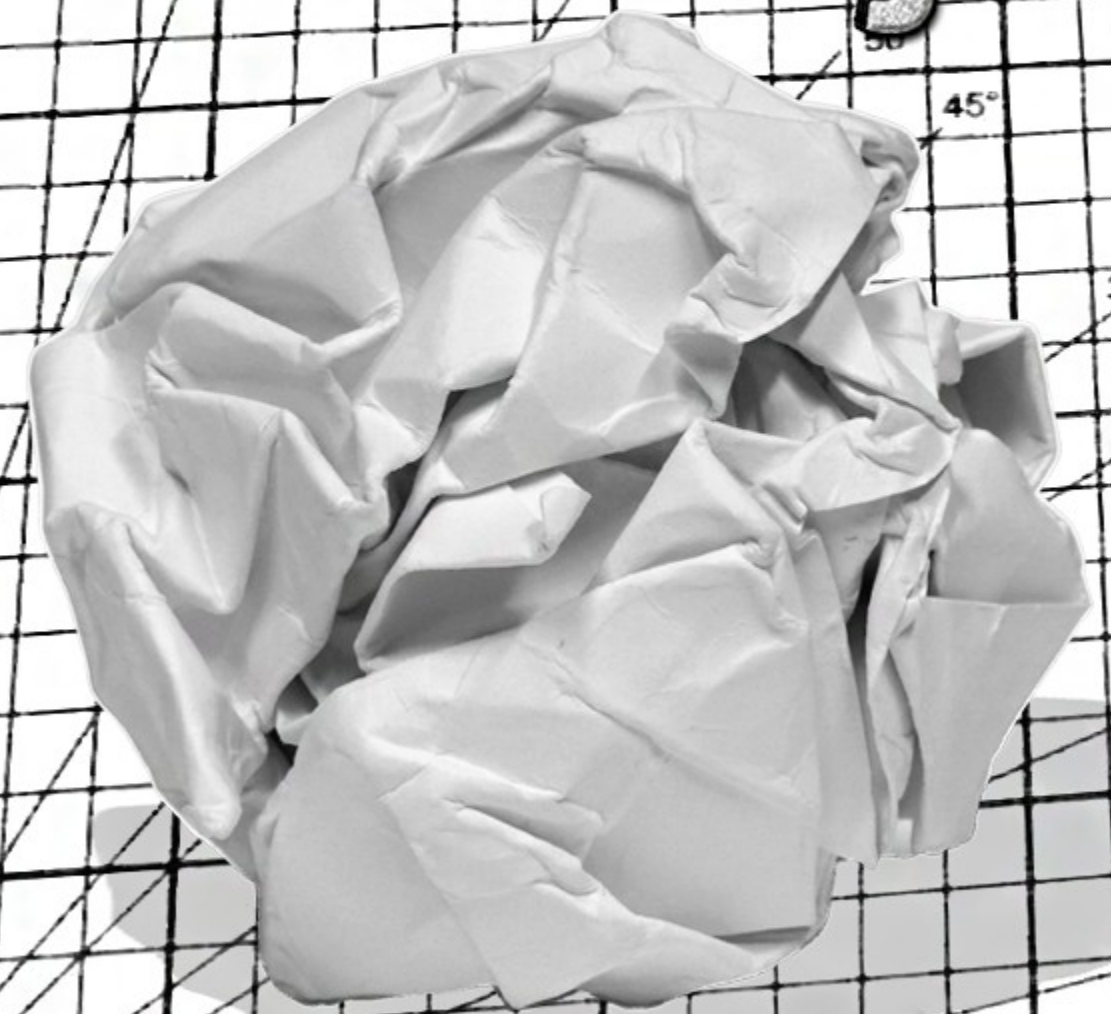


Cancelling the Project



from 'Demotivational Training'
by Guillaume Paoli

Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves?
How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you?
The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own?
How does he have any power over you except through you?
How would he dare assail you if he had no cooperation from you?

What could he do to you if you yourselves did not connive with the thief who plunders you,
if you were not accomplices of the murderer who kills you, if you were not traitors to yourselves?

— La Boetie

A relentless and pointless struggle — Perhaps the concept of asymmetry is still the most appropriate to describe the current moment. Everyone knows what it means in the military context. When an imperial power has attained supremacy of arms, logistics, and finance, it can attack where and when it wants to defeat any opposing force. Consequently, classical Western strategy, based on the head-on collision of two more or less equal forces, is no longer operative. In our era it is one force that fights alone, easily taking one place after another, and promptly ending up occupying the entire territory. But for the invader, this is where the trouble begins. We will always remember the triumphant “mission accomplished!” of Bush celebrating, on May 1 st , 2003, the “end” of hostilities in Iraq, and everything that followed. Once you destroy the institutions and infrastructure of a State, you better reconstruct them quickly because a population is not won over as easily as a territory. The humiliation of a defeat without a fight is not the ideal beginning for the conquest of hearts and minds. From time to time hostilities take the form of terrorist violence, i.e., inframilitary tactics. But more broadly, passive resistance — the inertia of the populace — thwarts the plans of the invading power. And that means stalemate. As time passes, the occupiers themselves become demoralized, the noble motives that mobilized them prove to be so many delusions. Once again the old adage is confirmed: superiority of arms does not make up for the morale of the troops. Not that we should be pleased about all this: it is quite possible that from the resulting chaos, everyone involved will come out losing in the end. But it is this situation that prevails and it is from here that we must begin.

The changes in the way the war is waged always reflect deeper transformations within societies. The French Revolution, industrialization, or anti-colonial wars upset the prevailing strategic models of their times. So it is not surprising that the guiding principles of asymmetric warfare turn up in other arenas today. The same goes for what was once known as class struggle. For a long time the dynamic of a society was understood as being the ad hoc result of a constant relation of forces, the opposition between the army of Work and that of Capital. In this trench war, punctuated by major social movements, each so-called advance is the result of a major struggle and can be the target of an opposing counter-offensive. Until the final battle, apparently. But this military model has not had purely positive effects; with its institutionalization, the “general staff” of unions have ended up looking more like their opponents than like their rank and file. But still, it structured the conflict, in the heart of every nation state, between two more or less equally powerful forces. Today, on the other hand, the global upper class is waging a unilateral war. One after the other the defense systems (whether they are legal, political, or customary) that once protected citizens of every country from the invasion of the commodity are swept away. Here as well, the aggressors arm themselves with means that are overwhelming compared to the capacities of their opponents to counter attack. Additionally, they have moved out of range of counter attack by freeing themselves of national limitations. You can take this analogy: the traditional role of global finance capital in asymmetrical combat vs. that of aerial bombing in modern warfare. The stranglehold of finance on World Trade, Inc. is comparable to that of the air force on the military command. In both cases the high altitude and the zero-risk of losses to their own forces allow the military command to take the offensive without risking consequences on the ground. The logic of a technological system has become separate from realities on the ground. The map of operations as it exists in the minds of the strategists has nothing to do with the actual territory, which is dotted with pitfalls and archaisms that are to be leveled forthwith. One has to redefine the territory so that it finally coincides with the map. In a word: outsourcing. Meaning. . . bomb first and check it out after. The same goes for the cosmetic euphemisms employed to describe operations (here the “surgical strike”, there “neutralizing”) while the actual results are accounted for as the losses and benefits of “collateral damage.” And since the human and social costs aren’t ever measurable, the balance sheet can come out positive. And everyone knows there will be no

peace, no balance point that will conclude hostilities. It is a spiral of chaos and "adjustments" that still continues to grow.

But if everyone's occupied, many don't participate with the required enthusiasm. It must be understood that throughout the new Europe, multiple channels of unified propaganda berate its citizens, accusing them of shoring up their own privileges and moldy values instead of taking up the cause of the new order. When all the significant decisions are made over their heads and against their interests, the democratic facade can no longer mask the asymmetric structure of the system. This is why the essential function of the rump states subservient to World Trade, Inc. is to infuse the spirit of collaboration into their subjects.

Tragicomic interlude

I learned that the criminal court of Paris fined some poor guy 750 Euros for having compared Sarkozy to Petain. He wasn't the first to notice this resemblance, however. Badiou wrote the same thing. And yes, it is clear, Sarkozyism is Petainism, but— it has to adapt to the current situation— it's Petainism wearing a thong, with rhinestones and peacock feathers on its ass. How can anyone be surprised? Once again we are participating in a grand show of public re-motivation, reconciliation with the occupier, identification with the aggressor, with a difference that can only ever be a citation, a remake, a B-movie version.

You could almost call it historic, when Lagarde, from the height of her podium, famously responded to the motto "France, the country that thinks" with "enough thought for now, let's roll up our sleeves!" Never have they sunk so low in a parliament that has seen many lows. You have to go back to Vichy find the equivalent of this elegy to "the value of work", because it was obviously taken from a speech by Petain on the May 1, 1941 . Same plan, same development. Petain began by saying: work is "the most dignified and noble means we have to become the masters of our fate." Lagarde echoes this sentiment: work is "a natural thing, essential for humanity to lead a life in equilibrium." But if work is so natural, why the devil is it necessary to defend and rehabilitate it? Is it not, by chance, to gloss over the impossibility of "becoming the master of your fate" under the Nazi boot? Or to "lead a balanced life" while the invisible hand has got you by the throat? Work is to blame for all humiliation, all resignation.

But enough already, we don't have any choice: it's exterior constraint, here world war, there globalization, making us roll up our sleeves. The enemy at our door is no longer the hordes of judeo-bolsheviks, but the "men and women of India and China" who "confront us armed with all the weight of their certitudes while we continue drifting along in our fantasies." Competition is forced on us; we must agree to make sacrifices. But consent is not enough. We still have to do penance, affirming that our plight is just punishment for our mistakes. Because we have followed "bad shepherds," or as the impeccably democratic Lagarde (twelfth most powerful woman in the world, according to Forbes) stated, ordinary people hold "aristocratic prejudices" against work, which might as well be against commerce, because in her mind the two amount to the same thing. The Right To Be Lazy, the Popular Front, paid vacations. May 1968, Flenri Salvador and the 35-hour work week, these were stages on the path of decline. "It was wrong," quavered Le Marechal (Petain), "to have lured you with the image of a future city where there would only be time for leisure and pleasure." And his lieutenant adds:

The last avatar of the right to be lazy was, during the 90s, the post-industrial myth of the end of work: that man could, according to this ultimate illusion, be definitively replaced by machines and computers.

In short, as the other says: the spirit of pleasure has destroyed what the spirit of sacrifice has built, despite the fact that this phrase seems odd coming out of the mouth of the sybarite parvenu of the Elysee (French presidential mansion). But in any case, unhappiness is good, because out of defeat comes a "rupture" and national recovery. Finally we arrive at the goal of all this bragging: to reheat the rancid gruel of class collaboration. And among the phrases that follow, only the shrewdest could decipher which come from Petain and which from the Minister of Commerce:

It is around the idea of work that the French people must reconcile. Let's stop opposing the rich and the poor as if society is irreparably divided into two classes. Indeed, common sense suggests, when it is not blinded

by passion or illusion, that the basic interest of bosses, technicians and workers is in the success of their trade. In work relations, the strongest impart strength to the weakest. Everywhere where men of good faith, even those coming from very different social milieus, gather to discover a reasonable solution, misunderstandings dissipate and are replaced by understanding, then by esteem, then by friendship. Some people, of course, come together better than others. But, and this is the essential, nobody will lose. Flenceforth, across social hierarchies, tightly knit teams will play together, in order to succeed together. And France will rediscover its equilibrium and harmony, which will allow it to recover more quickly.

Problem is, (responded a well-known 68er) property, management, and corporate profits in the capitalist system belong solely to capital. So those who do not have any find themselves in a state of alienation within the very work to which they contribute. No, from a human perspective, capitalism does not offer man a satisfactory solution.

It should be understood that this critique is partially determined by circumstances: it's an excerpt from a televised address delivered by De Gaulle on June 7, 1968. Still, it makes you wonder, given the insipid mush served forty years later by his successors' policies. Today's veritable "rupture" should be measured by this yardstick. The collaborationist Kessler, who wants to "methodically defeat the program of the National Council of the Resistance" also bluntly admits that that which must be eliminated is not only May 1 968, but its "founding fathers," sixty years of history, history itself, and with it the most basic ability to judge and to resist.

Since I'm citing these things and since Mrs. Lagarde claims to have read and even understood the "timeless work" Democracy in America that she evokes frequently in her apologue, let's remember the terms in which Tocqueville judged the liberal-democratic system that she wants us to love: The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided: men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting: such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

Enough thought. We are there. Pesky reflexivity — Like all analogies, the one just made between asymmetrical conflict and the current state of the social question clearly has its limits. For it isn't possible, at least among the citizens of the G8, to clearly distinguish between the occupied and the occupiers. It is useless to rail against "foreign influence" or "Americanization," a dynamic that is internal to all countries in global society. And it would be just as puerile to see a conspiracy of the Masters of the world in which the immense majority have no power. The days when the majority of workers were culturally, politically, and financially cut off from bourgeois activity are long gone. Today, there are thousands of ties that connect them. The average Joe can rage against speculation in the stock exchange; that's where his health insurance, his education, and his old age are financed (and it is he, small time investor, who will get fleeced with the first gust of wind) . He rails against globalization, but flocks to big sales on stuff made by Asian slaves. He is a bit worried about the future of the planet but is even more so by the rising price of gas. And if by chance, he demonstrates, it is not to defend dignity or solidarity, but his purchasing power. All in all, living in a democracy with such a high rate of participation, don't the people have the government (and the opposition!) that they deserve? This is how each person is also occupying him/herself, of course as lowly foot soldiers, only obeying orders and destined for war, but an occupier all the same, against whom it is time to resist.

It is here that a well-known little treatise written more than five centuries ago reasserts its relevance today. I am referring to the Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, written by Etienne de la Boetie at the age of eighteen. There are those who claim that this book was written by Montaigne, that to protect his identity he ascribed the authorship to his deceased friend, but no matter. The problem that Discourse poses is that of the reflexivity of all power relations. It can be put very simply: A man isn't a king only because other men behave as subjects in his presence. But because these men believe, on the contrary, that they are subjects because he is king . La Boetie wonders "what misfortune" made it that so many have bowed to the yoke without having been constrained to by force of arms. In response to this striking enigma, he did not have a definitive response (which is to his great credit) but offered some points of explanation.

"The first reason for voluntary servitude is habit." As banal as it may seem, this statement is far from it. For

throughout the media. But there is a great distance between thought and deed. There are a lot of constraints and addictions standing between the two, not to mention a lagging fear of lack.

Georges Bataille reminds us in The Accursed Share: if the Aztecs immolated sacrificial victims, it was not out of cruelty, but because they had the firm conviction that these murders were necessary to keep the sun shining. If they stopped the sacrifices, they would be plunged into darkness; they were forced to go through with it whether or not the perpetrators found the act repugnant. Bataille suggests: "They were no less preoccupied with sacrifice than we are with work." And yet if in the eyes of the Aztecs the society of immolation had its undeniable objective constraints, it is because the ritual worked, that it was effective, and the proof was: the sun comes up every morning. Is it really any different for us today? What does the thousand-mouthed whore tell us if not that? The markets insist that you immolate your vital energies. Without this sacrifice, all social life would be impossible, and the proof is... every morning, it all starts anew.

Except, in contrast to the Aztec myth, this circularity is not static; it always demands more from individuals, who find themselves overextended, overwhelmed by the increase of demands to which they have to respond. More and more unsolvable conflicts appear over the course of existence. A way to escape them is to flee into addiction, cynicism, simulation, or self-destructive derealization. This decline is not fatal, and we can happily add that many are striving to avoid these behaviors more or less consciously, not with some heroic stance, but by subtle gestures of reappropriating their time. In a way, demotivation is the application of a law of physics that the donkey in our prologue has known for a long time: inertia is also a force.

Of course, given the rapid velocity of the World Trade, Inc. train, ever increasing with the help of new locomotives, it is unlikely that a smooth, voluntary, emergency stop is going to happen in the foreseeable future. In this regard, as Francois Fourquet stated "The moral precepts of self-restraint and joyful sobriety at first glance appear to be magical incantations ." But as we have seen, demotivation can be found in the very heart of this self-devouring system. So we can rely on its exemplary virtue, as long as it becomes aware of itself. And since it is indeed a wager, we call on Blaise Pascal to the rescue:

"L'ideal historique de décroissance" Revue du MAUSS, August 2007.

When everything is moving together, nothing seems to be moving, like on a ship. When everything is coming undone, nothing seems to be. The one who stops makes the behaviors of others known, acting as a fixed point of reference.

Searching out this fixed point is still the healthiest task the mind can undertake.

Today the managers want nothing less than to make every employee a situationist, enjoining them to be spontaneous, creative, autonomous, freewheeling, unattached, and greeting the precariousness of their lives with open arms. Trying to outdo this would be absurd.

Cancel the project! Workers of the world, relax!

For more anti-work check out Prison Break by Flower Bomb, An Invitation to Desertion by Bellamy Fitzpatrick, Tangpingist Manifesto, Manual for a worldwide manuke revolt by Matsumoto Hajime, The Abolition of Work by Bob Black, Illegalism by Paul Z Simons, The Manifesto of the Happily Unemployed by Guillaume Paoli, How the Stirner Eats Gods by Alejandro de Acosta, The Unique and its Property by Max Stirner, Against His-story, Against Leviathan! by Fredy Perlman, Bolo'bolo, Language: Origin and Meaning by John Zerzan, and TAZ by Hakim Bey all for free on theanarchistlibrary.org

Demotivational Training by Guillaume Paoli is available at archive.org or littleblackcart.com also check out immediatism.com

All these self-defense techniques are applications of a key concept of Chinese philosophy, Taoist in particular: wei wu wei, action without action. Let's limit ourselves to banal, if not simplistic formulations: abstention, the suspension of action, and non-engagement are also ways of acting. In place of doing something at all costs, of scrambling, of rushing about in every direction, in certain situations it is quite preferable to pose the question: why do something rather than nothing? It is not simply a matter of making a virtue out of necessity in an unfavorable array of forces but in reversing an asymmetrical situation by occupying a completely different plane. This would be the possible philosophical meaning of de-motivation.

These comments shouldn't be seen as some sort of esoteric withdrawal from the questions raised earlier. They respond to a very real necessity of denouncing the new dominant model of activity; by this I mean the project. There is nothing more revealing of how our epoch relates to time than the excessive use of this word. To project is to cast out ahead of yourself. To multiply projects is to endlessly continue casting the fulfillment of the original intent out further in front of you. Once one burden is thrown off, another arrives to pay off, support, and begin again, the activity being reduced to challenging attempts, rough drafts, which are not necessarily great ideas, whose realization is always deferred. This permanent projection of activity into the future confers, onto the lived present, the dimension of a real virtuality of which "virtual reality" is only an epiphenomenon.

Chiapello and Boltanski named the "projective city" as the generic social form of our epoch, a vision of the world and a normative system at the same time. In the new version of World Trade, Inc., they write, society only exists in the form of a series of networks. And over every network a constraint rules, a norm: the project. It is this that determines when a network should begin and end, dictates the terms of membership and the acceptable forms of relationships within it, and of course the terms and conditions of what goes on there. If the project appears to be neutral, it is because it is a grammar of activity. "Anything can attain the status of a project, including ventures hostile to capitalism." But this neutrality is illusory because, as the sociologists warn, conceiving one's own activity in these terms is already adapting a series of constraints and norms inherent to World Trade, Inc., into which it has all the room to slip in. Be wary of grammar. In the terrific account she draws from her experience as a leading programmer, the Californian Ellen Ullman showed how her leftist past became the ideal point of entry for her digital slavery. It was in political groups that she learned to analyze the system, to define a project, to write a program, and above all to sacrifice her personal life to the organization, and so one is tempted to shout to the multitude of activists of every kind: leave the network, cancel the project, become passivists!

In 1958 Andre Breton and his friends, in one of their typical manifestos, attacked the "accredited butchers" of science. The object of their anger at the time was not only the nuclear bomb, but also the waste that "pollutes atmospheric and biological conditioning of the species in an unpredictable way." The surrealists were visionaries. Also regarding this, they wrote that Revolutionary thought sees the essential terrain of its activity reduced to the margins to the point that it must return to its origins of revolt, and short of a world that can only feed its own cancer, rediscover the unknown sources of passion.

What seems remarkable here to me is the formulation "short of a world." It calls for nothing less than a complete reversal in the direction of revolutionary energies. For too long they have been exhausted in a race with the techno-industrial system to be the first to get above the existing social conditions. This race was over a long time ago. More precisely, it has always been deceptive, the social utopias having been the fuel of development that has taken us to where we are today, in the midst of the realized utopia of World Trade, Inc., this universal non-place. Today, faced with the occlusion of the future, the will to resist fate can only aim for the deceleration that Walter Benjamin had the prescience to point out. Struck by the attacks of the Parisian insurgents on the public clocks in 1830, he wrote: "Demasquez les physiciens, videz les laboratoires!," a tract distributed (along with some punches) at the Sorbonne during a lecture given by Robert Oppenheimer. Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train — namely, the human race — to activate the emergency brake.

This perfect gesture doesn't have to be called "revolutionary" in order to make it happen. Haunted by the growing possibility of an irreversible catastrophe, most of our contemporaries, if they were asked, would agree that it is high time to pull the brakes. For that matter, this very urgency complacently spreads

nothing is more underestimated in current theories than the role of habits. Think about the old dualism of reason and instinct. To the question "why do we do something," one will generally answer: either we do it deliberately or instinctively. This leaves out the enormous range of everything that is done out of routine automatic reflexes that were certainly learned at some point but to which no further thought is given. And it is the same with social reproduction. How does a society achieve a relatively stable state? Some say: because it is governed by mechanical laws. Others say: because each person makes rational choices. There again, they ignore that what is largely and continuously reproduced is blind routine. When a dictatorship takes over it provokes resistance precisely because it runs roughshod over habits. But once victorious, it becomes a fait accompli. A fait is not accompli until everyone thinks that it is irrevocable. An example? All of these security measures, surveillance, and identity checks, to which every individual is submitted (and submits to) in a single day without even noticing. Just a few years ago, they would have been regarded as inadmissible attacks on an individual's free will.

The second reason given by La Boetie is the mind-numbing distractions and amusements that any self-respecting tyrant generously offers to his people. As soon as they have games, the subjects serve their master, "as inane as, but not as well as, little children learn to read with colorful images." This theme of the infantilization of subjects by power recurs up to today. De Tocqueville said of the democratic state that "it would resemble paternal power if, like it, its goal were to prepare men for adulthood. But it doesn't intend to do that, on the contrary, it wants to keep them irrevocably stuck in childhood; it wants its citizens to be pleased, provided that that they think only of this pleasure." Adorno and Horkheimer said as much about the culture industry. One could object that this is an insult to children, who, provided that they are not "infantilized" by the inanities doled out to them, know how to play with much more discernment and inventiveness. In any case, this phenomenon is certainly intensified by the simultaneous collapse of popular and bourgeois cultures, which, without wanting to idealize them in themselves, still offered potential points of resistance to this astounding tyranny of leisure that swallows up mental free time.

Next we come to the ideology of the common good and the use of warm feelings. "Before committing the worst crimes" writes La Boetie, [today's despots] "always begin with a few nice discourses on public welfare, the common good, and relief for the poor." It is superfluous to cite recent examples to prove this since this method has lost none of its relevance today. Much to the contrary: it is fed by the supplanting of political reason and critical judgment that it still allows (celebrated as "the end of ideologies"). What do you say to the flood of humanitarianism, the tricklings of compassion, and the crocodile tears? But what has notably changed is that this approach no longer needs to be believed to be effective. The era of mass media has perfected the perverse displacement of the question of the dishonest vs. the truthful nature of a discourse to that of its more or less successful "communication." Today's voluntary slave delights in "decoding information," judging how the lies are dressed up, weighing their chance of success. He imagines he is taking part in a well-informed discussion. On this La Boetie remarked: "We know well the formulations they use possess a subtle skill, but can one speak of finesse where there is such impudence?"

Last but not least we take into account the delegation of power. La Boetie affirms: only five or six people will directly enjoy privileges with the tyrant. But these six have six hundred who profit as a result of this relationship, and in turn these six hundred offer advantages and favors to six thousand, etc. This is what, in politics, we would call a crony network and in commerce a profit-sharing scheme. At all levels of the pyramid (except at the top and the very bottom) every individual sits on an intermediate echelon, and if he has to obey the echelon above him, this does not stop him from commanding the one below him, one compensating the other. This is certainly the most original point in the Discourse that illuminates an objective interest in obedience. It is of little importance that you love a tyrant or hate him if you get certain advantages, a position. In addition, it permits the slave to satisfy his domination drive in complete security because he is covered by the hierarchy. The more you descend the pyramid, the more modest the gains, and, as a result, the greater the temptation to take out your resentment on those below you. Milgram has shown that, placed in a situation of authority that relieves them of responsibility, two thirds of the subjects in a study readily became torturers, a result that every war demonstrates is accurate. In a more banal context, nobody is much interested in learning what crimes and injustices their investments or business deals aid in some far away country.

But if tyranny benefits so many, what reason is there to criticize tyranny? Wouldn't it be more reasonable to try to bring in those who are still excluded? First of all, it is because, according to La Boetie, this form of organization destroys all virtue and therefore undermines all of society.

Among the wicked, when they get together, it is no companionship but conspiracy. They don't love each other, they fear each other. They are not friends but accomplices.

There again, great progress has been made since the Renaissance; egoism has been raised to the level of a universal system ever since. From then on the very idea of equality has become a synonym for totalitarianism and only the "jealous" and the "wards of the state" have the nerve to call for solidarity. But that is not all. Because, the Discourse continues, one's interest in participating in the mechanisms of power are paid for by acute existential suffering. Where no society is possible, there is no individuality either.

What trouble, what martyrdom, good God! [. . .] Always having to be on the lookout, keeping your ear to the ground, to discern from where danger might come, to be on guard for pitfalls, to search for dangers among one's rivals, to find the traitor. Smile at each person and mistrust everyone, have no open enemies nor sure friends, always offer a laugh when your heart is cold with fear; not to be able to be joyful, nor dare to be sad! This portrait, one will admit, is not without its similarities to familiar characters today.

The elements presented to explain voluntary servitude are thus of a somewhat different nature. The first, habit, happens spontaneously, as it were. The gravity of the fait accompli makes it appear irreversible and even necessary. Beyond a certain threshold it is the very mass of voluntary slaves (supposing that there is such a thing, since there is no real way of knowing if this number is actually very small) that will push others to adapt. The two phenomena that follow, festivalization and the ideology of the common Good, are themselves deliberately provoked. It should be noted that they would not be effective unless they responded to a predisposition (to have fun, to believe in good intentions) that is widely prevalent. A latent tendency is aroused. Finally, the last element is structural. Here it is the hierarchical organization itself that grants its co-opted participants an interest in their own enslavement. It is clear, however, that these factors are united, that they are interacting. For example, the pleasant creator of a mind-numbing video game acts out of habit (it is established), from ideology (you have to meet the demand) and also to maintain his position in the social hierarchy. We have to insist on this point: The Discourse Of Voluntary Servitude does not elude the existence of constraints, it even presupposes it, since of course, nobody voluntarily enters this game. And these constraints are omnipresent as threats, because confronting the system is not without danger, even if it is only the risk of falling from one's position on the ladder. As a result servitude is not "voluntary" in that it does not result from each individual's free choice. But it is also not simply the result of coercion alone. It is to La Boetie's merit to have exposed this ambivalent middle course. It's not enough to account for authority, but it illuminates the reasons for its perpetuation.

Here, two objections may be expected. A liberal would reject the existence of slavery in a democracy, and a leftist would deny that it is voluntary. The two would agree that it is ahistorical to judge the present using a text from the Renaissance: the first would say we are no longer subject to the personal power of a tyrant, the second because such a dated text could not take into account the specific form of capitalist domination. The first objection concludes that current social relations are exempt from arbitrariness or usurpation. This requires faith in the old fable of the social contract and the invisible handshake that will always come to reinstate it. But who can still believe this? It is very doubtful that anyone would actually choose of their own will to live in their current conditions if these conditions were presented as one option among many. Anyway, we've heard it again and again; the market has its constraints. So the problem remains intact. Even if today tyranny is impersonal (even the great bad guy Bush had to quit at the end of his term), this only accentuates the element of reflexivity and makes even more enigmatic the obedience it engenders.

To the second objection, we can respond that World Trade, Inc. did not appear one fine day out of nowhere like a UFO. A long process of evolution created it, mutations allowed its growth, which was already gestating in the sixteenth century. In their general applicability, La Boetie's observations are still as relevant as the political maxims of Machiavelli (to which they are in some way the counterpoint). This does not prevent us

from examining the specific drives through which the reflexivity of domination takes place today, quite the contrary; which is what I have attempted to lay out in the previous chapters. But the anti-capitalists have always had a problem with voluntary servitude, suspecting those who assert it want to drown the concrete guilt of the exploiters in the psychological generality that "everyone is guilty." Assuredly as impersonal as power is, it rules through the caprice of the deciders in business, politics, and media, and it is essential that we, as much as possible, not let them get away with their plundering, extortion, and depravity. Necessary but not enough. Because everyone knows that as soon as one tyrant is ousted, his clone has already taken his place. One is guillotined, ten more show up. Above all, in shrugging off this troublesome issue, protest movements are fatally ensnared by a double paradox. First, seeing servitude purely from the standpoint of coercion is to grant the latter fantastic powers that it doesn't possess — it being well understood that if the majority of humanity were ultimately to believe that the Masters of the world had superpowers, then these Masters would enjoy yet one more power: that of making use of this very belief. We saw this earlier with "the market" and "advertising": critics of the system have an unfortunate tendency to take these discourses at face value. Not only does this make it impossible for them to understand what is really happening, but above all they reinforce the impotence they purportedly seek to attack.

The other element of the paradox is this: when more or less ill-intentioned individuals insist that we do not act but are acted upon, driven by economic constraints, social origins, mass manipulation, personal makeup, the unconscious or genetic background (delete what does not apply) what are they really trying to pull? If we are total victims or pawns of a determinism against which we can do nothing, the issue of our free will doesn't even need to be raised. Let's take it a little further: to deny the existence of voluntary servitude is to deny the possibility of freedom.

Disengagement — The appropriate method for waging an asymmetrical war has been known and successfully used for a long time. It was presented twenty-five centuries ago by Sun Tzu in The Art of War. Contrary to the Western understanding, the classic Chinese strategy seeks to avoid head-on clashes at all costs, the goal being to win without ever having engaged in combat. It is a method that favors sidestepping, circumvention, ruse, attentive passivity. The art is all in the neutralizing of your adversary's forces before he can even get them into the fray. You make him lose his composure, you drive him crazy, you push him to make mistakes so that he will already be beaten, collapsing internally at the moment he has to act. Once this invisible work of sapping his strength is complete, it will take almost nothing to make him lose his balance and to neutralize him for good, the ultimate goal being not to destroy him, but to dismantle his structures in order to seize his resources.

It would be of interest to imagine the potential applications of this strategy to asymmetrical class war. For example instead of exhausting ourselves gaining support, reconstituting a bloc, why not attempt to achieve an economy of maximal means, creating as it were groups that follow the path of least resistance! In a world where one lone guy can make 4.9 billion Euros vanish in an instant, the sky's the limit. But it would be mistaken to conceive of such a struggle in the heroic form of an intensive guerilla strategy that, lacking a hammer, opts for pinpricks. The latter can certainly have a considerable psychological impact, but that's not the point. The Chinese method (adapted to contemporary conditions) relies primarily on two eminently discrete principles: make oneself opaque and let the formidable machinery of World Trade, Inc. inexorably mire itself into the sands of demotivation. When confrontation is not possible, sidestep.

To succeed in dominating the adversary's troops' position without taking a position would represent an oblique relationship. In other words, through the absence of positioning, I control the positioning of the enemy.

Chinese and Japanese martial arts are founded on the same principle. In Aikido, for example, only the kinetic energy of the attacker is called upon and turned against him. This has led me to advocate the development of a kind of mental aikido, instead of trying to create yet another theoretical arsenal or a dogmatic fortress, one limits oneself in this discipline to mastering the minimal holds needed to turn ideological power back onto itself. Or, according to the playful words of Marx, "to make petrified relations dance by playing them their own tune."