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Ten Theses on the Proliferation of Egocrats
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order's "laudatory monologue." The anti-totalitarian revolution requires, not another medium, but the liquidation of all media, "the liquidation of their entire present structure, functional as well as technical, of their operational form so to speak, which everywhere reflects their social form. At the limit, obviously, it is the very concept of medium which disappears and must disappear: the exchanged word, reciprocal and symbolic exchange, negates the notion and function of medium, of intermediary . . . Reciprocity comes about by way of the destruction of the medium." (Baudrillard)

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References

- Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'economie politique du signe* (Paris, Gallimard, 1972)
- Jacques Camatte, *The Wandering of Humanity* (Detroit, Black & Red, 1975)
- Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, Black & Red, 1970; 1977)
- Claude Lefort, *Un Homme en Trop: Reflexions sur "L'Archipel de Goulag,"* Paris, Seuil, l976
- Michael Velli, *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders* (Detroit, Black & Red, 1972),

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this excellent apparatus, to make it *even bigger*, even more democratic, even more comprehensive . . . " (Lenin, quoted by M. Velli.)

IX

For the Egocrat, the media are mere means; the goal is hegemony, power, and the power of the secret police. "Invisible pilots in the center of the popular storm, we must direct it, not with a visible power, but with the collective dictatorship of all the allies. A dictatorship without a badge, without title, without official right, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power." (Bakunin, quoted by Debord) The collective dictatorship of all quickly becomes the rule of the single Egocrat because, "if all the bureaucrats taken together decide everything, the cohesion of their own class can be assured only by the concentration of their terrorist power in a single person." (Debord) With the success of the Egocrat's enterprise, the establishment of the "dictator-ship without official right," communication is not only absent on a social scale; every local attempt is deliberately liquidated by the police. This situation is not a "deformation" of the organization's initially "pure goals"; it is already prefigured in the means, the "fundamentally egalitarian" instruments used for the victory. "What characterizes the mass media is the fact that they are anti-mediators, intransitives, the fact that they produce non-communication . . . Television, by its presence alone, is social control in the home. It is not necessary to imagine this control as the regime's periscope spying on the private life of everyone, because television is already better than that: it assures that people no longer talk to each other, that they are definitively isolated in the face of statements without response." (Baudrillard)

X

The Egocrat's project is superfluous. The capitalist media of production and communication already reduce human beings to mute and powerless spectators, passive victims continually subjected to the existing

etc. The difference between manipulators and missionaries is theoretical; in practice, they are contemporaries competing in the same social field, and they borrow each other's techniques.

VIII

In order to broadcast the Idea, so as to convert or manipulate, the Egocrat needs instruments, media, and it is precisely such media that the society of the spectacle provides in profusion. One justification for turning to these media runs as follows: "The media are currently a monopoly of the ruling classes who divert them for their own benefit. But their structure remains 'fundamentally egalitarian,' and it is up to revolutionary practice to bring out this potentiality contained by them but perverted by the capitalist order. In a word, to liberate them . . . " (a position paraphrased by Baudrillard.) The initial rejection of the spectacle, the longing for community and communication, has been replaced by the longing to exert power over the very instruments that annihilate community and communication. Hesitation, or a sudden outburst of critique, are ruled out by organizational blackmail: "The Leninists will win unless we ourselves accept the responsibility of fighting to win . . . ," ("The Red Menace." A Stalinist would say, "The Trotskyists will win . . . ," etc.) From this point on, anything goes; all means are good if they lead to the goal; and at the absurd outer limit, even sales promotion and advertising, the activity and language of Capital itself, become justified revolutionary means: "We concentrate heavily on distribution and promotion . . . Our promotional work is wide-ranging and expensive. It includes advertising widely, promotional mailings, catalogues, display tables across the country, etc. All of this costs a tremendous amount of money and energy, which is covered by the money generated from the sale of books." (An "anarchist businessman" in a letter to The Fifth Estate.) Is this anarchist businessman a ludicrous example, because so ridiculously exaggerated, or is he solidly within the orthodox tradition of organized militancy? "The big banks are the 'state apparatus' which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready made from capitalism; our task here is merely to lop off what capitalistically mutilates

I

The Egocrat — Mao, Stalin, Hitler, Kim Ii Sung — is not an accident or an aberration or an irruption of irrationality; he is a personification of the relations of the existing social order.

II

The Egocrat is initially an individual, like everyone else: mute and powerless in this society without community or communication, victimized by the spectacle, "the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue, the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence." (Debord) Repelled by the spectacle, he longs for "the liberated human being, a being who is at once a social being and a Gemeinwesen." (Camatte) If his longing were expressed in practice: at his workplace, in the street, wherever the spectacle robs him of his humanity, he would become a rebel.

III

The Egocrat does not express his longing for community and communication in practice; he transforms it into a Thought. Armed with this Thought, he is still mute and powerless, but is no longer like everyone else: he is Conscious, he possesses the Idea. To confirm his difference, to make sure he's not deluding himself, he needs to be seen as different by others — those others who confirm that he is truly a possessor of the Thought.

IV

The Egocrat finds "community" and "communication," not by smashing the elements of the spectacle in his reach, but by surrounding himself

with like-minded individuals, other Egos, who reflect the Golden Thought to each other and confirm each other's validity as possessors of it. Chosen People. At this point the Thought, if it is to remain golden, must evermore remain the same: unsullied and uncompromised; criticism and revision are synonyms of betrayal, "Thus it can only exist as a polemic with reality. It refutes everything. It can survive only by freezing, by becoming increasingly totalitarian." (Camatte) Therefore, in order to continue to reflect and confirm the Thought, the individual must stop thinking.

V

The initial goal, the "liberated human being," is lost to practice when it is relegated to the Egocrat's consciousness, because "consciousness makes itself the goal and reifies itself in an organization which comes to incarnate the goal." (Camatte) The group of mutual admirers acquires a schedule and a meeting place; it becomes an institution. The organization, which takes the form of a Bolshevik or Nazi cell, a Socialist reading club, or an Anarchist affinity group, depending on local circumstances and individual preferences, "provides a terrain favorable to informal domination by propagandists and defenders of their ideology, specialists who are in general more mediocre the more their intellectual activity consists of the repetition of certain definitive truths. Ideological respect for unanimity of decision has on the whole been favorable to the uncontrolled authority, within the organization itself, of specialists in freedom" (wrote Debord, describing anarchist organizations). Rejecting the ruling spectacle ideologically, the organization of specialists in freedom reproduces the relation of the spectacle in its internal practice.

VI

The organization incarnating the Thought turns on the world, because "the project of this consciousness is to frame reality with its concept." (Camatte) The group becomes militant. It sets out to extend to society at large the organization's internal relations, one variant of which can be

summarized as follows: "Within the party, there must be no one lagging behind when an order is given by the leadership to 'march forward,' no one turning right when the order is 'left'." (a revolutionary leader, quoted by M. Velli.) At this point the specific content of the Thought is as irrelevant to practice as the geography of the Christian paradise, because the goal is reduced to a cudgel: it serves as the justification for the group's repressive practices, and as an instrument of blackmail. (Examples: "To deviate from socialist ideology in the slightest degree means strengthening bourgeois ideology." Lenin, quoted by M. Velli; "When 'libertarians' slanderously trash others, I question their maturity and commitment to revolutionary social change" an 'anarchist' in a letter to The Fifth Estate.)

VII

The militant organization extends itself by means of conversion and manipulation. Conversion is the favored technique of early Bolshevism and missionary anarchism: the militant's explicit task is to introduce consciousness into the working class (Lenin), to "reach working people with our ideas" (an "anarchist" in "The Red Menace," Toronto). But the militant's implicit task, and the practical outcome of his activity, is to affect the practice of the workers, not their thought. The conversion is successful if workers, whatever their ideas, pay dues to the organization and obey the organization's calls to action (strikes, demonstrations, etc.). The Egocrat's implicit aim is to establish his (and his organization's) hegemony over a large number of individuals, to become the leader of a mass of followers. This implicit aim becomes cynically explicit when the militants are Nazis or Stalinists (or an amalgam of the two, such as the US Labor Party). Conversion gives way to manipulation, outright lying. In this model, the recruitment of followers is the explicit aim, and the Idea ceases to be a fixed star, perfect and immutable; the Idea becomes a mere means toward the explicit aim; whatever recruits most followers is a good Idea; the Idea becomes a cynically constructed collage based on the fears and hatreds of potential followers; its main promise is the annihilation of scapegoats: "counter-revolutionaries," "anarchists," "CIA agents," "Jews,"