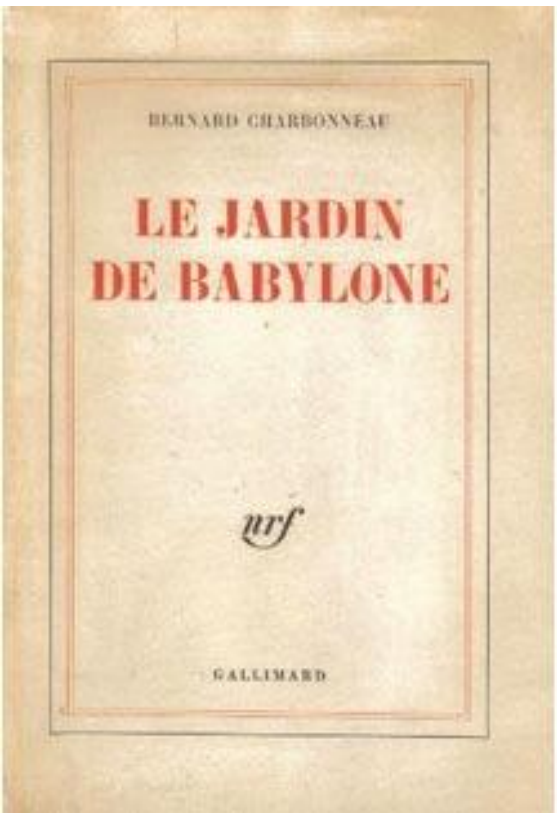
# The Garden of Babylon

**Nature, a Revolutionary Force**

Bernard Charbonneau





Originally published 1969.

# Contents

# Editor's Note from the 2002 French Edition[1]

Of the twenty or so books written by Bernard Charbonneau (1910-1996), all devoted to what he called the "Great Transformation" of the 20th century, it was in *The Garden of Babylon* that he most effectively demonstrated how, after having devastated nature, industrial society ended up annihilating it by "protecting it", *organizing it*; and how, at the same time, with this artificialization, opportunities for human freedom also disappeared. This book originated from a fifty-page text that Bernard Charbonneau circulated in 1937-1938 among circles associated with the magazine, *Esprit*: "The Feeling of Nature, a Revolutionary Force". In this text he attempted to establish the basis for a Federation of the Friends of Nature, whose statutes were included at the end of the text. The outbreak of the war ruined any hopes for this project, and it was during the solitude of those years that he returned to the text, which he completed in 1944—under the title, *Pan Is Dying*—with a phenomenology of the city and the countryside that would become the first part of *The Garden of Babylon*, published twenty-five years later by Gallimard. Since then, along with the "total suburb", a kind of environmental protection ruled by the recipes of *façadism* has spread everywhere, as in those forests of the Great Canadian North devastated by the paper industry, where a fringe of trees about twenty meters wide is left intact to preserve appearances for ecotourism and color photography. And it is not the least merit of *The Garden of Babylon* that it so precociously denounced what the "defense of nature" would necessarily become as soon as it separated its cause from that of freedom; the disgraceful regression that political environmentalism constitutes from this point of view was therefore judged long in advance.

***

[1] Bernard Charbonneau, *Le jardin de Babylone*, Éditions de L'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 2002 (first published by Gallimard in 1969).

# The Garden of Babylon

*Upon the dust of Eden a city was founded, a city whose empire spanned the Earth. But the marvel of Babylon is a garden, suspended at the summit of its masses of stone. Some trees and flowers, fallen from the hands of God, that men may gather some day.…*

*There was a time when there was no nature for men; and we are now living at the dawning of that other time in which nature will certainly cease to exist. At the beginning—for some individuals and some countries, it was not so long ago—there was no nature. No one had a name for it, because man had not yet distinguished himself from nature and was incapable of conceiving it. Individuals and societies were then encompassed by the cosmos. An omnipresent power, sacred because it was invincible, everywhere lay in wait for human weakness. Civilization was only a flickering light maintained at the price of an overwhelming effort in the midst of the jungles. Floods seething with monsters proclaimed their reign. Life, like fire, was nothing but an uncertain flame, lost in an ocean of darkness. The sun's victory is in vain; every sunset brings the defeat of the day and the triumphant return of the infernal powers. How could our ancestors have spoken about nature? They lived it, they were themselves nature: brute force, feral instincts. They did not know things, but spirits; in the shadow in which they were still submerged, the trees and the rocks confusedly acquired superhuman forms and life. Peasants and heathens, they were incapable of loving nature; they could only fight against it or worship it.*

*Everything changed; but at first imperceptibly. It might have been under the sun of Greece. In that arid land where even the night was transparent, the plains were broken up by mountains and the sea was sprinkled with islands, man and the individual found a space and an environment that was suited to his measure; and in the clarity of reason, monstrous forms petrified into objects. However, it was above all in Judea where nature was born, with the Creation: when light was separated from darkness, spirit from matter. From then on, God was only God and things were only things. By creating it, Yahweh had profaned the cosmos and man could set his hands on it. The cosmic order could still have its impact; but it no longer had authority over the human spirit: it had lost its soul. It became possible to understand it and to act on it. Necessity was only necessity; even provisionally crushed, the revolt of human freedom was unleashed forever.*

*Then, the rule over and the feeling of nature grew in parallel. Science penetrated the mechanism of the cosmos and technology made it possible to transform it. But this transformation, gradually accelerating, was at first limited to particular places in certain countries. In the West, man lived in the artificial environment of the cities, but at his doorstep the countryside began and, with it, nature. Thus, up until the Second World War, the people of France knew a transitional society where the past and the future coexisted: which allowed the enjoyment of the pleasures of nature thanks to progress.*

*Thus, along with the city, the need to escape from the city also grew. The feeling of nature appears where the bond with the cosmos has been broken: when the land is covered with houses and the sky is filled with smoke; where industry, or the State, imposes its*

*reasons and its disorder. The feeling of nature is not at home among primitive peoples or the peasantry, but among the bourgeoisie; it began with the "industrial revolution" and gradually spread to the countries and classes that were engulfed by that revolution. Because machines exist, man boards a machine to flee from the machine. From the hill to the mountain and from the mountain to the peak; from the fields to the desert and from the coast to the high seas, the crowd flees from the crowd, the civilized from civilization. This is how nature disappears, destroyed by the very sense that discovered it, as much as by the expansion of industry.*

*Today, however, the countryside is being urbanized and Europe is becoming a single unified suburb. A new stage is therefore taking shape in which, because nature will no longer exist, the feeling for it will have to disappear, too. Since the bulk of the population will be concentrated in a diffuse expanse of cities, the countryside will no longer exist; there will only be zones devoted to industries of labor, or to those of leisure. Nature will no longer exist; just as in the past man was part of the cosmos, he will now exist within the space organized by Regional Planning. A single system will define the gestures of the worker in the factory and his vacations in the countryside. The same scientific explanation will be applied to spirit and matter, and technologies will be assigned the task of imposing order on man instead of his environment. Thus, everything that one once thought was distinct and separate will be reintegrated.*

*This is the cycle that will be described in this book. But before beginning, and in order to prevent any misunderstandings, I owe the reader some clarifications with respect to my method. The author of this work is neither a scientist nor a writer, nor even a philosopher; he is simply a man who puts his capacity for thought into practice. This will not involve knowing facts in detail, but reflecting totalities whose enormity is imposed as evidence and which every conscious individual with a minimum amount of education is in a position to discover in his own life. This reflection implies making use of reason; however, insofar as the splendor and decline of nature are not ideas, but realities—among others, that human reality that is manifested in mythology—their representation is just as important as their analysis. Colors and song, whose use is today a monopoly of literature, just as reason is the monopoly of science, are indispensable for the outward, and above all, the inner description of the phenomenon. The reader will forgive me, then, if I do not adhere to the currently accepted genres. Believe me, it is not from ignorance.*

*And, finally, since real objectivity is based on the consciousness of one's own points of view, I have to confess that the author is a human being and undertakes his critique from that perspective. In the final analysis, "nature" is only one of the names that man has given it: it was no mere coincidence that the century that discovered nature was also the century of the individual and his freedom. Nature is at the same time the mother who has given birth to us and the daughter we have conceived; if it disappears, it is man who will regress into chaos. Therefore, it is nature that must be taught and defended.*

# Part One: The City in the Countryside

Until the great wave of expansion of the mid-twentieth century, industrial societies were characterized by the confrontation between the future and the past: this translates, from the geographical point of view, into the contrast between the city and the countryside. On the eve of the Second World War, the center of the metropolis was already ablaze with the glow of neon lights and a sea of automobiles was beginning to flow through its streets; on the heights of Ahusquy, however, one only heard the sound of a trickle of water falling on a pile of rocks; and the gestures of the shepherd who kindled a fire under his iron pot were still the same as those of Adam. And this contrast was manifested not only on the terrain, but also in the spirit of the men who lived during that time. Peasants who dreamed of the city, and urbanites who dreamed of the countryside; that is what we were.

During the first stage of the industrial transformation there were only cities scattered in the countryside: islands, at most an archipelago, of stone, asphalt and steel; rare were the countries where, as in Lancashire or the Ruhr, these islands merged and formed a province of factories and houses. The wilderness then extended infinitely like the sea and the city rose up from it like a reef: its monuments hardly stood out among the trees and only a short climb was needed to reach their summits, a fruit of stone coiled in the bosom of immensity. There were few cities, like London or Paris, that were so large that the eye or the powers of thought could not grasp their form.

The city, a microcosm created by man, which petrified his dreams into towers and columns, his reason into squares and avenues; or even into gardens, although we had to wait until the classical era and above all until Romanticism for man to dare to introduce his old enemy, nature, within the walls of Troy, which had been besieged up until that time, on every side, by that sea of green. The city of men: all of it well defined by walls or boulevards, where everything, like its streets, has a meaning that leads to the center. Fruit of another nature, human nature, like a hill rising towards the sun; a tangled labyrinth clustered around a bell tower; a solemn project in which reason, crystallized reason, is a palace. The city of men, although not yet the city of automobiles. The city of individuals, and of their speech, whose heart is a forum rather than a parking lot. But between the city and the countryside something has already begun to proliferate, something that does not have a name: the vague limbs of the outskirts, neither city nor countryside, neither nature nor culture, but a chaotic half-finished work, a front on which the labor of man advances so rapidly that it does not acquire a form.

The city in the countryside: two antithetical worlds, but for that very reason complementary. It is the green immensity that gives its value to the closedoff universe built of stone; and it is the closed-off and artificial universe that gives its value to the changing enormity that besieges it. Nature is beautiful for the man of the city, culture is priceless for the peasant! Perhaps never before, in a few minutes by rail or by car, was it possible for man to thus change his world and his century. Never before could he play on two boards, and give two dimensions to his thought and his life. But this

state of affairs lasted only an instant, and I fear that we have allowed it to pass us by. What could have been elements for a decision are now only testimonials of the past.

For the city, just like the countryside, is now tending to dissolve into a single industrial or residential suburb. A world in which the last farms and the last cities will sink into an ocean of apartment complexes, factories and "green spaces", just as villages were once lost in the forests. The confusion of the city and the countryside is only the geographical aspect of the constitution of a total metropolis: in the future there will no longer be any way to escape from either Babel or the belly of Great Pan.

# I. The Death of Great Pan

## 1. Far from Eden

Nature is an invention of modern times. For the Indian of the Amazonian jungle, or—closer to home—for the French peasant of the Third Republic, this word has no meaning. For both of them are still connected to the cosmos. At first, man was not distinguished from nature; he was part of an unbroken universe where the order of things was the continuation of the order of his spirit: the same breath gave life to individuals, societies, rocks and springs. When the breeze caressed the crowns of the oaks of Dodona, a symphony of voices resounded in the forest. For the primitive heathen there was no nature, there were only gods, beneficent or terrible, whose forces, as well as mysteries, surpassed human weakness from infinite heights.

In opposition to the irresistible current of natural forces, the individual and human society could only survive by fighting against those forces. They could not yet allow themselves the luxury of contemplation and love. They had to devote themselves body and soul to struggle, and mercilessly repel the always renewed attack of the green tide: cut, burn, give order to the chaos. If there were beautiful, lovable things, they were at first the precarious works of man. But this permanent war against nature was at the same time characterized by respect. The enemy was too great and too terrible not to be regaled with constant honors. To fight against him one needed his consent, because one needed to use his own forces against him. The order of things was a sacred order, in which man, forced to intervene to survive, labored in fear and trembling. Strict rituals dictated his conduct and served to exculpate it.

Of course, this equivocal respect for the cosmic order demonstrated that the seed of rupture and revolt appeared very early in the human species. By personifying the powers of nature in human forms, Greek paganism preserved the continuity between the cosmos and man, but began to strip the former of its mystery. When the storm was only the anger of the deceived husband, its objective examination was aborted. Later, Prometheus would try to steal the fire of heaven. He was too premature, however, and his sacrilege was punished.

Today, now that Prometheus unbound has become God, the modern individual recalls that lost childhood with nostalgia. More or less conscious, the memory of Eden still torments industrial societies. It is the yearning for a magical universe in which everything was alive, where everything had a

meaning and man was unacquainted with the curse of labor and time. Our revolutions and our pastimes aspire to nothing else. But an angel still guards the gates of these untimely paradises that were so laboriously constructed. He is called a soldier, a policeman, a warden. They are the guardians of the gates and prohibit us from entering; for to guarantee the security of this reconquered nature and freedom we must multiply the laws. We have been expelled from Eden forever. Now we can only look at it from the outside: never again shall we tread its flowery lawns. For us it is now only a dream or an image, a promise or a yearning: it will never be present again. Our lot is to grow old, die, reflect and struggle. If, some day, we are tempted to live this dream to its ultimate consequences, it is likely that we shall awaken imprisoned in this total universe and that what we shall discover will be hell.

For after Year One, everything changed. Whereas Prometheus, the ManGod, failed, the God-Man was victorious; only a being who was more divine could defeat Zeus. Great Pan died; and it was probably the God of the Christians who killed him: everything sacred, and at the same time everything human, was withdrawn from things. Starting with Genesis, the cosmos ceased to be God in order to become the creation of a divine person. He made the light, which separated day from night; there was an evening and a morning. The land emerged from the waters and from its nocturnal dream: a world that was innumerable yet exact, in which each object had its form and its own being. And God created Adam; and although he drew him from the dust of the Earth, he created him in His image and semblance. His body could participate in the universe, but his spirit belonged to another realm. And God made him the sovereign of His creation: a subject.

In the Garden of Eden, however, man and things nonetheless continued to live in God: there was not yet any sin or consciousness of Good and Evil. For this it was necessary for man, by destroying part of the work of his Creator, to create himself by sinning. Abiding by the counsel of Eve and the serpent, he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. He was now capable, just like God, of knowing them. But he was expelled from Eden, and cast upon the Earth, and plunged into need and into the evil that his spirit had recognized. And from then on, while the human spirit arduously attempted to once again find order in the chaos, his body had to endlessly reconquer it at the price of hard work. Thus, shackled by the weight of the flesh at the very summit of things, while his spirit was stretched taut towards God, Adam, like Prometheus, was abandoned to fundamental suffering and anxiety.

After this rupture, however, he had to once again be created by divine Love. If the Incarnation of the God-Man sealed a new alliance between God and his creature, it also established a link between God, man and his creation. The New Testament does not invest the forces of nature with divinity any more than the Old Testament; yet it is nonetheless pervaded with love for them. Mistrust of and Puritanical hatred for a nature that bears the stigma of sin, characteristic of the Reformation and the Counter-reformation, are completely absent from the Gospels. To the contrary, evangelical simplicity is draped in all the colors of spring. The universe of the Christian word

and life is not that of the city, or that of the factory, but that of the vineyards and shepherds. Creation is not the enemy, but the work of God: an immense parable in which, if one knows how to read it, one can discover His will. In the parable of the birds of the field, nature—spontaneity, childhood, rather than work or worries—is set forth as an example. "Look at the birds of the air..." is a scandalous response to the curse of Genesis: "You shall earn thy bread with the sweat of your brow." And since that time, we have sometimes obeyed the will of God by forgetting his curse.

Christianity still directed its faithful to deserts and sacred places, but in a different spirit. The desert is no longer just the refuge of demons. Ever since the Exodus prescribed by Jehovah exorcised it, it became the place of retirement of prophets and hermits, the symbol of the deprivation and solitude of the new Adam. And the forests that were the refuges of wild animals became the refuges of hermits. Christian faith did not abolish sacred places, it only changed their meaning: Sinai and Tabor were still holy mountains. But the Ascension expelled the gods from their summits, and man could now climb and stand upon their vacated pedestals. Even so, he did not make this ascent without due respect, for it is ultimately based on his own efforts that he can measure the whole depth of the heavens: the enormous void that separates him from the transcendent God.

Thus, the Christian creation is one of the hidden sources of the idea and the feeling of nature. It establishes a living relation between man and nature, for it is a paradoxical and ambiguous relation. Like God, in whose image he was created, man is distinguished from creation. He is no longer within it, and it is no longer within him, but presented to his consciousness: deprived of soul, it is present before the subject as an object. Man can act on it and transform it in his own way: his relation with it is no longer one of submission, but of combat. The flaming sword of the Archangel was capable of casting man upon the Earth, but it did not cast him into Hell; despite everything, he is not entombed in matter. And while he is still a determinate, finite and mortal being, Christ has granted him the freedom of the children of God. Thus, human freedom would discover and domesticate nature. However, the old bond is succeeded by a new one. Man begins to love the cosmos because it has become nature: because it is different from him, and because it is no longer populated by spirits. The oaks of Dodona are silent; only the wind still arouses the murmur of the leaves, and now their murmur consoles our anxiety. Dawn has broken, Olympus has lost its superhuman form; it has petrified into a pile of rocks. And man, curious, approached it. His hands grasped the lifeless stone; to get a better look, he ascended the mountain, attracted to the summit by a kind of intoxication. He had to look for a path, force his way, scoff at the abyss. And in this hand-to-hand fight with the mountain he found peace.

## 2. From Creation to Nature

Creation has become nature. For as man distinguished himself from the cosmos, he experienced the need to reintegrate with it. As his knowledge and dominion over things increased, his nostalgia for the time when these things had a magical dimension was awakened. As the individual asserted himself in the face of the universe and society, his need to cease to be alone and to find himself in harmony with both the universe and society increased. As the unbearable sun of consciousness reached its zenith, the nostalgia for the original innocence was awakened: the nostalgia for the time of nature.

Just like progress in the sciences and technology, nature is the daughter of the affirmation of the person and his freedom. Just as the personal God is the author of creation, the modern individual is the author of nature: it is no accident that the most important of its inventors was the Protestant, Rousseau. Since Eden is lost, it has to be recovered. Because the individual cannot rule his passions and escape the Fall of Man, Rousseau had to reply that the original state was the state of nature—of innocence. Rousseau's good and rational man was the invention of a Calvinist sinner. Removing from the Christian faith its contradictory signs—evil, the personal and incarnate God—the Savoyard curate tried to reintegrate God into the cosmos, but he was too late. Nature is man's mother: the model of all society. The end is the beginning. The goal of civilization is the noble savage; the goal of the revolutions, the return to natural law. The ideal constitution is only a return to the primitive social contract. Rousseau's nature is only the projection of the demands of the human spirit upon what exists. Ultimately, it is nothing but a Christian super-nature that does not dare to speak its name.

In a way, the solitary wanderer was not mistaken: a profound bond links freedom and nature. In a civilized society, in which social constraints have replaced the adversities of nature, in a society in which "that is the way it is" no longer designates the will of God and the fact that there is no court of appeal against his afflictions, but the decrees of History, the demand for freedom ends up being the demand for nature. It was inevitable that man, once he was no longer the sacred being made in the image of God, would become a natural being, one that society cannot touch without meddling with the perfect work of the great architect. But this intangible and fundamental nature, these natural rights: this human nature—does it still live up to its name?

When the weight of social conformism replaces the natural environment, the rights and duties of the free being become for the individual the rights and duties of the "natural" being—today we would say, the "authentic" being. When the vestments of the social being fit him like a second skin, primitive nudity becomes liberation; when morality becomes a new fate, sometimes the individual must break the rules in order to follow his instincts. This nature—is it not an ethic?

It is true that there is a relation between nature and freedom, but it is a paradoxical relation. There is no freedom without nature; more than anyone else, the free man needs space, time and silence. He needs the desert, the seas and the forests, the authenticity

of creation in the form that it had when it first came from the hands of God: but this is because he has lost it. He needs to once again find spontaneity, simplicity; but these qualities now lie beyond, and no longer within, material and intellectual progress. We can reproach Rousseau, like all of his contemporaries, for not having been aware of this paradox, for having associated, for example, as something that was self-evident, nature and revolution, when revolution is above all an act of violence against nature, especially against human nature. And those who seek to lead human nature by force to primitive innocence are those who attack it most profoundly.

The mistake of Rousseau and of his contemporaries lies in the fact that they tried to reconstruct, by way of their discourses, the unity that Christian faith had destroyed at its root: the good, rational and abstract man of the *Social Contract* is the response to the real sinner of the *Confessions*. They could only end up with a "feeling of nature" and a vague pantheism, like that of Victor Hugo, that makes nature, against all evidence, the generous and benevolent mother of man. The fact that they did not grasp the paradox of nature, its intimate connection with freedom and the individual, led them to disconnect the two terms of the contradiction. Love for and hatred of nature thus developed simultaneously in the heart of the modern individual. That is why, under the pretext of liberating it, he accepts destroying it.

Man having emerged from the cosmos, this is how he dominated nature, both intellectually as well as practically. And this is how, by distinguishing himself from it, he has learned to distinguish it and love it. There is no nature without civilization: one must live amidst the cement of the cities to marvel at the sky and the trees. But there is no civilization without nature, either. To build a civilization is only a passionate game for men if it is necessary to conquer it, as the pioneers of the past were forced to do, in a universe that rejected them. And the refuge that society offered them only preserves its value if, on the other side of the walls of the house, the wind blows and the rain rattles against the windows. Where would the splendor of the day be without the night to give it all its brilliance?

## 3. The war against nature

A new God profaned the universe; and this God was also man. At that moment Jupiter and Neptune vanished to leave man alone in creation; participating in it, and nonetheless free within nature, which is what it was called by man because he no longer perceived it in the guise of his human hopes and fears. He no longer personified it because he knew it and loved it for itself. Nature was no longer sacred, but from then on, it was not respected, either. In a way, at the very moment when it was spoken of there was no more nature, but only things to exploit, from which one could extract power or derive enjoyment; esthetically, for example. Man, who had in another time lost himself by merging with nature, today runs the risk of destroying himself by rejecting the bond that connects him to nature.

His first victories were due to his capacity for association, to human society. Civilization or culture is an anti-nature, especially at its beginnings, when man felt too weak to have any sympathy for the enemy. Man began to dominate nature even before he possessed effective machines, when state organization allowed him to accumulate the forces of an enormous number of men. Nature was dominated at first, and very precariously, by the great empires, especially Rome. Rome managed to rule an area that was in the human sense much more vast than our contemporary world, and it did so without airplanes or railroads, thanks to its great roads and, above all, the perfection of its army and its administration. But this victory was superficial, because the Roman state was incapable of creating a spiritual and technical infrastructure. Almost everywhere, man was still the man of old: the pagan peasant. A tiny layer of high functionaries and educated people was papered over the primitive lava of the rural masses. An endless ocean of barbarism battered the fragile levees of the *limes*; and another barbarism, much more profound, threatened to sweep away the superficial order of official rationalism and academicism from within the empire. Classical culture and reason were victorious in the metropolises where, from the thickets of Baetica to the peat bogs of Caledonia, the same model proliferated: the City. But these rootless populations, isolated in the moorlands or the settled countryside, lacked an economic base and the instrumentalities that would have allowed them to dominate their surroundings. They were administrative centers, without any life of their own, unlike the Greek cities. A blank, inert order, transplanted over vast areas in which forests, epidemics, and magic still reigned. A superficial order, condemned by its own victory. For while the Pax Romana was able to dominate nature, and subdue tribes and spirits, it sterilized the forces of life at the same time.

This is why the forces of life rose against it and Rome was swept away by barbarism from within and from without. The barbarian peoples launched the assault, while the Empire decomposed from within under the combined attacks of men and gods. The Empire was shattered and divided into numerous kingdoms and, later, into countless fiefs; the cities were largely abandoned and the encroaching forests erased the last traces of the Roman roads. The Middle Ages were a kind of return to nature; perhaps it was necessary for man, like Antaeus, to once again touch the Earth in order to derive from it the powers that would allow him to be victorious. And the Middle Ages, unlike Rome, were capable of progress because they were

Christian. Christianity, which, in order to adapt to the societies that it had won over, had become paganized, never ceased to bear within itself the principle of a desacralization of things: the scientific spirit. And despite the Church, the personal God called persons to freedom: to research, to initiative and to battle. This time the obscure vitality of barbarism would inspire the organization of the world.

As of old, progress began first of all with political organization: with the reconstruction of the State. The medieval kingdoms rediscovered the tradition of Rome: law, and administrative, financial and military techniques. While they ruled much smaller areas than the Empire, they were nonetheless capable of penetrating those areas much more

deeply, right to the heart of the peoples, paving the way for the Nation-State. In association with the monarchs, the bourgeoisie, for its part, embarked on the conquest of the Earth. Separated from the cosmos by the walls of his city, the bourgeois, unlike the priest or the feudal lord, could only perceive the rest of the universe as a place to exploit. His Christian faith justified reason and revolt, restlessness and adventure, which combined with the older traits of the quests for power and profit. Thus, thanks to the kings and the bourgeoisie, the cities once again prospered. But this time they were animated by a spirit of freedom. And, just like the Greek cities in another era, they possessed an economic infrastructure. They were alive, and they were numerous; mutually hostile, the very forces that they employed to destroy one another caused them to grow. The small States would disappear, and were generally absorbed by larger and more efficiently organized States. And the Christian Middle Ages finally bore their fruit; science discovered its autonomy, man made an inventory of his planet and the first mechanical slaves began to engender other, increasingly more powerful and more docile, slaves. Under the impact of human intelligence and activity, the old ice was broken and set in motion, at an increasingly higher velocity. It took five centuries to advance from the stern-mounted rudder to the steamship; it would take a

little more than one century after that to invent the airplane; and half a century later the first satellites were launched into orbit around the Earth.

Today we have the world in our hands; but although we have learned how to exploit it, we do not know what to do with it. With respect to nature we can consider ourselves free, and without regrets, if we are capable of accepting the responsibilities that this freedom implies. We are no longer trapped in a remote wilderness, and the night no longer imprisons us under its impenetrable blanket. The old fears no longer haunt the thresholds of our houses, and the monsters that once populated the forests are now penned up in cages in our public parks for the amusement of our children. Only death is still present, and it is all the more disorienting insofar as from now on it shows its naked face. We can build enclosures for artificial seas,[1] and bombs that are more terrible than volcanoes; in the future we will change the climate. Man has become the most active natural force on Earth; before him, forests retreat and species disappear. We are no longer pagans; we no longer worship the rain, we make it. We no longer venerate the hippopotamus or the eagle; our tanks and our airplanes are much more impressive. The forces that we worship are called Steel, Crisis, Peace; all it would take is a tricolor poster on the walls of our cities to make the Earth tremble. Our cataclysms are Revolution and War; because it is no longer the soil that sustains us, but the body of the social titan. We are no longer pagans; but if being a pagan means that you worship idols, then we are pagans twice over, since our gods are made in the image and semblance of our tools.

[1] Man has become a cosmic power. The weight of the water in these enclosures has triggered earthquakes that have measured, at the Kariba reservoir, a magnitude of 6.5 on the Richter Scale. Fortunately, the area is only very lightly populated. [Author's note.]

We have vanquished nature. Therefore, we must learn to no longer view it as the enemy that we must annihilate. This victory was sometimes restrained, as in the rural world such as it existed in some old civilized countries. In Europe, in Asia, and in a few regions of Africa and America, man gradually submitted to nature, even as he subjugated it. And the rural landscape was born from this union, in which the fields and hedgerows follow the natural contours of the land, in which the valleys hosted farms and villages in the same places where the plants bore their fruits. The meadows penetrate the woods, and the woods intrude into the vineyards. And just as it is not possible to say where man begins and where nature ends in the rural landscape, it is impossible to distinguish the rural landscape from the countryside.

It is more common, however, for man to have only been able to defeat his old enemy by annihilating it. An increasingly larger part of humanity lives in cities where no trace of nature subsists, except the sky, or parks that are distinguished by their artificiality. The Earth is buried under concrete, the horizon closed off by walls. When night comes, a symphony of lights sparkles in the black diamond of the metropolis to enclose it in the heart of darkness, in a closed world that receives all of its life from machines, except the inexhaustible flow of men who endlessly come and go like robots. Because it is in man where life and nature still irreducibly subsist: in the anonymous crowd of the sidewalks, where love and death are still looking for their chosen ones. It is true: when nature is penned in to this extent, even this verbal phantom that stalks the tomb of the real will have disappeared.

## 4. Nature is man

And in fact, nature is man; it is just one of the names of his freedom. The feeling that we can have of nature is nothing but the consciousness of our life. All of man's life is the expression of nature, nothing essential can be added to it: in the best case, artifice will only be able to camouflage a void. The blue sky shines over our heads, and the clear water flows through our hands; our hearts beat and our eyes open wide. What more can we ask? What is most beautiful and most intense about our existence, from the most simple to the most sublime, was invented by no one: new inventions, in the best cases, are nothing but new pretexts for old pleasures. Drink when you are thirsty and eat when you are hungry; step into the waves and catch a fish, have a few laughs with a friend or kiss your girlfriend's eyes. Everything we can acquire is an added bonus, the essential things were given to us the day we were born. Nature.... We moderns are beginning to discover the meaning of this word, which awakens an irresistible nostalgia in us: in this defeated nature where death reigns, but which still bears the mark of the creator of Eden.

Man came from the dust; therefore, although he distinguishes himself from it, he is still part of creation. When we disturb nature, we are cutting our own flesh; in this domain as well we must exercise our freedom with fear and trembling. Our spirit is

free, but our body binds us to the cosmos: in it burns the same fire that ignites the stars. And if the Earth is nothing amidst

infinity, man is small potatoes on Earth. All it would take is an imperceptible change in the salinity of the oceans, or a minuscule change in the impalpable atmosphere, for man to disappear like a breath of air. Man is only one form of living nature, which, for its part, is nothing but the result of a prodigious conjunction of all the forces of the universe. A supreme accident, a miracle. Thus, in this limitless expanse of nothingness, man is nothing; but if he becomes aware of his nullity, he discovers this nothingness in the center of infinity. And this is perhaps the most terrible thing about freedom: in that bright splendor that rends the night when we open our eyes. Man—and at this instant every one of us is this man—is situated at an equilibrium point at which all the nebulous tides converge to sustain him. On the scale of the cosmos, it would take very little to destroy him; and then the same terrible forces that cause the rose to bloom would reduce the planets to dust. But our weakness has become strong enough to threaten this equilibrium. Oppressed in the past by the natural order, will we be destroyed in the future by its destruction?

Such is nature, whose fragility is our fragility. If our actions become too powerful and are not attenuated by common sense, we risk bringing about our own physical destruction. And, in any event, we would destroy our freedom, which is even more fragile than life. Every blow that we deliver against nature affects our body, and therefore our spirit. This is why our impact on nature has a limit, since nature is precisely the mother from which man physically proceeds. Alas, Earth! Your master is your son.

The risk of physical destruction is still uncertain, but it is not insignificant. First of all, nothing guarantees that the increase of the population, associated with the endless increase of production, will not threaten us with an exhaustion of the planet's resources: the modern experiment is too brief to predict the future. Reserves of oil and coal might be exhausted, in the best case scenario, within a few centuries: not even as long as an Empire lasts. And in some cases, there are already shortages of the most basic products, such as, for example, water for our big cities. Paris has to consider diverting some of the water of the Loire for its own needs; and New York, which consumes 25 cubic meters per second, must distill sea water at a very high cost. The use of atomic energy might allow us to compensate for the exhaustion of some of our resources, but this is only a possibility, and not at all certain. There are many cases in which it is likely that we will have to produce very expensive replacements for the goods that nature once provided us; and this at the price of a great deal of discipline and hard work.

The most elementary prudence would demand that, at the very least, we should address this question. All too often, when someone points out that we are exhausting the natural environment, the believers in progress will respond with a profession of faith: "We will find a solution."

And if production continues to increase indefinitely, then another problem will arise: that of waste disposal. Under a sky contaminated by car exhaust, the Earth will become

a place overflowing with garbage, with its rivers serving as sewers and the ocean being used as the universal dump. Above all, however, the powerful, and blind, intervention of man can end up destroying the fragile equilibrium that gave birth to him. We have not evolved much since the time when we worshipped the forces of nature. Confronted by nature, we have, at most, the attitude of a rebellious slave. Since it is no longer oppressing us, we no longer see it as anything but an instrument: the soil is only of interest with respect to its yield per hectare; the river, for its kilowatts, without our ever even suspecting that economic utility is a very limited aspect of the role that nature plays in our life. The most essential bonds that tie us to nature are invisible, because they are too numerous and too profound for our poor reason. The zeal for exploitation, and the lack of any sense of the gratuitous, could turn against us and even threaten profits. The preoccupation with productivity is too attached to the present, it does not sufficiently take the future into account; and then the day will come when productivity declines. Twenty years ago, nothing would have seemed more rational than to cut down the hedgerows and woodlots to allow the tractor to plow a straight line across the countryside. If someone were to oppose this, he would have been stigmatized as a reactionary. Since then, advances in agronomy and the terrible lessons of experience have taught us that as old-fashioned that patchwork of hedges, terraces and woodlots may have been, it was also wise. Had 19$^{\text{th}}$ century man been capable of doing so, he would have destroyed all the "varmints", because he did not yet possess the expertise to realize how profoundly useful they are. Today, biology has shown us the role that predators play in the natural equilibrium, and fish farmers release pike into their fish ponds so that the carp will grow larger. The splendor of nature is not useless, it presents our senses with reasons that our minds have not yet been able to grasp. The blueness of the sky and the purity of the waters are not mere decorations on a stage set; in the transparent glance of a beautiful woman a terrible enigma shines: our relation with the cosmos.

In any case, however, we are sure that we are going to lose our freedom. Man's freedom was once buried in nature, and now it is separated from it; but it still proceeds from nature. Now, when nature must be conquered and defended, anyone who says freedom, says nature: spontaneity. It is no longer within, but outside of our civilization. And our civilization itself will only bear living fruit if it penetrates deeply enough into us to become nature.

Knowledge frees us from natural determination; but it does not eliminate it. To the contrary, it is conscious of it and is based on it in order to help us counteract it. All it does is divert the weight of the physical environment to the pressure of the social organization; to a need that although no less brutal is less frightening, since it is manufactured by and for man. We cannot escape our condition, our fate no longer depends on the progress that turns its back on nature; it resides exclusively in a precarious equilibrium between nature and artifice, which must be maintained forever by the vigilance of consciousness.

Man is born from nature as from the body of a mother. Wherever nature has disappeared, modern society is obliged to manufacture a super-nature: the land and the forests, and even its animals and men. But then the law must be implacable, since it must reproduce nature even in the most subtle of its details. The Dutch girdle their dikes with artificial breakwaters that mimic the capricious contours of natural rocky shorelines. Russian and American agronomists break up the steppes and prairies with strips of woodlands and hedges planted with bushes: science invents the countryside. In the future, man will have to repopulate the seas the same way you might toss fish into a tank; with respect to some species threatened with extinction, governments have now reached agreements to carefully monitor them as if in a nursery. Since our power has grown to the scale of the Earth, it is the world that must be governed, even to its most remote confines and the most profound aspects of its complexity. But in this case man must impose upon his fellow man all the rigor of the order that the Creator imposed on him. The net of the law will have to be cast over every square inch of the planet's surface. And in this new creation, the inhumanity of a totalitarian police state will replace that of an all-embracing nature.

There is no more nature, except in the heart of man, except in that growing feeling for nature that we find so pleasing in a certain kind of literature, when it is a vital instinct, a profound wisdom. For it is nothing but the intuition, intense but vague, of our connection with the universe.

Nature has been defeated, and this is why we are becoming aware of it. We have freed ourselves from it; what we have to do now is not only continue by going beyond nature, but also beyond progress. Our power must accept the limits that in other epochs were imposed by our weakness. In the past, we had to defend man's position against the powers of nature; today, we have to defend the position of nature: we must respect the rules of its game, its mystery, when necessary. Then man will not only have broken his chains, he will have chosen to set things in order, and will have become the real king of the Earth: the lord of the universe as well as of himself.

# II The City

## 1. The era of contradiction

For a long time, man's struggle against nature was difficult and its outcome uncertain. Even when human victory seemed obvious, the past was not immediately abolished by the future. Nature subsisted alongside civilization and, above all, within man: within society and individuals. At least until the present generation, we were still peasants living in a technocratic era; the ethnologist who records the dances of the "primitives" is modern only because of his tape recorder and his cameras; he, too, participates in the myths and rituals of his tribe. And his consciousness, which is usually asleep, is not aware of them, no more than the Nambikwara are aware of their own myths and rituals.

Up until now, the contradiction between the future and the past has been manifested under the objective form of the opposition between the city and the countryside. This opposition, which is currently dissolving, reached its maximum intensity in France between the two World Wars. But as always in such cases, the men who lived through that transition thought that the situation was eternal, when it was nothing but a brief instant in the transformation of humanity as a whole. The progress of the cities seemed to be endless and the countryside, changeless: in a large part of Europe, at least, machinery did not really transform agriculture. The generations of that era lived on the frontier between two worlds; peasants who went to the capital, and urbanites who returned to the land of their fathers, benefited from both worlds, without being aware of it.

Thus, first of all, I will state that, until the acceleration of the economic and technological expansion that followed the Second World War, the citycountryside opposition, or the opposition between industrial society and traditional society, was more profound than the opposition between classes. If this has not been noticed by the theoreticians of society it was only because it was too obvious; too enormous and too simple, too concrete and therefore too complex to merit the attention of the experts. You would have had to have been a child to feel in one's own flesh the clash of these two worlds whose frontlines then passed through the last stop on the streetcar line: where the walls ended and the fields began and you can walk on the grass. Two worlds in which space and time, and the density, and, consequently, the character of human relations, were no longer of the same nature; in which the ways of life and therefore of thought had nothing in common, except their opposition: in politics, for example, the contrast

between the conservative inertia of the rural world and the progressive movement of the cities.

In the chapters that follow, some aspects of this contradiction, which are still being manifested, will be illustrated; for even when the things themselves have disappeared, they still live on in man. And it is advantageous to pause to consider this contradiction, since it is most fruitful for those who address it. It gives us an opportunity to look at two worlds instead of enclosing ourselves in only one; to shed light on the city from the perspective of the countryside, or on the countryside from that of the city; to therefore examine their vices and their virtues, which are simultaneously antithetical and complementary. An examination of this contradiction can serve an attempt to exercise freedom and to envision a society capable of synthesizing the countryside and the city without destroying either; capable, to the contrary, of instilling them with their full meaning. A society that would augment the virtues of the peasant by adding those of the city dweller, and augment those of the city dweller by adding those of the peasant. Surely, never before has a generation had the opportunity to live in two eras at the same time; just as no other generation has had the opportunity to reflect on this, and to decide. Unfortunately, in the man of those times of transition, neither the oldfashioned rustics nor the new urbanites were prepared to question themselves, and both lived right next to one another without ever noticing each other. In this way, the past is succeeded by a future that is equally blind and indifferent.

The man of the past, whom we find in the man of the future, denies the contradiction by saying that the countryside is changeless anyway. For city dwellers, the countryside is a kind of inexhaustible bank account from which they can tranquilly withdraw reaction, or progress. It is the reserve of open space, fresh air and clean water that is indispensable for the development of industry; for providing the energy and traditional virtues from which the factories derive their labor power and the barracks their infantrymen; the national park in which the man of the cities is sure of being able to enjoy, in total freedom, the pleasures of the old days. The capitalist bourgeois, who had hardly even begun selling a few tools or textile products to the peasants, had not yet undertaken the liquidation of the countryside; at least in France, he even contributed to its survival by means of agricultural price supports and protectionism, in order to interpose the inert masses of the peasants between him and the proletariat. Thus, against a green background, the cities can proliferate undisturbed. There is a whole bucolic literature, written by urbanites for urbanites, that nourishes the myth of the eternal countryside; everything can change, since nothing changes.[1] And when he goes on vacation, after leaving his house in the Sixteenth District, the bourgeois returns to the springs to reassure himself that they are still running just as clear.

In France, the countryside can therefore be a literary theme; it is not a social problem. Up until quite recently, the prestige of socialism and Marxism, characteristic

[1] The bucolic accounts of Jean Taillemagre in *Le Monde* carry on with this tradition. [Author's note.]

of a rural nation that is still in the first stage of urban culture, that is, in that of ideology, reduced the social question to the opposition of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. And, in effect, this point of view is justified if one remains on the plane of intellectual and political expression: the point of view of the city. However, the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is itself proof of an antagonism that is taking place on a common level. Both belong to an urban society. They do not have the same standard of living, but they do have the same idea of life; and it is the bourgeoisie that provides the proletariat with the principles and models—the standards—of life. On the other hand, there have been bourgeois thinkers who have theoretically examined the class struggle: professor Karl Marx, among others; and the bourgeoisie has often contributed its management personnel to socialism. Marxism was the first tendency to emphasize the dialectical relation that unites capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The merciless struggle that characterizes their opposition must not make us forget the common features of these two poles of industrial society, which explains the mutual borrowings which have been taking place since the war. These two sides profess, in effect, the same religion of industry, and share the same battlefield: the city. For each, the countryside is a foreign body that it can somehow tolerate, while awaiting its chance to eliminate it violently by way of the revolution, or systematically by way of technology.

On the other hand, during this transitional era, the peasant is still living, for the most part, outside not only the ideas but also the economy of the bourgeoisie. The peasant is a proletarian if judged by certain aspects of his standard of living, but he is rich with respect to certain goods that even the bourgeois in the city lacks. The peasant is always conservative, regardless of how he votes: monarchist, radical or communist. An embryonic political science, which does not know which of its urban categories he should be included in, tosses him into that box of odds and ends called the "middle classes", thus assimilating him to white collar employees and civil servants; as if there is not a greater distance between a Gascon tenant farmer and a professor than there is between a professor and a factory foreman! The Marxist-Leninists, on the other hand, unabashedly assimilate the peasant and the worker and include him in that totality that constitutes "the people"; a confusion that exacted a high price from the revolution as well as from the peasants, and would clearly reveal the difficulty of integrating the latter in an industrial society. The peasant is not distinguished from the bourgeois because he has a higher or a lower standard of living, but because he has a different way of life; he is not opposed to the bourgeoisie, because he plays by other rules. And if a bourgeois finds it difficult to understand a proletarian, he would find it at least as difficult to understand a peasant. It is highly significant that the peasant class, in the Marxist sense of the term, that is, as an economic class that competes with the other classes in the industrial system, and which fights for power and for the improvement of its standard of living, was only constituted when the modernization of agriculture had already begun to liquidate the countryside: the peasant class was born when the peasantry was dying.

This fundamental characteristic of the city-countryside distinction, the distinction between the city-dweller and the inhabitant of the rural areas, is now beginning, with industrial progress, to flourish at the level of theory. Today we are aware of the fact that the distinction between developed and under-developed, that is, predominantly agricultural, peoples, may very well be fundamental. However, while the adjective "developed" designates a very concrete society, that is, industrial society, the adjective "under-developed" embraces in a confused way everything that is not industrial society: from the pygmy hunter-gatherer to the Chinese coolie and the Alsatian farmer. Nullified at the national level, the contradiction is manifested on the world scale. Africa, South America and Asia are becoming the gardens for a Europe and a North America that are undergoing the process of urbanization. And we find between these two kinds of societies the same ambiguous relation of aid and exploitation, of scorn and admiration, that has always existed between the bourgeoisie and the peasants in the countryside. And in their poverty, the under-developed countries are also the last reserves of that wealth that industrialization has destroyed everywhere else: reserves of raw materials, reserves of water and space; and reserves of nature, especially human nature. And tourists from the continental cities travel to admire the wild animals and the traditional festivals of the rural people. Not for long, of course; for the rural world, whose increasingly more fragile social structure is confronting an increasingly more powerful urban society, is decomposing at an accelerating rate. The under-developed world is becoming a suburb: a residential suburb in the case of Polynesia and, above all, an industrial zone in which the shantytowns precede the factories. When the city—sociology—discovered the countryside, the end of the latter was at hand. Surveys and questionnaires for the peasants followed the invasion of the tractors, and pitchforks and harnesses have begun to adorn museums and lobbies instead of hanging in stables. The heir of bucolic literature, rural sociology plays the same role that ethnology plays with respect to primitive peoples. It performs the last rites, or an autopsy.

## 2. From the city to the urban agglomeration

The city always embedded man in an apparently closed world, separate from nature. However, the ancient city is distinguished from the modern city not only by a difference of scale, but also by a qualitative difference. The ancient cities were much less numerous and much smaller than ours. In 1939, there were already more than fifty urban agglomerations with more than a million inhabitants, whereas Bruges—the medieval New York City— barely had sixty thousand. They lacked technological means: a monster like Rome, fed by the imperial administration, was at the mercy of a delayed fleet. Men could associate with one another, crowd together behind walls to assure themselves that there were neither wild animals nor death, but this did not obviate the fact that the city was still besieged by the cosmos. Hence that energy, that aggressiveness, that was characteristic of the bourgeoisie; they had to go on the

offensive in order to defend themselves. Our cities, on the other hand, dominate the surrounding area. They are authentic centers:

economic and administrative centers, centers where the threads of a network of highways and railroads meet, centers of financial relations and laws that shackle their subjugated surroundings. Now it is the countryside that is besieged by the city; and since it lacks walls and the will to defend itself, the rising urban tide will soon overwhelm it.

The ancient cities were lost in the midst of nature. In the winter, at night, the wolves would come and sniff around their gates and at dawn one heard the roosters crowing in their courtyards. But the main thing was that they were the products of human nature; they did not lead, but followed it. Associations sprang up spontaneously: the cities had their own life, sometimes they were independent, like the free cities or the medieval municipalities. Even when their function was to serve as the capital of a kingdom, like Paris, they aspired to freedom: to an autonomous existence and self-government.

This living unity was expressed in an organic style. The apparent disorder of the medieval cities (the Romantics' "picturesque") concealed a profound order that a map reveals. The labyrinth of alleyways inevitably converges on a central point, a castle, a cathedral or a royal plaza. In these cities, everything is spontaneous, yet necessary: just like the sinuous network of veins and arteries that flow to and from the heart. And the apparently disorderly torrent of men, work and festivals conceals necessary relations, full of meaning, between individuals and groups and things; or, in other words, a society. Later, when the West began to discover the disjunction between nature and the human spirit, the monarchs and the architects created cities that were adjusted to human reason—which for them was nature. They opened up broad avenues through the densely packed network of the old city; and where they could do so, they built administrative centers according to symmetrical plans: and this time it was not a god, but a king who was at the center of this geometry.

Until the 19$^{th}$ century, the cities grew just as a tree or a man grows; and each new expansion, new wall, or new ring of boulevards, delimited a larger form. Then, eventually, with the progress of industry, the cities exploded, creating a surrounding zone of construction projects and crowds of people, without any attempt to envelop them with a circle of roads or walls. The city engendered by the industrial revolution is no longer a finished product, or a work in progress, but a chaos. Its plan—one hesitates to use this term—is formless. It is an expanding cloud whose rate of growth exceeds that of man; it is no longer the expression of human deeds materialized in stone, but a kind of geological upheaval, a social earthquake, which neither human thought nor human action can now control.

And at the same time that the urban chaos was proliferating, so too, did the theories of urban planners. Phalansteries in response to the shacks of 1840; plans for the Paris of 2000 that serve to expiate the disorder of 1960. Perhaps urban planning arises when the city ceases to exist: not being able to live in it, we dream of it. And on the blank page, or on the terrain cleared by bulldozers and bombers, the geometric design of

a Babel, whose towers rise up from amidst the trees, will take shape, realizing the synthesis of nature and progress. A shining city whose plan must be the matrix of the life we have dreamed of where men will immediately and willingly take up lodgings. For a long time, the city was an article of clothing that was gradually cut to the right measure; chaotic slum or ideal society, from now on the urban environment is becoming the Procrustean Bed to which men must adapt or disappear.

We are speaking of the city, but the city has changed. It is hard to continue to use that same word to refer to the cement disasters that have ended up swallowing various cities. The geographers propose the somewhat inelegant name of "conurbation", while I prefer "urban agglomeration"; I think that the common language expresses much more accurately the cumulative nature of the phenomenon. After the primitive style, after the monarchist order, the disorder of the individualist period—while awaiting the monolithic beehive of a totalitarian collective. The urban agglomeration is no longer the product of either human nature or human reason. Let us take a look at the map of a big European city. In the center, a dense nucleus crowded around a major landmark; then, contained by the innermost ring of boulevards, the modern city. Beyond that, a built-up zone that spreads in every direction into the countryside. The arrangement of the tentacles of the new districts irremediably recalls the infiltration of cancerous tendrils throughout the circulatory or nervous system. An animated map that would retrace the evolution of the city would show us how buildings accumulated in increasingly more compact layers along the transport routes: highways, railroads and canals. And where these routes converge—train stations, factories, docks—the built-up strip becomes more dense; sometimes squeezed between a hill and a river, the built-up surface merges into a more compact mass. And around the central mass, the urban fabric decomposes into residential areas and industrial zones, forming around the urban agglomeration a dismal ring characterized by the outbreak of a scattering of satellite agglomerations.

The continent proliferates: but it has no contents. The outskirts are nothing but a built-up void: a refuge for men or machines. It is nothing but a bloated extension of the city, lacking a center and a life of its own, or market districts, palaces or theaters, and hardly more than a bar or two where the seed of an embryonic social life can begin to germinate. And because it lacks a center, it lacks relations; when a suburb wants to merge with another suburb, its proposal must be approved by the city. To live, to conspire, to pray, you have to return to the past and return to the heart of the old city. The suburb can be a swarm of persons, but it is only alive when they leave it, in the morning and then again in the evening, to go to the city. As soon as night falls, however, the streets are rapidly deserted. Then the outskirts of the city are nothing but a desert, where dangerous wild beasts prowl.

Up until now the cities were societies; hence their style and their limits, which they could not exceed without forfeiting their reasons to exist. The urban agglomeration, however, grows mechanically. The expression of political progress, and especially economic progress, it grows at a constantly increasing rate, as if in free fall under the

sway of natural forces. Even on the map it seems to be in motion, and this impression of proliferation that is conveyed by the map is the image of its profound reality: once unleashed, the process grows like an avalanche. Man is added to man, house to house, undifferentiated unity to undifferentiated unity to form the mass. The agglomeration has no form, no limits and no style; it develops, so it would seem, in a disorderly way, and in its immensity it conveys an overwhelming impression of anarchy. In reality, however, it obeys implacable determinations: real estate prices and access to transportation, which are more strictly necessary than the sacred perimeter that once fixed the form of the city, since they are of a material and economic order. The city is a fait accompli, the gods can no longer do anything about it; men, even less.

The urban agglomeration.... For the spirit, an indistinct blur; and for man, an oppressive weight, in that place where the strongest determinations in the universe reign.

## 3. The suburb

The city, or rather whatever took the place of the city, is expanding.

Transforming the fields into vacant wastelands, and the vacant wastelands into lots, and the lots into an apartment complex. By surrounding the farm with a network of bungalows, the developer deprives it of its reason to exist before making it disappear; by transforming the countryside into a garden, the forest into a park, the hedgerow into a concrete wall, the riverbank into a pier; transforming the pond into a dump before converting it into an inground swimming pool. Throughout the countryside, beyond the last stops on the streetcar lines and bus routes, various broken down old houses of the "My Refuge" and "Villa María" type are scattered here and there. Like those watercourses that, following subterranean passages, suddenly rise to the surface far from their points of origin, in an enormous area where the expansion of its outskirts is being planned, the city destroys the countryside, transforming the peasant into a civil servant or a worker, and the servant into a slave; the council hall into a dance hall, the local inn into a hotel. By cutting off the rural path with a wall; by posting the verges of the forest with rude notices of suburban ownership. And by the time the first big construction projects are finished and the first sewers are built, the countryside is already destroyed from within.

The suburb is undefinable. It is not quite a city, but it is not the countryside, either. It is a countryside whose natural order has been destroyed and a city whose monumental order has not yet been constructed. The inorganic aspect of the suburb is impressive when you compare its plan with that of the neighborhoods of the ancient city: it seems to be more relaxed—the buildings are constructed at a certain distance from each other—and more chaotically—its roads no longer obey a general plan and divide and go in any direction; they obey, unlike the streets of the ancient city, a centrifugal force; it is no longer the harmony of order, but the blind rush forward of an

elemental force. When one crosses the suburb on foot, the impression of monotonous confusion reaches paroxysm. It is, first of all—and this is what generally strikes the explorer—the manifestation of misery: the suburbdump. The pond, which in other places is covered by water lilies, is here covered by a suspiciously iridescent film, it is full of gases that burst from bubbles when you stir the water with a stick; the waste ground is covered with bottles, jars, mattress springs, toothless forks, that industrial decomposition that our civilization leaves in its wake, fertilized with tires and rags in every stage of decomposition, from humus to almost edible carrion. The unhealthy suburb, more unhealthy than the equatorial jungle; the greasy soil of its hills fertilizes dense thickets, less dense, however, than the iridescent waters of the river, whose current slowly drags mountains of bloated, livid dead fish that epidemics cause to float downstream in enormous quantities. The dead fish take on a rosy coloring, like a sentimental whore. This suburb that was once elegant, whose rococo luxury ended up rotting in the damp shadow of hundred-year-old chestnut trees. The whole zone is a swamp into which all kinds of junk is tossed: the broken bottle, the car without wheels, the unemployed worker or the off-duty prostitute, the Bolivian cabinet minister who ended up becoming an alcoholic. A world defeated, busy picking through the mountain of garbage to snatch some scrap of flesh from the bones of misery. A humanity that has hardly risen above the level of the ground, except at the crossroads where the solid edifice of the bar rises, the place for encounters and escape. The suburb of shantytowns made of cardboard boxes or oil drums, built with all the wastes vomited up by the city. The suburb that the city wants to forget, which its motorists cross as fast as they can by the most direct roads so they do not notice it.

Just as the castle rises above the hovel of the serf, the silhouette of the factory rises above the asbestos roofs and the rags hung out to dry in the sun. The silent misery is broken by the whistle of trains, the hum of the trucks, the strident or serious rhythm of the running machinery, which spreads throughout the whole zone, the industrial outskirts. The intensity of its force gives it its own style and its own reasons. There is a grandiose desperation in the industrial outskirts, characteristic of a Babylonian enterprise; the gigantic laboratory of an alchemist where, in a labyrinth of steel tubes, chains and hooks, among clouds of smoke, in towers of bronze in which a secret fire burns, the magic spells are cast that allow men to dominate the world. There, all uncertainty dissolves: forces as implacable as they are precise do what must be done; they forge effective machines and a hard proletariat. One would have to be blind not to see that what is made there is not the mediocre comforts of insignificant individuals, but a collective effort that defies the universe. It is the cave where the thunder and lightning of world wars is forged.

The tragic element of the industrial suburb is salutary; unless one is the victim of a particular esthetic, it is impossible not to see that its scale is no longer human. It towers above us, bellowing its challenge. Perhaps this is why the bourgeois who is coming home from his house in the country drives as quickly as possible through this upside down version—this hell— profoundly repressed, of the city. Here we find

ourselves face to face with our origin and our destiny; when the cobblestones gleam under the downpour, when the wind picks up and dispels the smoke that pours out of the smokestacks, the air that one breathes is the same as in the lost places of the mountain peaks and the headlands of the sea: we stand before an abyss that man will never be able to penetrate. Such as the cosmos might have looked like at the dawn of time.

If we want to gauge the scale of the beings who frequent these cyclopean constructions, we must refer to the residential suburb. Behind the grandiose edifice of the economy, the misery of individuals; behind the materialized audacity, the interminable extension of horizontal mediocrity. The suburb to which one returns at night while reading the newspaper, the suburb of relaxation and spiritual emptiness; the suburb where one sleeps, and where one daydreams in the eternal return of the everyday routine. The suburb without monuments and without history. Why talk about it? We know these people, we live in these houses—how can we recount the tale of nothingness? The residential suburb prior to the "social housing complexes". A report on the amorphousness of the city. Anyone who has seen ten meters of its streets has already seen the kilometers and kilometers through which the labyrinth winds: no Ariadne's Thread will allow you to escape from it. Anyone who has seen ten of its inhabitants has already seen the millions of others who populate it. A city? No, an immense scattering of cheap buildings where, now and then, one can make out the simulacrum of a focal point: a café, a grocery store, a hardware store, a movie theater. The corner store is a subsidiary of Potin;[2] the movie theater, a subsidiary of Paramount, where the inhabitant of the outskirts of the city can find, for a somewhat lower price although only after some delay, the same entertainments that are provided downtown; this is what the people of the outskirts call "living in Paris". Surely, this explains the atmosphere of vacuity and superficiality of the outskirts of the city; these neighborhoods populated by tens of thousands of inhabitants have less of a life of their own than any mountain village. The residential suburb is the realm of mere dormitories.

No order rules over the disposition of these thousands of single-family houses except possibly the allure of the street. Each homeowner has built his house and decorated it in accordance with his own fantasy. Wrought iron fences and walls embedded with broken glass protect these fortresses of French individualism. Yet, if we follow these endless roads, we are rapidly submerged in an ocean of monotony, as if this multitude of particular details pertaining to each individual were nothing but a vast accumulation of grains of sand. Little by little, this embittered individualism reveals the same basis: the green doghouse, the miniature garden so that each homeowner can take advantage of even the smallest scrap of land, a solitary lettuce protected by the whole family against a single slug; the tree pruned with extreme care, so that the neighbor cannot gather its fruit and because one must comply with the municipal regulations; and also

[2] Félix Potin: trademark name of a retail food store that was founded in 1844 and went out of business in 1995. It had over 1,300 outlets in France at one time [Spanish translator's note].

because you have to have something to do on Sundays, and because here the passion to do something on the part of an idle humanity can only be consummated on a few square meters where everything is raked, neat, trimmed and polished; and as for the ground, every centimeter counts, because you had to pay for every centimeter. The soil harassed by this feverish activity is sometimes compressed as hard as cement under the weight of the daily traffic, and its entire surface has been covered with a layer of sterile gravel: a domestic desert, a reflection of the interior world of its owners, who pursue here the vocation of generations of peasant-plowmen. Sometimes, eccentricity and grandiose airs: a gleaming glass ball, an exotic palm tree or a zinc awning, since an awning ennobles its owner. Nowhere do you find a single completed building that has its own dimensions; everywhere you see imitations, imitations and imitations.... And then we come across the false turret, the Chinese-style fish pond, the proliferation of a conventional style of baroque.

All of these outskirts of the city express, wherever you look, the vain eagerness of the individual to distinguish himself from other individuals, the illusion and the vertigo of the epoch of individualism during which these places were built. Why, then, the wrought iron fences, the broken glass on top of the walls, the lawsuits, the barking dogs, if behind these ferociously defended walls one only finds the same faces, the same Lévitan furniture, the same rose-colored comforter upon which *Marie-Claire* or the *Paris-Soir* lies open to the same page? When the last light is turned off at night, one's spirit feels overwhelmed by the weight of all these interchangeable existences. How many dreams and how much lost sleep, only to repeat the same thing? Why these millions of existences? To achieve what? Under this overcast sky in which the frozen fires of propaganda are deployed, a turbulent ocean heaves monotonously. But this confused murmur is that of the human ocean that is swallowing people.

## 4. The city dweller isolated from the cosmos

Men concentrated in cities to escape the forces of nature. And they certainly succeeded. The modern city dweller tends to be completely trapped in an artificial environment. And not only in the crowd, but because everything around him is manufactured by man, for human use.

There are still cities whose charms are still associated, for a while, with nature's charms. Mediterranean cities where the sun and the breeze penetrate to the heart of the shade. Like those cities of Languedoc, esteemed for their size and for their neighborhoods built of stone, interspersed with dark thickets, which assert the firm and clear contours of the human order. Elsewhere, cities of average size and ancient cities, gazing from the summits that they dominate. The enormous urban agglomeration, however, overflows its natural setting, where it is only integrated in the extravagant immensity of a place that is overwhelmingly set apart from its environment. Surrounded by desolate mountains, by the waters of the sea or by the course of a big river, the city then

appears to be a cosmic accident; just as the cement cliffs of Río rise up from the jungle, dominated by those steep bluffs that seem to be the tallest monuments of the city.

Even before the flood of automobiles, there was no way to catch a glimpse of nature in the city except by accident: the morning chirping of the sparrows in the chestnut trees, or that beautiful sunset that we loved to watch from the terrace of a café. Only here and there, between the houses, the clear stretch of the river finally allows us to catch a glimpse of a non-petrified world. The river, watched by people on their balconies, flows slowly with time, saluted by the trees huddled along its banks. A streak of movement and emptiness that insinuates itself into the compact fabric of the city; its bridges cross it in a leap, and the rush hour commuters in their cars and trains only notice a patch of brighter light. A perpetual invitation to the vagabond—and sometimes to the suicide—so that the pedestrian can escape the tides of the city.

Savior of the unhappy, river of the booksellers that crosses

the city where everything stands still, take me with you.

Downstream, wide open to the sea breeze, the beginning of an estuary. The port, on which the bourgeois downtown turns its back, but towards which the wanderer, or the seeker, turns his steps. Docks where the rigidity of the piers and the deliberate sluggishness of the cranes does not prevent the gulls from shrieking and the water from heaving, making the hulls of the cargo ships vibrate and squeak as they rub against their moorings. The docks where the hazy city seems to be ready to raise anchor, where the local wail of the sirens, issuing from the fabulous fatherland of the fleets, makes us feel the thrill of a muffled impulse to embark. In the rest of the city, however, the land is concealed under cobblestones or asphalt; the sky is nothing but a narrow slit crossed by wires that one contemplates when one raises one's head. Nor is there a night sky; the artificial lights blind the stars and the moon. In the countryside, the spirit soars through space and chooses its prey; there are even times when, surrounded by sky everywhere, the place where a man stands seems to be a peak that borders on the infinite, a place where one clearly feels that the Earth is only a planet. In the city, within a few meters, the view clashes with the façade of a building: it would seem that it is the world that is laying siege to the meager bit of sky. The expanse of geometric forms is no longer explained by their relation with the natural environment, but by the whims of individual fantasy, or by fashion, by collective determinations. Flat roofs under the snows of the north, brick towers rising from the swamps, cement everywhere, façades incapable of turning towards any other compass orientation than that of the street. If the rural landscape is the fruit of the marriage of the Earth and man, the modern city is a

construction in which human reasons—often insane—are victorious.

In the city, the cycle of the seasons, the contrasts of time, fade away. In the winter, on his way from the office to his overheated apartment, the urbanite plunges into the tepid mouth of the subway. Sometimes a strong wind blows, with a rumor of setting sail; it whistles around the edges of the tall buildings as if it was blowing through the rigging of a ship, and it is as if the whole city was shuddering. But regardless of how

much it may stir up the leaves in the squares, it is nothing but a mischievous gnome who throws roof tiles and plays dirty tricks on passersby. The rain, tenacious, is more likely to hit the mark. With its constant noise that drowns out all the other sounds it imposes silence on the street, enveloping the positive and monotonous world of the buildings in a watery grayness punctuated by gusts of rain and wind; reflecting on the new asphalt the freshness of a new beginning. With the smell of the rain, melancholy seizes the city dweller; he thinks that it is sadness, but it is in fact the memory of the Earth, the yearning for a tranquil and distant world that he senses because of the rainstorm. But the cobblestones dry out, the pedestrians continue on their ways; and this shadow of a city whose reflection gleams in the play of the raindrops disappears with the rays of the sun.

The lights of the city have vanquished the night; and the smoke of the city has vanquished the day. A veil of dust and noise isolates it from the sky, and a layer of asphalt from the Earth. In the winter, the complex outlines of the city become blurred against this gray background where a confused clamor is muffled. A product of urban smoke, smog is linked to its myth; it is in this throng of people and noise where Fantômas[3] disappears. Smog, the creator of the only genre of urban fantasy, deforms the peaceful geometry of the streets and produces a fabulous city. Distorting the shadows, transforming the pedestrian into an apparition, mutating the tragic silhouette in a window into a cotton veil; turning the steady footsteps of the pedestrian into a breathless approach, the creaking of a cart into a distant thunderclap, making the presence of that unusual visitor palpable: silence; turning an ordinary lamppost into the mute sign of some curse. The city then ceases to be perceptible to the senses and is now only manifested to the spirit. The smog of London, the city of Jack the Ripper.

In the sky of the city dweller there is no longer a sun, but the office time clock. Other stars illuminate and govern his time, which passes much more quickly, in the always-warm and slightly suffocating stomach of the social Leviathan. Like a slave, he bears a chain attached to his wrist, a chain that gets more tense as soon as he slows down. And his boss is so refined that he sells him the fetters that bind him and that he will not break until the day he dies. It is his wristwatch.

From the sewer grating to the lightning rod on the bell tower, the urban landscape has a structure of human reasons. And nowhere is this more evident than in the adulterated nature of the public parks, whose vegetation made for relaxation is more implacable than a cinderblock. Maybe it is the gates, the signs that prohibit walking on the grass, that predilection for flowers that are too beautiful and fish that are too red, those fat and defenseless animals protected by the guard, those plants that would die anywhere else; perhaps it is the crowd dressed up in their Sunday best that gives this impression. The public park is not a pleasure, it is the medicine necessary for a

[3] A character in a series of popular French crime novels written by Marcel Allain (1885– 1969) and Pierre Souvestre (1874–1914), Fantômas was a ruthless criminal genius and a master of disguises [American translator's note].

humanity deprived of fresh air. Amidst their buildings, men have manufactured an instant nature. They brought earth, they dug canals that drain into the river, they planted trees and flowers; and to protect this stage scenery they have built a wall studded with spikes and posted with regulations. Its visitors are too numerous: look but do not touch. The public park is a deceitful fantasy: a spectacle.

You would need all the magic of childhood to see forests and meadows there. And when it comes right down to it, childhood does not deceive us; it wants to transform the lawn into a meadow, penetrate into the prohibited nooks and crannies. In the foliage of the domestic lilac the wild bumblebee goes its ways. The only interest the child has in the public park consists in penetrating nature as soon as the guard has turned his back. But the disillusioned adult only discovers in it that cold draught of dreams that burns his throat. Waterfall—fountain: nostalgia for the generous torrent; the forbidden meadow: nostalgia of the rat race for fresh air; a school of obese carp, stuffed with scraps of bread: a desire for free-flowing waters full of fish. The prisoner thinks he has broken through the walls of his prison and finds that he is looking through the bars of a cage. The passerby, who hardly even casts a glance at this domesticated nature, dreams that you have to grab it with both hands; and passing through the gate he heads for the industrial zones, whose hard contours are more poetic than this vegetation made to please men. He can even venture forth in search of the original purity and penetrate the forests that border the fringes of the outskirts of the city. During the weekdays, he can find shade there, and sometimes silence; but beneath his feet is a yellow, withered plant, and the hard surface of the soil is utterly filthy. At the heart of unspoiled nature, nature has perished under the overwhelming violation of the crowd.

In the city, it would seem that man has freed himself from the cosmos. Only a few years ago, death reminded us of its presence with those baroque funeral processions that blocked traffic. On our streets, it was not so long ago that you could have seen them pass by. The blacks went crazy when death struck; wearing a three-cornered hat in the Louis-Philippe style, with linen gloves, his dark stockings impeccably ironed, with a serious look appropriate for the circumstances, he amused himself by dressing up the horses, putting skirts and silver spectacles on them; he placed the coffin on a fancy wagon covered with flowers made of spun glass and feathers of doubtful provenance, and his triumphal chariot was followed by a host of temporary guests all dressed up for the occasion. The procession moved with deliberate slowness, in order to oblige the trolleys to stop and the conductors to dissimulate their impatience. Caught by surprise, the pedestrians doff their hats. It was completely inappropriate; it was something as rare as making love in public. Was it just a momentary disruption of the normal routine, or did it reflect the paradox that the cult of the dead subsisted amidst the rational order of the city? But do people still die in cities? In any case, one no longer finds any trace at all of death, since family processions have been replaced by motorized corteges.

Death no longer exists in the cities, and thus annihilation has become real. As it does with the rest of its human wastes, the city, overflowing with the increase of its mass, pushes its cemeteries towards its periphery. On the map, they are enormous white spaces surrounded by highways and railroads. Sometimes, chance leads the wanderer to come up against one of their endless walls, which obliges him to make an absurd detour like death itself. Bordering the suburban blandness, the cemetery wall is lost in a straight line, punctuated by a series of lampposts, and accompanied by newsstands and factories: indestructibly real. Once you pass through the gate next to the guardhouse, you enter a network of neat, rectilinear paths; on both sides, to each his own provisional concession; for years, memory was granted the right to persist; tears were granted the right to endure in cheap trinkets; flowers were granted the right to wither in a lead urn. The miserable remains that adorn some even more miserable remains, serial luxury for serial nothingness. You do not have to be a fortune teller to know that in a place like that the memory of the dead also dies. This is the end. Here, terms like "desert" or "abyss" seem to be meaningless, because one always has the idea that an abyss is vertical and a desert, horizontal. And that's not nothing. Wherever you look, minutely classified in the geometric boxes of an administrative management, a baroque and monotonous chaos in which individual sadness adorns with its insignificant ornaments the immobile tombstone. This is the city: not a meaning, but a thing.

## 5. The city and freedom

The city dweller became free by isolating himself from the cosmos; but that is also how he can end up losing his freedom. He knows this well, since for him, to be free today—that is, to go on vacations—is to escape from the city. However, to a great extent the origins of freedom can be traced back to the city: the free man is the citizen, the man of the city. In the Middle Ages, *Die Stadtluft macht frei* ("City air makes a man free"); the peasant who wanted to escape from serfdom had to get behind its walls. The thick walls of the city watch over a living appeal to restlessness and revolt; if the city is ever called into question, it will be by its inhabitants. The source of individualism, the city is at the same time the point where the pressure of the human mass and its organization reaches its highest intensity. The more the population grows, the more strictly will the portion of time, space and freedom of movement of each individual be rationed. There is only one way to defend the city: surround it with walls that keep its neighbors from getting in. In this way, the city dweller is squeezed onto a narrow sidewalk, between the walls of private houses and the road where the collective movement seethes. The bigger and more improved the city becomes, the more it also becomes a gigantic organism that can only function by adhering to a rigorous plan. Freedom was born in the cities, but today, in order to live, it must flee from them. A child can tell you that the suburbs end and the countryside begins when you can walk

on the grass. But one must be a child of the city to notice how prodigious this miracle really is.

However, in all this unfeeling stone, there is still a painful thorn somewhere. Today as in the past, behind the secrecy of its walls the city is still manufacturing the only being that can justify it, the only force that can put it into question: the conscious individual. Somewhere, among the crowd, you can see him. He is not distinguished by any external sign, except for those capable of reading his glance. The same city that manufactures an army of robots cultivates the most refined human types; that is why it has occasionally been able to present itself as the headquarters of a new barbarism and at other times as the focal point of civilization. The conflict that opposes the social classes in the city on the economic plane is certainly unimportant compared to the abyss of mutual indifference that, on the spiritual plane, separates the solitary individual from the masses in the city.

In his own way, he is the man of the city. A delicate, yet at the same time resistant sensibility, allows him to distinguish between the violent sensations that are inflicted on him by his environment. He is vividly affected by what is natural and human in the city. Saturated with geometric figures and crowds, he develops a sharp sense of smell for nature: at a square in Montmarte he can detect the village; amidst the chestnut trees of the boulevards, he breathes the spring air. The absence of nature and men makes him more sensitive to their presence. It is this sensibility of the city dweller that, at the end of the 19$^{th}$ century, inspired the work of the great painters of Paris and its environs. Of course, the Montmarte of Utrillo was still a real village.

Above all, the individual knows how to derive a kind of intoxication from his rootlessness. Walking at random on the streets, amidst the noise, going from one thing to another; wandering, from one woman to another, from spectacle to spectacle, pursuing the present moment; the way a traveler in a foreign country goes from one hotel to another, more alien to all bonds than any monk in his cell. In this way, the extreme refinement of urban civilization can for some people lead to all the virtues—and all the weaknesses—of extreme dispossession. The individual likes the city because, by freeing him from nature, from men and from things, it considerably expanded the part that there is in him of consciousness and ideas. Only there does he find the favorable environment for the spiritual restlessness that is at the heart of his existence. Only there does he find the unrest that awakens the demons that he is accustomed to deal with. There, he is really himself, wandering through these same streets, allowing himself to be carried by the tide and its rumor the way a fish abandons itself to the play of the ocean currents: in the kingdom of Nowhere, the only kingdom where the spirit can really be affirmed—the spirit that is not of this world.

That is the only value of the city, the highest and the most miserable of all. This is what remains of so many prestigious material things: the weakest, most tormented beings. That nocturnal conversation during which, for hours, we walk along the deserted streets, watched by the sleeping city like a voiceless monster. Of so much wealth, nothing is left except the communion of individual weaknesses, a handful of friends

meeting at an apartment that is more sparsely furnished than a shepherd's hut. A few friends have come here to unlearn everything: to find the night in the heart of the light. For if Galilee is still the fatherland of happiness, Jerusalem is still the headquarters of the throne and of Golgotha. At least as long as one can still say that Jerusalem is a city.

The big city is the realm of individuals, and everything a man can find in it ultimately refers to them. It was already that way in the epoch of the medieval municipalities and it is still like that now; but it is far from possessing the same meaning that it did of old, because the individual affirmation can only be made at the price of breaking with the society that engenders it. If the individual of the modern big city is more lucid, more refined, intellectually more free than the human types that preceded him, this might be explained by the multiplicity of impressions, by the greater opportunities for culture. But this is not the essential thing; this intensity of the internal life is due to the internal tremor, to the mute flame of a being who is not integrated in his environment: the statistics regarding madness and suicide in the cities testify to this. What keeps the city dweller on edge is restlessness, anxiety. His lucidity is the fruit of desperation and feeds on his unrest. The individual of the city exists because he is in conflict with the city; because its inhuman development is destroying all the bonds without which the individual can neither live or grow. And if sometimes a man without any ambition goes to the city, perhaps it is because, without being fully aware of it, he has an appointment with that drama that is actually the reason for the existence of the individual. He goes into battle, so that he, too, will be wounded and he will proclaim his suffering at the base of those gigantic walls, among that inert crowd, against which his madness is shattered. The individual consciously chooses between the city and the countryside at a certain moment of his life, he knows that he is choosing between happiness and unhappiness, between authenticity and consciousness. But today, when the countryside is disappearing because a city without borders is tending to engulf the whole world, surely it is no longer possible to choose between one and the other.

The conflict between the city dweller and his environment is reaching its culmination today. Until the advent of the atomic age, each aggravation of the terms of the contradiction resulted in a greater autonomy for individual consciousness, but this tension has now reached its breaking point. The contemporary big city produces a type of man in whom thought and behavior are dissociated to the extreme. Increasingly more sensitive, more intelligent beings, capable of the most surprising diversions in the realm of ideas or dreams. Individuals whose thought, to survive, must be separated from action; who pay for absolute refinement with absolute powerlessness. Others have succeeded in ceasing to think. The most terribly solitary individuals—amidst the most terribly vast masses.

At this point, the conflict upon which the existence of the city dweller is nourished must explode in plain sight or come to an end. It cannot be aggravated without annihilating the most fragile part. The big city, up until now the realm of individuals, can only continue to develop by eliminating them; and when the city dweller tries to grasp

the meaning of his anxiety, it is no longer in order to discover in it a vague nostalgia, but a danger that threatens his life, and the need to fight to survive. His experience of the city pursued to its logical conclusion obliges him to become conscious of its problems; and in the not so distant future these problems will be everyone's problems. That is why, up until now, the individual felt, more than anywhere else, at home on its streets.

# III Surface and Point

Here in France, however, the city par excellence is Paris. In relation to the center that determines it, the rest of France is nothing but a dead surface: countryside and, no doubt very soon, suburb.

## 1. The Province

If the fatherland is defined as an original and living society, here we only have one: France. In this case, however, we are all children of Paris. We know how to dress up as Flemings or Catalonians for festivals, but otherwise we are all just so many provincials: the Province, that empty expanse defined with reference to that fixed point: the Capital. It is a harsh truth for the provincials to accept; but it is also a bitter pill for the Parisians, who are nothing but provincial émigrés to Paris.

The provinces still exist, of course, but this existence is pure inertia. The land is still there, the mountains are still anchored on the horizon: castles are still stranded on the hilltops—but no emblazoned feudal standards announce their challenge. Fortunately, the National Trust, rather than the municipalities, is responsible for their maintenance: the sky is clear, and that is why it is so vast. Nothing remains of the truth of the moment except what is elemental: time, space, silence; the most ordinary works and days. Here a world comes to an end; but from the basic elements another world can be reborn at any moment. When everything becomes quiet, all you have to do is listen to perceive the mute questions that are posed to us.

The castle still reigns over the city, but there is no longer anything sovereign about it; and since it has ceased to have any usefulness whatsoever, it has been turned into a museum. Houses still huddle around it as of old, and pedestrians still walk the streets that lead to it. They never enter it, however (maybe once), because it is basically an empty shell; you would have to be a tourist to be interested in its appearance. The old capital is still alive. To judge by the statistics, it is even larger and more populous than ever. But this body lacks the divine spark that once gave it life: freedom, whether political, economic or moral. Sovereignty, the possibility of choice, glory or heresy ... everything is equally forbidden to it. This people of soldiers and conquerors is no longer anything but a gray mass of shopkeepers and laborers; it no longer has strength, it is suffering: the greatness and delusions of command have given way to the mediocre vices and virtues of obedience. Such is the fate of Béarn—and soon it will be the fate of all of France.

Vitality no longer bursts forth everywhere, it is concentrated in one point. All impulses flow from top to bottom, and human life flows from everywhere to accumulate in the center; anyone who wants to swim against this current is defeated in advance, whereas if he wants to leave the countryside, he will be carried along by the movement of the whole. There is only one fixed point to which man is really bound; everywhere else, he is in motion. A strict hierarchy maintains this movement. Below, in the village, childhood and ignorance; above, in the capital, maturity and knowledge. And the individuals are thus sorted out, more or less rapidly, in accordance with their weight, from bottom to top: from the local secondary school to the institute in the provincial capital, from the institute in the provincial capital to a university in a big city. Increasingly more often, however, the great oppositions are organized in Paris. On both the provincial as well as the national level, the hierarchy of salaries and prestige nourishes a perpetual movement that sorts individuals into layers, the most successful being the least rooted, except at the end of their careers: but the pyramid has only one apex. The law that governs us is the law of the elementary logic of gravity. In a mountainous province, the career of a teacher is an uncertain one. He begins in the highlands and ends up on the plains or the coast. But if he does not have enough weight, the pendulum will swing more slowly, and retirement will surprise him while he is still stranded at the entrance to the valley or on some mountain slope.

The Province is not a place, but a way station. The educational hierarchy constantly deprives the countryside of the best of its youth; all that is left is the land and the masses: it needs salt. In the cantons, life stops at the age of fourteen; in the provincial capital, at eighteen. The Province does not ask itself why its young men have to desert it at the age when they begin to ask questions. And if one of them returns to his home town at the beginning of his career, a *cursus honorum* that now embraces everything from public administration to the big private corporations obliges him to depart at the very moment when he is beginning to establish connections with nature and the local people. He has no sooner begun to cultivate an enduring and profound work when its success leads to his departure. Only failure will allow him to remain.

In such conditions, how can this be a country: an original society that nonetheless has a universal value? All this constant movement prevents such a society from forming. No marriage is as long-lasting and as fragile as that which unites a man and a country, and none is as fruitful. It would take a whole lifetime, when in the best cases we have a few years. A country is a fatherland, but the fatherland is the land of our forebears, and our forebears lived and died somewhere else. Our adulthood is not the continuation of our childhood; the house where we live is not ours, it is a hotel, at most a furnished apartment, where we are staying for a while; only the category or the price varies: with or without a bathroom. It is true that man is a wayfarer on Earth—and traveling is so easy and comfortable today!

In an era when economic organization is tending towards the universal, there may be economic regions as defined by the Ministry of the Economy, but there is no longer a local economy. The division of labor is transforming the country, as it is transforming

the person, and it has ceased to be an autonomous whole in which the most diverse activities converge and is instead a specialized function. That is its ultimate originality. The North is the textile industry; Languedoc, wine. Lacking a way of existence or a style of life, the country is reduced to an economic interest. And thus the economic organization can standardize customs, since local selfishness would then be even more narrowly focused.

How can the country continue to exist? It has less force and fewer materials of its own than ever before. If culture is defined by forms that are apparently separated from any material basis, perhaps it is here where we find it in its pure state: in the menu of the hotel restaurant; in those songs and costumes exhumed from the past. Because this culture, significantly classified as "regional", does not serve to justify life, but death. Our ancestors were not regionalists, they were simply country folk; they did not live by looking towards the past, they lived in the present: they governed themselves, they schemed and prayed, and the splendor of forms was an extra bonus for them. There was a time when our King Henry was a man, his laughter echoed under the sun of battles; but with the passage of the centuries, death in battle does not seem so impressive and today his image adorns boxes of caramels. When we want to distinguish ourselves— and because we know that we are becoming increasingly more equal, we must put even more effort into this— we borrow the clothes of our great-grandparents. To be up-to-date, we abide by following, cautiously and after a certain delay, the fashions of Paris. And this delay is getting shorter every day. Today's Auvergnese folklore? *ParisMatch*, Hollywood and Karl Marx, and suits made by Dior. We do not distinguish ourselves from the capital only by subtleties. When we want to define ourselves by contrasting ourselves with it, we are the first to take it as a standard of measurement; on this terrain, however, we are defeated in advance. Do you say that there is no longer any intellectual or artistic life here? You are wrong! A Carcassonese won the Goncourt Prize. Haven't you seen the new train station? And that building designed by Le Corbusier? We have our painters, and even our abstract painter: he left for Paris only a short time ago. Daniel-Rops is at this very moment speaking at a conference on Abbé Pierre; and the Frères Jacques just gave a recital three months ago.

Our country no longer exists. Our local painters can explore the trails blazed by Courbet in the past, and the poetesses of our Academy dare to write free verse in dialect. The province is an invention of Paris: would there still be a Basque Country if Parisian tourists had not discovered it? The peasantry is too deeply implicated in the landscape to see it. When we till our garden or lead our cows to pasture we have these mountains permanently dominating the horizon; the Parisian knows them better than we do because he needs nature. The Parisian holds us in high esteem, you need only listen to how fondly he speaks of "provincial virtues": simplicity, prudence, seriousness. We listen to him, flattered by this portrait that contradicts everything we know about ourselves. But Paris is our conscience. The Province is the complement of Paris—and the whole is France—it represents the savings account of human forces and virtues that Paris can now tranquilly do without. But it never occurs to us to break free of

this role by putting the Parisian virtues into practice: the critical spirit, the passion for novelty and initiative. We would only look ridiculous: the inconceivable is always ridiculous. The Parisian loves our land, and he cheerfully lets us know that we have no idea of just how fortunate we are. This love is not Platonic: the proof is that he comes here to spend his vacations, and might even end up relocating here when he retires. If he is educated and a sociologist, he will be the first to express his outrage at the abuses of centralization; even in this respect, the light comes to us from Paris. Recently, the Ministry of Culture just gave us an excellent local theater company that would have cost us a fortune to create. Paris is drafting plans to stimulate our economic and cultural life. Unfortunately, the Province is not following them; when the central government concedes us freedom by decree, we do not know what to do with it. We always mistrust the strange innovations of the Parisians. Paris devoted its efforts to centralizing the provinces when they were alive, and now that they are dead, everywhere you look Paris is trying to decentralize them. But freedom must be chosen, and our weak arms no longer have the strength to hold what is given to us.

The Province is in its death throes, and this twilight is lovely under the big cedar by the terrace. The sky receives it, the hills and the seasons adorn its bier. In the choir the lance of the old banner skewers forever the same wild boar in a mosaic eternity. But along with strength, we have lost violence; to once again be violent we will have to wait until Paris mobilizes. The Province is pure appearance; as is the case with certain people, it breathes, works and amuses itself, but it is not really there.

The Province is dying, while the head has lived and is still living on the trickle of blood that flows from its weakened body. And France is nothing but a province of a planet that is always getting smaller. The Province is dying, but it is a natural death for those who accept the current evolution of the world; it would be a big mistake to see this as an aberrant phenomenon that pertains exclusively to France. We live in a totality that is being organized, in which, with increasing frequency, the decisions issue from a single center and will affect the entire surface of the globe. But then we will have to pay for the superiority of strength with the sacrifice of the wealth of a civilization that in the past nourished itself from multiple sources.

The Province is dead; but death is the only means of access to another life. If we want to see the old countries reborn within it, it is useless for us to look to the past. We must open our eyes to the present, to the immensity of its silence. It is not vain folk culture that it brings us, but the primordial elements. Paris has access to the superfluous, for us what remains is the elemental: a little more space, a little more time; and all of life takes place in these two dimensions. Lacking spectacles, the splendor of creation surrounds us: lacking stadiums and swimming pools, we have the sea, the river and the plain. Lacking great personalities and masses, we have man in what is essential about his condition. Here as well as there, life and death await us, but here they offer themselves without disguises, because they concern our neighbor. The last chance, but the most realistic one, for the Province, resides in this possibility of once again finding the essentials of all human existence; nothing less picturesque,

but also nothing more universal. The Province will be reborn in the man who chooses this freedom without lies; whose consciousness chooses nature: space, time, hearth and fatherland. These seeds will certainly fall on the rocks, since the desert is apparently sterile and silent, and it is uninhabited. But if by chance they are strong enough to penetrate this soil, then their life force will use the rock as a foundation.

In Paris, the head: consciousness and decision; in the Province, the body: nature and the primordial night. This is the fundamental structure of French society; wars and revolutions come and go, but this structure does not vary, and that is why nothing changes. To challenge its existence, however, would be the most extreme example of revolutionary action: if revolution is defined as a radical break in an evolutionary development. And this problem is so concrete that anyone can make the decision in an instant. If we feel called to a difficult task, we can choose to live in the country of our childhood; and if a few men, determined to participate in a common project, were to make this decision, then on that very day a new fatherland will have been founded. Such an enterprise would be completely contrary to mediocrity, however. It would demand abundant energy: for anyone who becomes involved in this project can count on being even more ignored by the Province than by Paris, since the former is nothing but the shadow of the latter. In the harsh silence of the provinces, there is nothing that will allow illusion to flourish: here, the hour of truth is every hour. But before nature, and before men, it will love this nakedness: if it is true that everything ends in the desert, it is also true that everything begins there.

## 2. Paris

Here is the Meeting Place, the Navel of the World, the eye of the storm, where everything happens amidst the din of traffic. Here is Paris; coming from every direction, roads, rail lines and highways strive to converge. But everything ends in this gigantic last stop whose stations are dead ends. The train accelerates and then slows down in an ever narrowing spiral, emitting a metallic screech on the curves of the hillside of Étampes; it has undoubtedly departed from the normal paths to penetrate into another dimension. Sun and sky come to an end, the constellations have fallen to Earth; over an endless surface, a profusion of lights randomly flash on and off, while the horizon is illuminated with a red sunrise. Sometimes the truth emerges in a bolt of lightning: a crossroads of shining asphalt, a small café, a bus stop under the bridge, a blurry silhouette. But then with a clank the train descends into a cavern with the painted walls of vacant lots, warehouses, residential blocks; storage yards full of propane tanks, acres of garbage. Green signals and blue flames: a blackish flower blooms. Gigantic organs or factory smokestacks? And the purple becomes more intense, while the darkness, riddled with so many lights, becomes deeper. And the train majestically slows down in front of the featureless walls of some tall buildings. We have arrived; the locomotive has finally stopped in front of a wall.

Then begins the Labyrinth, whose tangled ways here are like a maelstrom. Streets that lead to more streets, an enormous square with a big brick building. What is it called? It is all the same, there are so many ... just as this café is like any other. You walk through a fog that prevents you from seeing anything, a fog of noise, objects and persons, from which, inevitably, man protects himself by refusing to see or to hear anything. Kilometers of streets jam-packed with things on wheels. Six million souls, thousands of millions of interests, of clashing gestures, as if they proliferated with all the haste and rush: at twelve and five, the implacable wave of the human tide, and the absurd dance of the individual atom. Chaos? But the crisp gestures of the police, the click of the signals, succeed in sculpting order with the cracks of a whip.

The mass of the buildings, the plateau of stone and asphalt perfumed with gasoline, riddled with windows, innervated with transformers and cables, on which a few pathetic trees grow. District I, II, III, IV, V ... cities within the City, that you cannot even think of leaving on foot; you would have to resort to the magic of the rites of the SNCF.[1] You can only penetrate the drill bit of the subway; where the names of the stations fly by us like the symbols on a slot machine. The cold and antiseptic bowels through which the human masses circulate at midday, the lump of dough from which the cookies are cut. An everyday limbo that masses of unseeing eyes traverse like sleepwalkers through a causeway of signs and machines that suddenly thrusts them into the light of the sidewalk.

Somewhere in the old Paris, on the banks of the Seine. The buried city, whose dark crevices lie in wait along the glittering course of the boulevards. The mythical city, the pale blood of neon embellishes the face of a past that is rotting right before our eyes. Those shouts, those crashes, those fires—is this the present, or some kind of sorcery issuing from the dark night of time? Is it Paris, or Antioch, or Alexandria as seen by Hieronymus Bosch? From the confusion of houses the monuments emerge by chance. Notre-Dame and the Hôtel Lambert, and Saint-Sulpice and the Tower of Saint-Jacques. There are too many, in the eternal circulation of the street, under the uniform of soot that camouflages all the centuries, it is impossible to distinguish them: in the jumble of the Palace of Justice a Royal Chapel has been lost. Further to the west, Les Invalides dominates in vain the majesty of the boulevards; the pack corralled by the cars immediately surges towards it.

Another immersion in time; it runs before us at high speed, endlessly. A crack of light in the middle of your ordinary, standard, everyday avenue in Paris. The democratic and bourgeois building that is repeated infinitely; but it has nothing to say, except that you have to stay somewhere, even if it turns out to be nowhere. The corner bar, the life of red color in the lights of *Chez Dupont tout est bon*, where, in fact, everything is neutral.[2] The most abstract desert in the world; whose sand is men. We flee without much hope

[1] Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (French National Railroad Corporation) [Spanish translator's note].

[2] The latter phrase must be understood as a joke at the expense of the slogan of *Chez Dupont*, the famous Parisian restaurant [Spanish translator's note].

to our hole. We leave for Greater Paris: arrogant doormen, the luxury hotels open upon vast horizons of shining asphalt that hum sweetly under the caress of the Cadillacs. But you have to be situated at a much higher vantage point to take in this picture: the anonymous pedestrian is lost in the jungle of passersby and lampposts, avenues jam packed full of strangers where, furthermore, he does not feel at home: the cold stares of the waiters and policemen are there to remind him of this fact. He is a mere visitor, whom one tolerates with disdain, in a city much more distant than Aschaffenburg or Ondarroa, in the fabulous capital of Great Luxury, High Finance and High Fashion. Its God is Money and its divinity is Woman: finally ready, everything exactly in its place, camouflaged under diaphanous fabrics and lace, equipped with complicated and delicate artifacts, the most irresistible machines of war load their smiles. To travel to the antipodes, we need only cross to the other side of the tunnel. What awaits us is no longer a city, or anything else but a question. A question that is posed to us from the heights of the monuments of triumphant Industry and from the immensity of human misery. From one bank of the Seine to the other a desperate banality extends, erasing hills and plains under the debacle of houses stapled to roads that flee from them. The city and the subway end here, why not, between absurd shacks, and the dead ends are constantly petering out in the nothingness of vacant lots and waste ground. It is the outskirts. What kind of life for man would you expect to issue from a place like this?

Paris? Why describe Paris? Paris is a universe, and that universe is not made to the measure of man: nor is it made to the measure of his language or his gestures. Although the telephone exists, we still do not have a thinking machine. Why analyze Paris? It is refractory to any analysis. Paris is not an idea, it is a fact. Concerning this theme one can be simple or complicated, stupid or brilliant; each person has something to say and the most profound discourse is superficial: this is what happens with regard to the Ocean. Paris is a fact, perhaps the Fact par excellence of our French society. What can you say? Everyone knows perfectly well that words will not change anything. However, the real questions are always the ones that seem to be most futile, because they point to the most real, and therefore most intractable, foundations of our life.

In France, Paris is the Center, the City par excellence; not only is it the most populous, the wealthiest and the most active; you cannot even compare the biggest of the provincial capitals with Paris. For France, Paris is not a city, it is "The City": but France is no longer the world. A few minutes away, all the Politics and all the Science, all the orientalists and all the pederasts, all the homeopaths and all the Protestants; all the Money and all the Misery, everything....

Paris is the Center, the point that fixes and orders the extension of the Province. The Province exists: rivers, cities, countryside, fields and factories, but so, too, does a body exist, with the strength and the sluggishness of unconsciousness. The Province is inert matter; elements: water, grass, tons and cubic meters; electoral districts, economic material, cultural material. A surface that can be reckoned in square kilometers, which the capital is responsible for measuring and defining, crossed by trains and decrees, rounds of inspectors and tours of artists; Paris is the order, the thought and the impulse

that gives it form. The political center, the royal city eliminated its suburban rival Versailles, and the city of the sun from then on reigned alone over society. Of course, although the country no longer exists, there are still departments and prefectures, and the Province still follows the political impulse—at most, it can retard it. If it wants to master it, the Province must go to Paris and become Parisian. Vote, make demands, defend its interests, but not reign. Its particularism cannot rise to the level of universal consciousness. It has no political ideas of its own, it follows such ideas after a shorter or longer delay. The Province suppresses, for good and for ill, the Parisian revolutions. The fact is that, after the Commune, Paris has had no more revolutions—perhaps because it is becoming a city of provinces in a world that is organized on a global scale.

Political centralization gave rise to economic centralization: beginning in the mid-19$^{th}$ century, Paris became, if not the place where all business was conducted, at least the place from which directives were issued: even the big provincial newspapers have offices in Paris. The increasingly more important role played by the State in the management of the economy has considerably magnified the economic importance of the Parisian urban agglomeration; since the Liberation, its industry has developed more rapidly than that of the region of the North, despite all the industrial decentralization plans elaborated in the bureaus of the capital. After the exodus to the provinces, the war provoked a kind of boomerang effect that subsequently swelled the population of the urban agglomeration of Paris to eight million inhabitants.

In this centralized organization everything materially depends on the center.

If this is what happens in the body, why would it be otherwise for the spirit? Our entire educational and cultural system is literally oriented towards Paris, and in an increasingly more pronounced way. There was a time when you could prepare for the *agrégation* in the provinces; today, in order to be accepted as a member of the corps of professors in the technical schools, you must attend the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in the Latin Quarter. Paris is our most prestigious Institute of Technology: in this way, all human values—or at least what society considers to be human values—are united in a single place. All Art and Science are concentrated here, except for those monuments that cannot possibly be moved. Kilometers of masterpieces and tons of documents, snatched from the Heaven and the Earth that gave them meaning, accumulate, and are sometimes buried, in this great garbage dump of Culture. From the Louvre museum to the Guimet Museum, to the Museum of Natural History.... In this respect Paris also surpasses all human scale, but Paris is above all the last center where living art and thought are produced. In this universe closed off between walls, ideas often take the place of sensations, and Art takes the place of Nature: the picture and the screen open, by way of imaginary forms and colors, the window that elsewhere serves as a frame for the river or the forest. Paris creates, the Province follows: the existentialist wave is currently breaking in Guéret— although it has lost a good part of its force.

Paris is in the center: the forces that in other places are dispersed and come from every direction are emitted here from a single point. Men and things are within easy

reach, connected by the nervous system of the telephone. All you need to do is dial a number to hear on the other end of the line the voice from beyond the tomb of the friend you have not seen in twenty years. Within easy reach, the J-K Section of Storage Module B of the National

Archives, in Room No. 16 of the Seventh Bureau on Grenelle Street. In Bourgoin you would have to wait years, become lost in endless correspondence, to obtain the grants necessary to build a college. Here, myth becomes reality; we have finally reached the heart of the Castle; and those fearsome entities—the offices, the director—are transformed into a friendly old man who solves our problem in two minutes after signing a register. The basic precondition for all action is to be in Paris. Only the defeated—or a handful of winners burdened with years and honors—can skip it.

All roads and all reasons lead man to Paris; and all abilities, because this logic is the logic of destiny. The ladder of upward mobility drives one towards Paris whether one wants to go there or not: if you don't care about your own career, you at least have to think about the careers of your children: where are you going to find a decent piano teacher for your daughter? And if you don't go to Paris to advance your career, you will go there because you are lazy. How can you find a way to live in the provinces without doing anything? In Barbezieux, your hopes to obtain a position in the Ministry are null, and you cannot count on the old women who frequent certain theaters: even in its vices, the Province is too strict, it leaves nothing to chance, no possibilities. To live in the provinces, you must be a teacher, a farm laborer or a prefect, you must perform a necessary function. That is why everyone who is mercurial, an adventurer of thought, of politics or of money, ends up in Paris: individuals and masses, the professor with a doctorate who aspires to become a literary critic, and the starving African in search of bread. The man of action who is dreaming of changing the course of History, and the provincial who is just bored.

Here the masses accumulate while the individual is disappearing. The swarming masses automatically controlled by the time clock. The masses of rich people of the $16^{\text{th}}$ District, whose heights of arrogance repeat, wherever you look, the same hymn to bourgeois comfort. Proletarian masses, and masses, even more countless, of petty bourgeoisie. Money regulates the movements of this artificial world whose refined pleasures practically all have to be paid for. For the wealthy person who knows how to use his fortune every possibility is open, while the poor person, who no longer receives the free gifts of nature, is excluded from that permanent feast whose display exasperates his vain desires. The economic classes are especially homogenous and differentiated here: since the end of the $18^{\text{th}}$ century they have been segregated in their districts: in the center, the diamantine heart of Art and Business; on the outskirts, the spongy sapwood where the labor power is dispersed.

The masses: the indistinct and fluid material upon which the enormous organ that feeds on them is nourished. The amorphous masses, controlled by walls, police and government departments, who are distributed by the transport system and whose wastes are evacuated by the sewers. The fundamental disorder, and the ineluctable

order, to which the individual reflex reaction responds much more rapidly than the head. For those who see the totality, a human ocean in which every drop is a face; but only God can see it this way. Man, for the most part, only sees single faces without really looking at them, and then his own face becomes the face of a blind man. Six million of his kind are concentrated at one point—but he needs a minimum of distance to be able to see them: six million of his kind piled up in the subway at midday, body against body, breath mixing with breath, silent like the act of love: physically present, and therefore spiritually absent. Six million souls to isolate the individual: the individual who gladly loses himself in the crowd; the individual who goes unnoticed—at least as long as he has some money; but who is also lost in the bottomless social abyss, the black hole of Aubervilliers,[3] from the bottom of which the sky can hardly ever be seen by its miserable residents. For he who turns towards the whole: the masses; and for he who turns towards men: the individual. The indivisible unit that implacably defends his beefsteak against the pressure of the whole, the agile and hard atom that dances to avoid collision with solid bodies, but which is sometimes dragged by ephemeral turbulences in an irresistible collective impulse. Anyone who observes the City, will see that the laws generate an impersonal wave: but if his glance will descend towards men, he will see that disorder and an incredible variety of individual cases fills the sidewalks: anyone, a great actor, an old man in a tattered coat, a Japanese girl in a parka; anyone, a crazed beggar who comes towards you, babbling nonsense.... Why get attached to all this? The crowd has already swallowed you forever. And new faces approach us like an avalanche, to bury us.

What does a mountain care about the insect that lives on it, what does it matter that there is an endless sea of houses, machines and crowds; what is good about Paris are the people you can meet; however, the most normal thing about Paris is that these people are unapproachable. Every kind of individual, the most outstanding when not the most extraordinary, are only two steps away: but, how do you reach them, and how can you hear when everyone is talking at the same time? Here, there is nothing but man, in this universe manufactured by his hands; if he is covered by so many layers—ideas, images—it is surely because he finds himself naked in the most naked of lands. On the radio, a voice refers to them, and you freeze to death here, in these overheated burrows that pass for homes. Paris no longer exists, we will return to the elementary cell: to man between four walls.

Paris exists, but what more can we say about it? To question such an imposing fact, we would need the faith that moves mountains: and this faith is not inert. Who would dare to bring up the subject of centralization again? He would expose himself to ridicule. Therefore: Paris. Yet these subjects are ridiculous because they affect everyone: and just because they have been repeated over and over again does not mean they are less

[3] A municipality located to the north of the great Parisian urban agglomeration, which the author cites on various occasions throughout this book as the epitome of the dehumanized suburban city [Spanish translator's note].

true. Only a few years ago, in our canton in the provinces, it occurred to an author from the town of Lacommande to explain the little village of Monein with reference to its white wine. The residents of Monein showed him, quite correctly, that his theory lacked nuance, but the criticism was too unanimous to not be motivated by self-interest; above all, because most of the residents of Monein are descended from people who once lived in the neighboring villages of Cuqueron and Parbayse.[4] To question the existence of Paris before the Parisians is to question their own existence, to try to make them understand that it is something they are suffering and that they did not choose. Their reaction is therefore normal.

Paris does not exist, some people will say, except for the outside world. Or, Paris has too much existence, to the point where it can no longer be subjected to analysis: neither to the analysis of consciousness nor to the analysis of language. In the gigantic Leviathan, the tiny parasite settles for a little corner. The oceanic noise of the street becomes silence, the hustle and bustle of men and things, stillness; it cannot be any other way, or else one is subject to the penalty of being defeated by the force and the multitude of impressions. In this oversized world, man reserves for himself a world suited to his measure, and sometimes even smaller, for here more than in other places he must economize on his forces. To live in Paris is to reject it. Go to all those art openings? Visit all those museums? Impossible. In the provinces, opportunities are too scarce not to take advantage of them, a good concert is a big event. Here there are so many! That is why it is better to correct examinations, or punch tickets, or relax with the family.[5] Spectacles, debates ... it is all well and good for professionals, or the provincial who just arrived in the city. The normal, everyday Paris has its center in an office and its circumference extends from the corner store to the playground where you bring your children. It hardly includes a few thousand persons, less than Guéret; and Guéret borders on an endless wilderness. Paris is a myth, I assure them that we

[4] This local incident made me think about the fate that befell the book by Fr. Hoffet, *Psychanalyse de Paris* [Author's note]. [Perhaps we should explain this allusion. The book by Frédéric Hoffet to which Charbonneau refers was published by Grasset, but was published with a very curious Editor's Introduction, in which the editor expressed his disagreement with the thesis of the author. This Introduction began with the following words: "Dear Frédéric Hoffet: I do not agree with you, neither with respect to psychoanalysis nor with respect to Paris. A bad start for an Introduction, you might say." Something similar happened to the residents of Monein: they wanted people to talk about them, but not the way the author from Lacommande did. They criticized him for his claim that the only thing that the village of Monein cared about was white wine, omitting any other reference to its inhabitants and the other resources of their village. According to Charbonneau, however, who finds the polemic very amusing, the reaction of the inhabitants of Monein was basically motivated by the fact that most of them traced their descent to other neighboring villages that were even more humble than Monein, such as

[5] "... punch tickets" (on the subway): an allusion to a hit song by Serge Gainsbourg, released in 1958, *Le poinçonneur des Lilas*, which is about a man whose job consists in "punching" the tickets of the passengers on the subway at the Mairie-des-Lilas station, in Paris. The song emphasizes the insignificance of this man that no one notices and whose job consists exclusively of "making holes, little holes, every day little holes": "Faire des trous, des p'tits trous, toujours des p'tits trous" [Spanish translator's note].

do not see anyone, that we lead the most provincial life, and that we will only become more provincial as we get older. Then, why Paris, if Paris is Guéret? "But what are you saying, man! Think of the possibilities there are here! The spectacles, the human contact...." The discussion never deviates from this circle.

For man, Paris is impossible, he must deny that it exists: he cannot live with his eyes fixed on a dizzying peak. The myth, "Paris is a village", fulfills this function: all the Parisians participate in it, except that the intellectual embellishes it with subtler flavors. Utrillo paints it, René Clair films it: "Oh! How beautiful is Paris, my village! My Paris, my dear Paris...", as the popular lyrics say.[6] A village, it is true, but the most closed village you can imagine. Elsewhere, each place unites very different men in the diversity of nature; here, they are concentrated in an office, or a party, or around an idea; and Paris is big enough for the Trotskyist dissidents to incorporate a village: the most extravagant mania can believe that it is the center of the universe. This feature is used to cultivate the myth, the myth of Paris-Babylon just like the myth of Paris-is-a-village. Babylon with its ziggurats and its gardens in the sky, its kings, its prostitutes and its doctors, the mingled crowd of its slaves. But that silent Babylon under the night sky must be the most provincial....

Paris exists, but this is obvious. And to question its existence is madness, for Paris is the expression of a centralized organization that is deployed today in every country in the world. How can we turn our backs on logic, History, necessity? There is no remedy for it, however, if there still are better reasons. So much splendor feeds on a gigantic zone of shadow, and the closer you get to Paris, the darker is this shadow: you can get to know the real Province better in Fontainebleau than in Perpignan. So much light bursts forth from the darkest part of that night, that its splendor stuns and blinds.

All the clarity of this expanse is condensed in a point; that is why it is not strange that it acquires the blinding intensity of a diamond.

In the centralized organization, the center commands—the head: the capital.

It is all the same whether this head is no longer human and if the body only opposes the head with the inertia of a thing. How can we speak of democracy in these conditions? French democracy is, all too often, a mere principle, all the more pure the less it is tainted by practice. We are not capable of applying it where we are. We beg and we await the response: the decision comes from on high.

Where the capital reigns, the Court reigns: a small number of people gathered together in one place. It is true that Paris cannot be reduced to the crème de la crème of Paris, but the political and literary crème de la crème sets the tone, and the Parisian province follows its lead. Of course, the life of the Court is the most brilliant life; by rubbing shoulders with each other, people's spirits are elevated, but they also fade and erode. And although human relations are multifarious, since man is the only measure of man, it is easy for them to become superficial: the lack of time and the lack of

[6] *Mon Paris*, also known by the title, *Ah! qu'il était beau mon village*, a nostalgic song first recorded in 1925 by Jane Pierly, a popular singer of music hall songs and operetta [Spanish translator's note].

space that would allow each person to find his place. The impressions are intense, but ephemeral; the mercurial nature of the spirit is connected with its lightness, with its lack of vigor. Parisian life lacks an everyday relation with nature, and no tourism undertaken during vacations will reestablish it. In this completely human environment, Art can only respond to the needs of the senses. But human art is inseparable from artifice; voluptuousness, here more than in other places, trembles with pain, creation is associated with destruction. The most humble provincial is often within reach of happiness; the four walls of his house have views of the fields, he can fish for trout and hunt rabbits with his greyhound. In Paris, this kind of lifestyle would only be within the reach of a rich bourgeois; but the provincial lives in ignorance of his wealth. A continuous wall encloses the road of the Parisian, a wall in which now and then the window of a display case is opened. A gray universe of stone in which the flags of the billboards wave: meanwhile, repressed everywhere, desire is exasperated and howls at the death behind Nature: behind Woman. In this all-too-human world, man is absorbed by Man, just as the mountainside dominates the foothills. Not even one second of pause, or of silence; the spirit is kept in suspense. The individual yields to the pressure of the masses and at the same time defends himself from them by way of a systematic rejection, the cult of originality—but real originality always comes later, as an addition; not to those who rebel against opinion, but to those who ignore it. Thus, Paris engenders a very special type of civilization and art, which has its value in relation to other types, but which is condemned to sterility once it is transformed into the only one: condemned to devour itself by repeating at shorter and shorter intervals the infernal cycle of fashion.

The splendor of the City—Rome or Paris—it fed for such a long time on the vigor of the body that it was consuming. But the day will come when the City reigns over an empty space; then its splendor will become increasingly more tenuous, and then it will be very close to dying. Despite the noise of the street, Paris could perfectly well become a dead city, a pile of monuments and of inert *souvenirs* in a desert wasteland, like Timgad or Lambaesis. A new Venice, frozen forever in the form that foreign painters and tourists so adore. Cordes-sur-Seine, with its old, somewhat grubby, but so picturesque houses; Saint-Germain-le-Petit, with its amusing local customs, its typical dances, its

urinals.[7] The greatest folk culture spectacle in the world, under the bemused gaze of tourists from Kansas City or Moscow.

This being the case, it is the last French province threatened with disappearance: Paris. But what can you do to awaken the Province? Like sleeping beauty, it awaits a sign from the capital. And the center is elaborating plans for decentralization: but in order to proceed in this manner against the dominant trend it will have to considerably augment its powers. The task, however, is to decentralize, not to create other centers, to disperse: retirees, industries, tourists. This dispersal of people and things, which has already begun within a radius of thirty kilometers, will spread to all of France when progress in transport will have placed Bordeaux and Clermont within one hour of the offices of *Opéra*. When that happens, the Province will clearly be what it has been tending to be for some time now: a suburb. Neither Brittany nor Provence, but a horticultural, industrial or residential suburb. A vast suburb-dormitory to which men withdraw to sleep or to die. When the empty expanse is reduced to a point, decentralization will finally have been perfected. But the point has no surface, and for that very reason does not exist.

There are no longer any provincials, but only people from the outskirts of the city who insist on remaining in their deserted neighborhoods in the middle of the day: between Bourges and Issoudun the solitude is almost as overwhelming as it is between Bièvres and Saint-Cyr at three in the afternoon.[8] The desert, however, is beautiful and speaks to those who want to listen to it. The desert is the place of the beginning, where one returns to find the fundamental truth lost in other places: amidst the noise of our world of power, of rationalization and of hierarchy. The lost truth on which all democracy, all personal and social life is based: where order is the fruit of freedom. He

[7] Here, Charbonneau mentions two semi-imaginary places. Cordes-sur-Seine does not exist under that name, but Cordes does, a very beautiful medieval town in the French Midi that was a prosperous center until the 14th century; in 1969, the date this book was first published, it was almost deserted and abandoned. The author added, "sur-Seine" as an ironic reference, in order to make it understood that Paris could end up experiencing the same fate. It is not without its own irony that in 1993 the city was renamed Cordessur-Ciel (Cordes in the Sky), in order to give its name a more poetic air, and is now a locality that is totally given over to tourism. As for Saint-Germain, this is a very common toponym in France, but there really is a Saint-Germain-le-Petit. It is most likely that Charbonneau is referring to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a neighborhood in Paris that was known during the 1950s and 1960s for its dance halls ("with its amusing local customs"), where *be-bop* made its debut in France ("its typical dances"), and whose urinals were a meeting place for homosexuals. As in the case of Cordes, the whole diversion is used by the author to suggest the decline of Saint-Germain and the possible future of Paris [Spanish translator's note].

[8] Here, Charbonneau emphasizing the idea that will be more extensively addressed in the last pages of this book: the province has been transformed into the outskirts of the city, into a mere suburb of the capital. Bourges and Issoudun are cities located about 250 kilometers from Paris. Both have important pasts and their own lives, but already in 1969 they were becoming more and more like Bièvres and Saint-Cyr, dormitory-cities engulfed by the Parisian urban concentration, displaying a ghost-town aspect during working hours [Spanish translator's note].

who has ears to hear, let him hear: the living center is everywhere, invisible yet present in the immensity.

# IV The countryside

## 1. The country

Where the city ends, the countryside begins: its antithesis, that is, its complement. The open space after the closed space; isolation, as opposed to crowds and, however, society rather than loneliness. The nature that is apparently opposed to culture; but there is no other culture than the one that is nourished on the most living and most profound essences of the land. The city itself takes root at the confluence of rivers and roads, and the most beautiful cities owe their beauty not only to their monuments, but even more to their locations that unite the beaches and the mountains that contain them.

And in the countryside, as in the city, but this time imperceptibly, man is present everywhere; the countryside is his own work, as much as it is the fruit of nature. The hieroglyphics in which valleys, roads, fields and pastures form such a coherent whole that the city dweller takes it for granted as a natural feature, when it is in fact the product of a long battle of conquest fought in one way or another for centuries. In our country districts there are no virgin forests, but properties managed by generations of foresters: if the timber is so tall, this is because of the work of the axes, but also because of the ordinances of Colbert. And if beyond the eaves of the forest the tree trunks rise up from an open greensward, this is because a stubborn scythe cuts the underbrush and mows the hay, opening up a tunnel of light in the shadows, on that veritable carpet which is as pleasant to the eye as to the feet: the meadow. The meadow, the horizontal zone whence the vertical is born, the plaza from which the colonnade rises: the forest. Or else the labyrinthine wave whose gates, at every obstacle, open up on another sky: the alpine meadow. This landscape was not designed by any architect; yet what garden is more beautiful than the countryside? But there is not just one countryside, but hundreds of them, which is more surprising, but each one perfect, so that one could not change the smallest thing about them.

In this country garden the labor of the peasant is everywhere. The hedge, sometimes composed of boxwood, sculpted as at Versailles, follows the road that is bordered by lawns that refresh the tired feet of the farm laborers. The baroque procession of willows and carefully trimmed oaks, pruned winter after winter with the steel of the pruning hook or the pruning shears, accompanies the course of the creek without deviating

even a little from its straight line. Even in the heart of the *saligue*,[1] if a fine grass grows under the shade of the oak grove, this is because the cattle go there every day to graze. If the peasantry were to disappear, or if the peasants ceased to take care of the wetland forest, this garden on the banks of the river would become an impenetrable bramble thicket. Not even the mountain is just a mountain, its virgin meadows are also the product of the passage of man and his animals. When the flocks no longer graze on them, they are nothing more than barren uplands where the hay would go unharvested, over which the avalanches would sweep. At least in Europe, the mountaineers make the mountain, which in the Mediterranean is an enormous terraced staircase studded with chestnut trees. When it is depopulated, as happened in Corsica and Cévennes, the terraces collapse, the forest disappears and the mountain slopes, scraped down to the stones, revert to their original chaos.

Men who were neither thinkers nor poets, but peasants stooped over the ground, built the Portillo de la Sía.[2] The only resources they had were rocks and wood. They shaped the blocks of stone and built steps that rose towards the sky, and all along the road they planted ash trees. They cut the meadow grass that formed a green carpet on those slopes almost to ground level, without missing a single blade of grass; and they pruned the trees. And the seasons came and went, which gradually rounded off the stones, sometimes with a greensward, and sometimes with a bed of flowers. And on the top of the ridges of the promontories that they had so painstakingly reinforced, they built watchtowers: stone upon stone, finally covered with slabs of rock. Nothing escaped their zeal, everything was in its place. All along the mountain slopes, the walls wound smoothly to the depths of the gorges: if a stone fell, a hand would put it back into its place. Sometimes the wind would make the foliage glitter, just as the gray of the walls reflected on the green of the meadows. The Portillo de la Sía still rises over the scorched gold of Castille. Its people are gone, but their work remains, perfect. Is it a dream? Is it a legend? The old sphinx is still asking us its question. Since we come from other places, we can only be sure of seeing the outlines; but it is too pure not to convey some strict meaning.

Anyone who observes the countryside in the European countries sees neither man nor nature, but the alliance of both: the landscape is the crowning achievement of the peasant. Nothing remains of the primitive darkness, but everyone respects it. Just as the terraces hug the mountainsides, giving form to the heights, the old paths can be traced along the crests, and the roads can be seen in the valleys, while the fences and walls highlight and break up the lay of the land and space. The country is an open book in which one can read the presence of men everywhere: in the form and the color of the countryside, the succession of tasks and harvests; in the reddish-brown color of the scrublands and the woods the impact of the axe and the fires of winter resound and

[1] An Occitanian term for a wetland forest, composed mostly of willows, typical of the Gave de Pau river [Spanish translator's note].

[2] The Portillo de la Sía is a mountain pass at an altitude of 1,200 meters on the border between Cantabria and Burgos [Spanish translator's note].

flare. The tourist who is driving at high speed on the highway looks at the landscape, but he does not grasp its meaning; the local people decode its signs everywhere. The hiker who traverses the countryside does not know that he is also traversing human lives: the darker shade of vegetation that snakes through the meadow leads to a spring that is visited by someone every day. The trees, the flowing water, the stones arranged on the grass, indicate customs and properties; as vast as the countryside may seem, there is not a single tree that does not have a name. And the hearth sustains the country just as the key sustains the vault; no one notices it, since it, too, is born of the earth and the darkness of the west to turn its face towards the light. The immensity of the countryside defies the gaze that gets lost in its labyrinth, yet it can be summarized with a single line: from nature, man has created a style. Today, however, this portrait is being erased.

The modern city is a chaos in which colors, sounds and forms constantly clash, while every rural county fits into a finished whole: a landscape; every countryside has its own landscape just as every person has his own face. And countrysides are just as varied as persons. This diverse unity is the fruit of peace, not of war, of marriage and not of rape; on the other hand, in the *no man's land*[3] of the cities, the front of construction projects advances like a wildfire. Man and nature, the present and the past, clash in the cities and mutually destroy one another, while in the countryside they have had time to reach an understanding. There, man is everywhere and nowhere; his footsteps sink into the earth or between the walls of the hawthorns, and the web of trees that his customs have cast over the countryside is adapted to the least whim of the rocks or the waters. Houses and villages, which are nothing but stone, clay or wood, are built where needed, and exactly as they are needed: the bell tower stands out among the trees as if it was the tallest tree. The farms are scattered evenly over the summits, facing southeast, towards the mountains and the sun, and the road along the mountain crest is one you will never forget. The suburb is swarming with movement, while in the country, as in the city of old, there is nothing that does not have its place, its particular location, and man and his works sink into the rocks in order to rise even higher. The site of the village: the center to which the environs gravitate and through which the cathedral and the castle participate in the universe of the outside world. Made with the elements of the country, like the landscape, the work of men does not reject nature, but completes it, and makes the tower sprout from the edge of the cliff, crowning it with a human meaning. A work that does not obey merely economic, technical or esthetic reasons, like the industrial monstrosities and the ridiculous single family houses of the suburbs. And because of their own instinctive knowledge, which is furthermore absolutely necessary, imperative, that guides the choice of location, and determines the selection and use of the materials, there is not a single tile or a single window that does not display the right proportion and aspect. Even the color. What refined esthete selected this fiery red whose color makes the whitewashed walls of the

[3] In English in the original [American translator's note].

Basque farms even more luminous? Surely the same one who gave the neighboring trees their perfect form: nature, if in this case we are talking about a human nature. Their style, just like their choice of location, unites the works of man with the countryside. The same careful hand, prolific yet steady, seems to have sketched the waves of the hills and the winding curves of the furrows, and to have distributed the masses and the colors of the countryside. The agricultural landscape in counties where monoculture crops are not cultivated is a unified whole, yet nonetheless one constantly discerns new details in it. In the mountains, however, if the sun of harvest time pierces the night of the pine forest, it is not in search of an artistic effect, but of daily bread.

Eden is not a virgin jungle, Eden is a garden, assiduously reconquered thanks to the work of the gardener: his hand, although invisible, is present everywhere. There is no landscape without the peasant; if the peasant abandons it, it will decompose. And we have up until now been able to enter this landscape: we walked on the grass, or in the hay, climbed over the fences, gathered mushrooms or went fishing. But the urbanite forgets that the countryside is not a jungle, and that it is due to a society. The terrestrial Eden is not a gift from God, but the fruit of hard work and poverty; how can we renounce them without destroying Eden?

## 2. The man of the country

Wherever they still exist, peasants are men of the country [*paysans*]. This is why, like the various country districts, men of the country are countless in their variety; mowers of the fields, bent double on the horizon, harvesters in the mountains, descending towards the precipice. Country folk of the sea whose prows divide the waves the way the plow cleaves the earth, for whom the seaweeds are the fields and the reef is a milestone; but all of them follow the great currents of the tides and the seasons. The man of the country, whose family home fixes the center of his time and space, as necessary in this crease of a little valley as the bud at the base of a leaf. Fixed to the soil, the peasant nonetheless has disposal over an immense area, unlike those suburban chalets that are scattered about the country at random but which are nonetheless beginning to pile up in heaps. The peasant has space in every direction: north, south, east and west, in the four quadrants of his farm. They talk about rural shacks, but even the poorest ramshackle hut is in the open country; all you have to do is open the door to be under the open sky. The urban shack, however, is shut up within the stony hell of a building cemented into the city.

Furthermore, the peasant follows and dominates the passage of time. The universe is all around him and lives with him. His labors depend on the season; and its rhythm comes and goes, tireless like the tide that washes over all things. June comes and the reapers approach with their heavy, implacable tread; and the swing of the scythe rustles and hisses while the bounty of the spring falls....

Space and duration, these are the most elemental goods of life on the land, and the peasant still has them at his disposal because he pays for them. It is this availability that instills with peace even the most trivial moments of rural life, which causes every break from work to be a draught of water from the spring and every moment of silence to seem like a breath of fresh air.

The urbanite lives in the artificial rhythm of a strictly human world; the peasant is part of the heartbeat of the cosmos. The immensity of the sky attaches him to the earth; an overabundance of life coming from all directions besieges him and bears down upon him: those plants and animals that at any minute he must either defend or fight against. Sometimes he has too much of that life that we urbanites lack.

And although no one can hasten the arrival of the seasons, a hailstorm can crush the vines in the blink of an eye; to the degree that he still participates in the majestic rhythm of nature, the peasant is still abandoned to its fortunes. Up until now, however, he lived very close to the earth, he set roots in it that were too deep to be easily extracted. The peasant is unaware of the extremes of prosperity and misfortune that affect the city dweller; he has little to fear or to hope for from that future that shines so brightly on the horizon of the cities. He lives in an instant that flows eternally from the origins. But this cosmic side is nothing but one aspect of rural life; by itself it does not define the man of the country, but the primitive. While the peasant has submitted to nature, he has also emerged victorious from his contest with it, and his victory is the more complete one, because it is the more moderate.

There are continents in the world without countrysides or peasants, in which new cities are built in a desert of factory farms exploited by industrialists and day laborers, where tractors and highways trace their lines on the blank sheet of human nature. Here, however, everything is cut to the measure of man, sometimes too much so. Man is lord and master, under various forms; he has had the land for centuries, although the land has him. To a good extent he owes his means of life to his own efforts: in the century of the division of labor, the peasant is the man of diverse crops and tasks. His property is an island that must resist storms, and he must have some savings.

Thus, the peasant is free; however, because his freedom is real, all the weight of the earth bears down on the freedom of his calloused hands. The moment is in charge in this freedom; the sun and the thunderbolt, rather than the factory time clock, call the tune. But in this endless workday, he takes his time, since he is his own master.

As hard as he works, his work has a meaning; because at each instant he can choose the pace of his labor, and because what is at stake is the fate of his land. He is his own master in a world where each person occupies a position in a hierarchy. Do not be deceived about this rough man, bent over the soil; no matter how far away you are, as soon as he sees you he will rise. He is in his house, and he will decide whether to close the door to you or to offer you hospitality. Even if you are a multimillionaire, he is in charge here. The greeting of the proletarian would have a hint of annoyance or indignation; on the threshold of his domain the king of the countryside awaits you: the man of the country.

Here is a man, and since he is real, his presence is often awkward. In the cities, you lose yourself in a human cloud; here there is no way to avoid it, such a premium is put on space: distance allows us to distinguish our neighbor. In the city, ten families live in one building; in the mountains, you could populate five valleys with the passengers of one subway car. Here, everyone knows everything about their neighbors, and the real knowledge is disappointing; nothing of that comfortable anonymity typical of the big cities that allows us to love our fellow man while exempting ourselves from having to smell the strong odor of our neighbor. In the city, you know your friends; here, your neighbors. The first tolling of the bells makes the wine glass of silence tinkle: you know who is dying, and from what.

How can we, Christians or post-Christians, put a price on the peasant life, when we know it from the inside? Its virtues are no longer ours, however much its evils are all too obvious to us. And the worst thing would be to judge it from the outside, based on those seductive forms that are illustrated in our books and that are reflected through our car windows on Sundays.

This peace that overwhelms us when we go to the country—is it equilibrium or inertia? For good or for ill, the peasant is the counterweight that retards the advance of History: pagan in the Christian era, Christian in an era of atheism. Does he hinder our progress or moderate our wild outbursts? What do our wars and our revolutions, our sciences and our arts, owe to him? Little, so it would seem; the peasant always forms part of the troops, he is still just as mute as he was in the times of Descartes and Turenne.

And yet so much silence then secretly nourishes the precarious and splendid fruit of the royal courts, for consciousness feeds on unconsciousness. From the farms, from the hills, from words exchanged at a bend in the road, arises a slow force that sustains and instructs man: from the real to the true.

Peasant: *paganus*. Christ, however, was not a worker, but a vagabond wandering among the peasants of Judea. His historical existence is inconceivable in the slums of Moscow or Paris. The city was only the place of the end, and of torture. Shepherd, lamb, oil press, these humble words are also in the Gospels. The Word was incarnated in them forever.

However, even when the countryside is not just a place of escape for vacations, but the place where our life takes place, we know that it is trembling at the approach of the city. For a century now, life there has coagulated: ever more powerful machines shatter peasant inertia. Laws and mass transportation uproot the villages, just as bulldozers clear the hedges, to build a *no man's land* whose foundation is the dust of houses and tombs. There is no longer any nature or humanity that can stand up to this implacable plan of the reasons of State and of Production. In France, the peasantry is certainly the main obstacle standing in the way of productivity. All rationalization schemes run up against his mistrust and his individualism. Too small and too diversified, the rural enterprise has the lowest profit; the countryside still has to be depopulated to welcome the population of the tractors. Perhaps, however, we will preserve the cultural element.

The normalizers stricken with nervous depression will contemplate the ruined farms while they recite Giono. For the countryside is still for us a place of death: the place for retirement, or for the return to the land of failure. In our world, the bucolic lie is necessarily associated with the destruction of the peasantry. It allows man to take refuge in fiction from the question that the end of the countryside poses, an end that will be the end of the unity of man and nature; the end of man himself, for he is part of Creation.

Currently, in certain new countries whose soil was up until now handed over to unmitigated exploitation, we see that the governments are recommending crop rotation, irregular fields and enclosures, woodlots: to conceive, to manufacture the countryside by way of science, laws and machines. They might be able to recreate it; but will they be able to recreate the free men who populated it? Because the construction of the countryside will demand even more rigorous discipline than its destruction.

Up until now the peasant existed alone, like the land or the water; today he is subject to interrogation. We can feel satisfied with his death throes, admire the bones bleaching under the sun in countries that are more dead than France. Or we can think that the survival of the peasantry deserves our concern and our struggle. Left to their own devices, we are going to see less and less nature and freedom; today, unlike the city dweller, the peasant can no longer exist except by means of an extraordinary effort of consciousness. By opening his eyes to what he is, and choosing to confront this future that he rejects. And it's about time.

This choice can take the form of material progress, as long as this progress is always only a means. The school can help the young peasant to love the countryside, to transmit to him the passion for nature; but this will not be achieved by abolishing the rural schools and moving them to the city. Agronomy must make agriculture a more learned and sanitary activity; the future of the French countryside is not that of the mechanized steppes, but that of the Lombard or Dutch farm-gardens. Above all, it is necessary to accept that the choice of the people—of the peasant—will sometimes imply the sacrifice of productivity. This sacrifice, however, is revolutionary, if the characteristic of revolution is to break with evolution.

Today, only imagination and faith can save the countryside, and these are neither peasant nor pagan virtues. Their goal is not the establishment of paradise on Earth, but to preserve this way of life that is torn from the gravitational force of the Earth to testify before Heaven to the gravitational force of God.

## 3. Lament for my country

Anyone who writes about the countryside ends up writing bucolic literature; the author of these lines, as he is fully aware, is no exception. He speaks to the present about the past; and that is what the urbanite talks about: these customs, these walls, these trees and these waters exist for him, but they have now ceased to exist for the

peasant. Like a corpse, the landscape is the last reflection of a life that has disappeared. Customs survive, but they no longer evolve; things endure, but they have ceased to be born. Definitively petrified, forms shimmer with a terminal splendor before they start to decompose.

When he leaves the city, the urbanite leaves an environment full of people, movement and noise, to suddenly awaken in open space, duration and silence. But he must not deceive himself; this immobility and this silence are, to a great extent, the immobility and silence of death. In this condition, the countryside only gives this impression of duration because it no longer moves; it continues to be subject to depopulation and degradation, at a faster or slower rate, out of inertia. It is evacuated of people, activities and ideas. The folk culture that is admired by the tourists from the city is nothing but a legacy, petrified forever, of the past. The folk culture that we now know dates from the end of the 18$^{th}$ century: a precarious moment of apogee, when the countryside took advantage of the early stages of material progress without yet being affected by its human consequences. And if some rural areas remained a hotbed of Christianity, it was for the same reason that they had remained pagan for so long: due to backwardness. The countryside no longer invents as it changes, but clumsily imitates, and at a low cost, the models that the city supplies to it: and this time it is the city that sells it the copies. If certain rural areas and their virtues are still alive it is not because they are stronger, but because the wave has not reached them yet. The modern countryside is not the idyll that bucolic poetry has invented, but, with few exceptions, the harsh reality of greed, mediocrity and boredom. But neither the sky nor the land, nor its fruits, have changed. Surely, you must be a city dweller to realize the inestimable value of peasant life. Perhaps the peasant must become an urbanite in order to finally realize what he has lost. And so that he, too, will discover, with the anxiety and the suffering of the individual who is isolated from nature and from his fellow man, a freedom that will allow him to choose that alliance with the land that he once so painfully endured.

Here, autumn is an awakening. The dense confusion of summer dissipates under the gaze of the same light: not one stone that does not gleam, not one branch that is not sculpted like the hardest glass. Every evening the clarity of the sky becomes sharper under the threat of snow, a threat that will then be dispelled by a south wind during the night. Suddenly purple, the angry Pyrenees appear, with their peaks streaked with ice, their slopes aflame with the fires of sunset, a mantle of clouds flowing around their ridges. Towards this all-too-pure void eye of the hurricane a legion of winds then rises, and the streamers of the squalls smack on the shutters; now disheveled, the West roars bloody murder and all the downpours from the sea follow, while the leaves take flight and the too heavy fruit of the harvests falls from the black branches of winter.

This country only shows itself in autumn; during the summer it camouflages its trees behind leaves. But now everything is clear: the hills are very similar and are all the same height, accompanied by the same valleys; if one of them subsides, another pushes forward to assert its prominence. This country that once lay concealed in a grayish-green haze, now blazes in colors, and a symphony of features explodes before

our eyes. Black junipers are scattered across the red flanks of the moors, white walls and slate roofs gleam among the fluttering gold of the leaves. Under the weight of its treasures, the autumn afternoon gives way until it is broken, and the silence crackles in the sun in the cornfields, punctuated by the fall of acorns and chestnuts. But nothing is forgotten under the sky, not a leaf, not the bark of a dog: that barely visible tree, at the top of the hill, seems to be embedded in the horizon. Everything stands out, but everything is related; just as roads and hedges go from one farm to another, which embrace and unite the forms of this vast body: the countryside.

In autumn, however, the countryside in the far north of the country dies. The night harasses this all-too-distinct light. The wall formed by the trees and the hillside rises straight from the water, like the even more severe wall of the church and of the houses in the highlands: a wall of immobility and silence in the darkness of the foliage in the crown of the trees. Some roofing tiles fall, some of the front windows break and the same peal of thunder drowns out the sound of the bells ringing in the Day of the Dead that resound over the clear waters. Here, the sun reigns, while up above the bell rings repeatedly for a shadow that is lost in the immense shadow of the past. And the water flows forever, or stagnates, while the trees grow, feeding more vigorously on a deeper silence. The epic poem of the big poplars rises, hard and muscular, with an athletic impulse; but, wherever you look, the silent meadows extend in every direction. All the greatness of creation rises up in a cry of light, and makes this defeat of man participate in its glory, just as the ivy drapes and sustains these ruins.

Such funereal splendor no longer exists for man. A handful of insignificant beings somehow establish themselves on the enormous skeleton of the past. Weak parasites that these decrepit walls crush as much as they protect. All of this splendor only exists for the outsider: the solitary fisherman who walks along the bank of the river. Even in the middle of the day he walks in your shadow, Saint-Mont de Armagnac! And the cold of your shadow penetrates his heart. The water that laughingly courses through the pebbles swirls, then it turns black like the abyss: suddenly, the lightning strike of the pike slashes the emerald shadow with a streak of silver. Because the source of life is still flowing, always intact: the countryside here is dying, but nature still exists.

There was a time, however, when Saint-Mont was alive. The clarity of its walls then adorned the present moment; just as today it is still bearing fruit, the country once bore songs and festivals. And the people of the trees were a people of youths whose capital was this villa and whose empire was this plain. They settled on top of the hill to dominate the countryside, and built solid houses to affirm their power: these stones that are today crumbling brought them to the height of their power. And the tallest of these houses was the house of God: here, the heart of life was beating.

But time has passed and this sacred place is like a mystery whose meaning has been lost. Where is Saint-Mont de Armagnac now? On the wrong side of the present, at the antipodes of Paris: and the noise of the street drowns out the question that its silence poses. Armagnac has disappeared from this department of Gers, transformed into an expanse that cars pass through in the blink of an eye, like a desert, and the few

drops of life that survive are drained by these thousands of roads. Genocide is a crime, but it was never so common as it is now: in the era of the metropolis and the masses, it is being committed everywhere and all the time, but it is only genocide due to carelessness. Forms that survived and that are now being erased. The building housing the cooperative and a few new chalets have now been constructed on the edge of the national highway: the lost children of the agricultural hinterlands. In this country that is falling apart, the

Administration is building imperial Roman roads whose impeccable bridges cut through the course of the waters, and whose curve of cement twists around a ghost amidst the whine of the tires.

Here, right before us, lies the highway, and it is an excellent highway. Let's go. The clarity of the autumn in this country is the watchful gaze of the winter.

The outsider who drives through our moors does not understand them. He glides over the surface of the extended plane upon which an army of pines, completely disciplined, responds to a horizon of flat gorse. And speeding along he proceeds in a straight line, the highway opening its enormous asphalt mouth to swallow him—derisory prey before the great trophy of the

Basque coast—a miserable *far west*[4] of picnic grounds and market stands,

Fallières churches and Deschanel dance halls. Toctoucau, Solferino, Facture;[5] this absurd human hodgepodge in the middle of the wilderness seems to be hitchhiking at the red sign of the gas station, waiting for the driver who will allow him to escape from a land that he has spurned.

But all you have to do is make the decision, and take the first shortcut, and in the impenetrable wall of pines opens a breach that leads in a straight line to the real Landes. With a turn of the steering wheel, the sun of the national highway fades in a clear shadow that leads to the heart of the secret. So much monotony conceals the curves of little valleys; so much inhuman greatness, the smooth surfaces of the open fields studded with alders. All these blazing torches protect the coldest springs, the green pools in which the trout take refuge from the rushing waters. The sea of heather and pines conceals the clearing: an open lake of light in the stifling incense of the forest, a refuge for its old oaks; an island of shade amidst the grating song of the cicadas. In the moors of igneous colors, the green of the meadows and the foliage still protects the possessor of the secret: the peasant and his hamlet. He has always known that the sandy plain is only a stage, and that the real fatherland begins where the side roads begin and the foliage gets thicker, where rocks and waters flourish. The door is at the end of the world; at the end of the path, the porch of a little house offers itself to the outsider in the middle of the night.

[4] In English in the original text [American translator's note].

[5] Toctoucau and Solferino are two little villages, with somewhat comical names: the one because it is so exotic sounding, the other because it is named after one of Napoleon's great battles. Facture is the name of a very large paper mill in the commune of Biganos.

Guided, then, by chance, the car door is banged shut in the silence of Goux, and then the silence suddenly reigns again. But today the silence that lies behind the tumult of the big highways is, all too often, a silence of death. Starting from the pines, the path is immediately lost in a silent glade where only the shaded waters of a creek flow in a gully. All that stood there was a great stone phantom under the sky: a bell tower, the remains of a church. A ruined wall, but still standing. Testimony of another epoch, the last bastion of a lost cause, still sheltering the abandoned cemetery of a deserted parish. When it was built, that wall seemed invincible; but the centuries have broken against it and the fortress was taken by assault. And the waves of the generations have been declining, all equally modest: warriors, peasants, retirees. The last one died without a fuss in 1927, leaving at the feet of the tall reef these tombs covered with grass, these rusty shells without pearls, which veil the silence of the crossroads.

However, the old soldier is always standing there, in his armor of gold and marble, still on guard, a guard who no longer has anything to guard. Below his uncovered face the entrance to a high portico begins, which leads to a humble door, which displays the pure curve of the simplest tri-lobed arch: just as a red thread sometimes adorns the naked blade of a sword. A virginal and severe face, whose body is a ship: a bell tower, the pride of an all too terrestrial faith, which rises heavily until that rapier of stone pierces the blue sky, but which today conceals the mortal cry that underlies it, under the funereal canvas of a black tapestry of ivy. It seems that the copper of autumn slumbers in anticipation of celebrating the funerals of summer.

The night grows quiet, as the mute lips close. In the silence of Goux a question lingers without an answer. Why this perfect form of stone, this enigmatic sign, that nature, defeated everywhere else, has succeeded in erasing here? We moderns think that all we need to do is contemplate beauty. But the form is only an appearance, or rather the sign of a more profound reality: anyone who really loves it, is attracted to it. If the sign is engraved with perfection in the stone, it leads to meaning.

The harmonious and heart-rending silence of this abandoned church is that of a presence that interrogates us about life and death. The question is posed: mute, the past and the present confront each other. The most remote parish participates just as rigorously in its expression as Agrigento or Vézelay, or the designs of our machines. We get a presentiment here of a language that was that of the cathedral and the chapel, that of the lord and the farm laborer; what is called a style, the material expression of a life and of a spirit that unite man with the universe, and man with man. We admire this style in the past because our present seeks it in vain, except in our machines: but the church of Goux was built to vanquish death, which is still today defying the time that is its herald, while our machines are made to use in the present moment. Apart from our technical disciplines, we only know a hodgepodge of contradictory forms, ideas and interests. And the only enduring testimonies that we will leave among the ashes of an atomic nullity will be chunks of cement: bunkers or dams, the heavy excreta of a civilization jampacked with matter. For us, the silence of Goux is nothing but the perfect corpse of a dead Christianity.

Surely, we should let the dead bury their dead, and put some distance between us and the melancholy of this enchanted glade. There is nothing for it but to leave; but how to be present without contemplating a past that is our origin? Are the real dead not those robots of a totalitarian progress that are rushing forward without even casting a glance at what they have left behind? Disregarding the past, how can they plan for the future? The present is just that burning instant when they both come face to face. In this abandoned clearing we leave behind a part of ourselves. And, awkwardly, we go to great lengths to repeat the achievement of a past epoch, and we try to construct our own churches, too. But we lack the material means, as well as the faith; and when they are not just copies of the past, our churches seem too much like garages or movie theaters, since those places are the only real religions we have today.

An epoch comes to an end, and we have to accept it. Night falls: we have to leave the glade of Goux, nomads who no longer possess anything down here. And the signs that we trace might be invisible to the eyes of man. The hope and the mistakes of Christianity are now things of the past, judged by the world and by God. But these stones and this afternoon will remain within us forever; even though their light is that of dusk in an abandoned cemetery. We have to leave this place where the beauty of death has triumphed forever over the disorder of life, without forgetting that this door is not only our point of departure, but the end of a journey that surpasses our mediocre lifespan. Not in vain, on the high seas of our life this milestone fades away.

# Part Two: Towards the Total City

Thus, until the Second World War, two types of society coexisted in the most developed countries: an industrial society in the cities and a traditional society in the countryside. Not even in England or Germany, where urban development had reduced the rural population to less than one-fifth of the total population, were the specific traits of peasant life radically transformed, that is, the relation with nature, the dispersion of the population, the importance of material life. The contrast between the city and the country was especially pronounced in France, where the development of the cities— or, more properly speaking, of The City, that is, Paris—was nourished on an enormous rural mass that represented half the population. The bourgeois of the Third Republic could be defined as a peasant who had emigrated to the capital: this explains his ideological and political attitudes, and especially his relation to nature, which is not the same as that of his counterparts in more profoundly urbanized societies like Germany or England. The contrast between the city and the country is even more pronounced at this stage, for if the city does not yet encompass the country, its influence is already great enough to paralyze it. The countryside is no longer alive, and therefore no longer evolves: it is, at best, in a state of collapse. Its present is therefore its past, which seems even more distant because the present of the cities is the Future. There is one country that does not fit this description, however. That is the United States. The American farmers are already integrated into the economy and into the general way of life, although television is only in its infancy: in this respect, America was during this epoch the prototype of the future society. As for the USSR, politics plays the same role there that technology and economics play in the United States; the revolution, after promising to give the land to the peasants, attempted to integrate the peasants by abolishing private property. But the terror itself shows that this assimilation was not entirely successful; something that is also confirmed by the still considerable proportion of the population that lives in the rural

areas. This integration of the peasants into the body of industrial society would be carried out, to a great extent, by the second total war, which, like a kind of *bulldozer*,[6] cleared the ground: uprooting the people, making a clean slate. Perhaps the Metropolis of the future can only really be built on the featureless terrain created by the expanding shock waves of a nuclear war.

The period after the Second World War was characterized by a brutal transformation that can be called urbanization. On the one hand, the number and the size of the cities considerably increased; on the other hand, economic expansion and the social changes that it entails, as well as the emergence of new technologies like television, extended the activities and the customs of the cities to the countryside as a whole. The countryside became an element within a single economy, within a single society, of which the city properly speaking is nothing but the central district. The rest is an industrial zone or devoted to industrialized agriculture, airports, highways, and recreational areas for the inhabitants of the city. The countryside tends to be transformed

[6] In English in the original [American translator's note].

into an empty space, or, since it depends for everything on the city, it can be effectively defined as a suburb: the airplane becomes the bus for the most remote populations. In this way, the radical break with the cosmos, which was the characteristic feature of the city dweller, becomes the characteristic feature of all men.

# I. The urban explosion

## 1. Megalopolis

The growth of the cities that began in the 18th century rapidly accelerated after 1945. Since it is not the purpose of this book to provide data, which are well-known and are easily available in reference books, I shall only recall the essential facts in order to provide some context for the scale of the phenomenon. Between 1945 and 1962, the number of urban agglomerations of more than one million inhabitants increased from around forty to over one hundred. The rural population of the USSR fell from 75% of the total population of the country to 40%. The rural population of France, which had fallen from 65% of the total population in 1870 to 50% in 1930, fell from 50% to 35% between 1945 and 1962. The population of the Paris metropolitan area, during that same period, grew from 4.5 million to 9 million; the population of Tokyo increased from 5 million to 11 million. The growth of the urban population was even more rapid in the

"underdeveloped" countries. Between 1930 and 1962, the population of Casablanca increased from 250,000 to 800,000, and Brazzaville's population increased from 10,000 to 120,000. Historically, this is an incredibly rapid rate of growth, a social explosion that suddenly brings to light the results of a revolution that was imperceptibly underway for centuries.

The causes of this sudden disaster are, naturally, the same ones that lie at the origin of the development of the cities, to which we must add the consequences of an unprecedented war that endowed these causes with greater force. The accelerated industrial and commercial expansion of the period after the Second World War, under either its liberal or semi-statist form, concentrated the population of the Western countries in the cities, while in the communist countries political-economic centralization led to the same result. The enormous demographic pressure of this period also contributed to the growth of the urban population; a growing population that could only find jobs in the administrative and service sectors—theoretically susceptible to indefinite extension—of an urban economy.

The expansion of the cities also has more profound reasons, however; it is a social, human and even religious fact, as well as a technical and economic one. Technological progress simply allows the human reasons that cause men to accumulate in the cities to continue indefinitely, without having to face difficulties regarding circulation and

supply that would put an end to this trend. The urban explosion is not merely the effect of economic expansion; the cities that have grown the most are cities in

"underdeveloped" countries. The vertiginous growth of Calcutta, or even worse, Brazzaville, is explained by the poverty of these countries much more than by their wealth. The city grows because it *must* grow, in the ethical sense of the word. For the economists, the increase of the urban population is the sign of economic progress, and, consequently, of the progress of all the other factors. It is the sign of development, and therefore we should be in favor of it even if the economy sometimes falters while trying to keep abreast of this development. Its leaders organize it entirely in this sense: labor, training, culture ... the led are utterly compelled to follow this trend. And the economist's reaction is everyone's reaction. People emigrate to the city because the city is always a Rome or a Jerusalem: the prestigious destination of their ambition or of their dreams, the beacon that signals the magical destiny where it will finally be possible to live life as it really

should be lived. It is assumed that people go to the city to find jobs. In reality, they go to the city to get closer to the light, because in the depths of the countryside they have no opportunities; to live a life of adventure or to get a career, to find a wife or a husband for their life. The forced "return to the land" caused by the war accentuated this reaction even more; for the generation that had to suffer through that ordeal, it conferred a new prestige on the city; this explains the flood of people who went to Paris after the Liberation. The population of the cities grows because human beings are social beings: because they are happy when there are many of them gathered together, and because only the human concentration of the city concretely realizes the society in which man is no longer alone and in which he subsists within a multitude and among invincible works, or at least this is what he believes—as long as he has not yet become a true urbanite. Above all, however, the city grows because it grows, and more than ever it is defined as an agglomeration. It attracts factories because there are factories there, it attracts people because it has people. The city develops because it is what is called a "*fait accompli*", that is, a fact in the face of which the human spirit capitulates. The urban explosion is simultaneously the sign of man's victory over things and of man's defeat in his confrontation with himself.

All kinds of reasons allow us to justify in retrospect the accelerated growth of the urban agglomerations, but they only serve to dissimulate the sole real reason: that it is a "*fait accompli*". It is perfectly evident that this growth is not the result of planning; planning only intervenes *a posteriori*, in order to give necessity the semblance of human choice. The phenomenon is too big and above all too rapid to be the product of human will; it is like a geological convulsion, like a mountain avalanche. You can only do one thing: "adapt", that key word of the new Prometheus. The urban planner only creates "shining cities" on paper, where he fabricates a prototype on a reduced scale: a building or a complex of buildings, in the best case a Brasilia in the middle of the wilderness. The classical urban planner thought that he could impose human reason on nature; the reason of our time, despite having at its disposal much more powerful

means, attempts in vain to keep up with the flood of the social tide. If residential high rise buildings are constructed this is because they must squeeze the population into a limited space; if new roads are opened this is in order to make room for an increasing number of cars. There is no time to act in advance; in the time that would be needed to plan for a single little district on the outskirts of the city, the whole area is covered with people and houses. Attending to the most urgent needs, usually the plan calls for building high rise apartment buildings, a body without a soul, that is, without the social content that only time can produce. To prevent the uncontrolled expansion of an amorphous suburb, the English have tried to create satellite cities around London, isolated from each other by green zones, whose inhabitants work *in situ*, and which have their own life instead of being mere bedroom communities. But if the urban explosion continues at this rate, it is hard to see how they can prevent the urban agglomeration from swallowing these satellite cities in turn. In any case, to distribute hundreds of thousands of inhabitants in this way requires almost totalitarian powers. And even then it does not work.... Not even the USSR can really control the urban disaster; at most, it temporarily succeeds in postponing the flow of new arrivals—and with a great deal of difficulty, according to witnesses. When technological progress constantly modifies all conditions, the forecasts that the urban planner can make are disrupted before they have even had time to be implemented. How can we seize control of this phenomenon? Besides reinforcing coercive institutions, urban planning presupposes a slowing down of the expansion of the cities.

The example of Paris is typical. The more masses and human activities are centralized, the more you hear people there talk about urban planning and decentralization; meanwhile, however, the built-up areas are spreading to more and more distant locations. Inspired by the work of the geographer Jean François Gravier, the supporters of "regional planning" have helped implement a program of industrial decentralization that has only resulted in sending the factories of Billancourt and Nanterre to Flins and Poissy. And to speak truly, even when this urban fringe reaches Orléans or Poitiers—because decentralization can only originate from the center, and because it is not an exclusively economic matter—all that will have been achieved is to add more districts that are closer to or further from the city. Up until now, the proportion of new businesses that have been established in the provinces strictly speaking is minute, despite the subsidies, compared to the number of new businesses created in the region of Paris. This is why, faced with the evidence of their failure, the Parisian decentralizers have a tendency to capitulate. Since 1960, the task is no longer to limit the growth of Paris, but to prepare for a Paris of twenty million inhabitants, in which the ChampsÉlysées will extend to Le Havre and in which the Sorbonne will be at the source of the Loiret. The most extravagant futurist utopias pale in comparison with the progress of an out-of-control reality; if this is the Paris of the next few years, what will it look like in a couple of centuries? Man's victory over nature has been translated, among other things, into the fact that he is forbidden from looking more than twenty-five years ahead.

## 2. The urban front

Rather than urban growth, we will have to speak about the urban explosion; and the speed at which this new world expands is constantly increasing. Before the last war, the city expanded to the borders of the countryside; today, it is devouring the countryside. The Ruhr basin was nothing but the prelude to the future industrial Eden; the new region of the Ruhr extends from Dunkirk to Hannover and from Rotterdam to Geneva. In western

Europe, in the northeast of the United States or in the port cities and their environs in southern Japan, the total city—or, more accurately, the total suburb—of the future is being assayed. Driven by the development of transport and industry, attracted by the water that is becoming ever more precious, the building boom is spreading across the large valleys. Paris is expanding downstream on the Seine towards the sea, while it expands upstream on the Oise towards the urban agglomeration of the North. Attracted by the sun, it is launching another urban tentacle that is sneaking down the Rhône, a tentacle that extends to Lyon and Saint-Étienne, Marseilles and La Crau. Meanwhile, the southern suburb of the future is proliferating from Orleans to Tours.

All along these major arteries the landscape will soon disappear, and will be transformed into an industrial or transit zone. The land will be buried under asphalt, the views hidden by walls, or else driven by the speed and by the expansion of the transportation networks beyond the horizon. In this linear concentration, advertising and signs absorb the attention of the driver as on a railroad line. Gas stations and streetlights replace trees; stores and parking lots replace the countryside and the fields; motels and supermarkets replace farms and villages; cement conduits replace rivers. On some stretches, the Rhône and the Rhine are nothing but names, and soon we will no longer remember that they were once great rivers bordered by poplars where one could swim or fish.

Rolling downhill, the urban avalanche is heading towards the estuaries, where it accumulates. Under the pressure of both work and leisure, since the steel mills like to be near water, too, it propagates all along the coasts. The refineries are built there and, just as in other suburbs, high rise apartment buildings replace the chalets. The cement network is therefore closing in on the last country districts. But since they need industry, too, here and there factories spring up, the leading edge of a flood that will soon cover all the fields of Europe.

This time, far beyond the consolidated, urbanized, planned, real heart of the real city, a turbulent and chaotic wave of debris and infrastructure is breaking: an urban front for which there is no time to plan anything. The material expansion that produces urbanization is too rapid, it destroys more than it builds. The present has no time to integrate nature or the past; it tears them down and sweeps their remnants away with a *bulldozer*. The urban agglomeration that is spreading at an increasingly faster pace has no time to sink roots into the soil, or to base itself on walls of stone. It lays waste to everything, and then, on the horizontal plane, it builds vertically. And even when

it has not yet finished building, it has to destroy again to build a new model. Its creation is a perpetual chaos in which one rough sketch succeeds another; a project, a battlefield on which masses and machines swarm. But this front is a *no man's land*[1]—a land belonging to no one, a wasteland.

The urban explosion is too brutal to build a city, and here we only see the consequences. The pressure of urban growth vomits its bile towards the periphery, a kind of ulcer or fire advancing like a wave creating a zone of devastation in which nature is destroyed without actually building any cities. Fields and forests disappear much more rapidly than during the first phase, devoured by much more powerful machines, giving rise to a new moorland, this time an industrial moorland. Underground rivers of mud impregnated with fuel oil that the backhoes relentlessly stir up, deserts of cement where the whirlwinds of dust mix with the smoke from the factories and the landfills. Featureless *terrains vagues* [wastelands]; they are so called because the fermenting materials of this new Genesis are indescribable.[2] In this void vast housing tracts suddenly emerge from out of nowhere, monsters washed up by some deluge; as at the dawn of time, they emerge from the ooze. Reefs of steel, sections of wall: is this a construction site or a demolition site? A storm has passed which has knocked down the trees and replaced them with rudimentary vegetation, which will in turn be uprooted when the area is once again covered by trees. A world *in utero*, or in ruins?

Like the buildings, everything is endless, although there are no stores: there are universities, but there is no Latin Quarter. The Megalopolis grows too fast, the transport networks cannot keep up, the roads are only in the planning stage, the sewage system is nonexistent—less nonexistent, however, than human institutions and relations. In this stage—but will it ever be surpassed?—the total city is nothing but a total suburb. And these infinite outskirts, at the same time that they devour the countryside, bury the city under the masses of their buildings, their men and their cars.

**3. How to get rid of it?**

The most visible sign of the growing urban chaos is the sea of wastes, in view of the fact that the city everywhere precedes sanitation and sewage systems. This insane old woman called industrial society, otherwise so charming, still has not realized that, with the help of the automobile, she is haphazardly leaking her wastes and runs the risk of staining her pretty nylon underwear.

While all production entails byproducts, ours multiplies them, especially because it generalizes the use of "disposable containers"—that is what they are called—plastic containers that are indestructible by any means except fire. The diverse detritus of a consumer society that is consuming at an ever increasing rate; strata of *gadgets*[3] in the junk: industrial wastes, suspect sludge, and even plastics, too, that replace sand

[1] In English in the original [American translator's note].

[2] Here, the author engages in a play on words based on the dictionary meaning and the etymology of the French term, "*terrain vague*": on the one hand, "wasteland"; and on the other hand, "vague terrain" (indefinite, indistinct, diffuse) [Spanish translator's note].

[3] In English in the original [American translator's note].

or gravel on the riverbanks. Impalpable soot that floats in the air like spit on water. Multicolored smoke. Olfactory wastes, aromas of hydrocarbons, unknown putrefaction from the paper mills, unprecedented odors from the chemical industry; the sonic wastes of the roar of engines, which saturate the silence or shatter it with a *bang*!

The burial mounds of the old cities are composed of their rubble; our burial mounds, which are incomparably larger and more active, threaten to bury us alive. How to get rid of it? And I am not talking about Ionesco's play.[4] Our positivist civilization does not have to deal with such poetic regrets, its corpses are eminently material: they are the wastes of the swarms of men and their products. Wherever populations accumulate, the air is full of odors, the water is full of wastes. The city grows; this one has a hundred thousand souls today, but since these souls also have bodies, we can just as well speak of one hundred thousand intestines, of one hundred thousand buckets of waste that have to be emptied every day. And we are very clean; we need water—chemically pure water. And everything that we take from it, ends up once again in the water. The price that we have to pay for the faucet is the sewer—and the sewer is just the other end of the faucet. We are constantly washing; our washing machines full of detergents run endlessly and make everything shiny and clean, and immediately vomit their filth: it is no longer the washing machine that makes suds, but the Seine. The white softness of our detergents is a polluting white softness. At least at this stage of its development, the civilization of hygiene is a civilization of waste.

I remember a river in the Pyrenees that flowed with all the clarity of the mountain sky to the sea. The pebbles polished by its waters glittered in the sun and the green shadows of the seaweed undulated on its sandy bottom. Your gaze plumbs the blue eye of the pool and finds the somber trout whose white flash suddenly illuminates the cracks in the rocks. Not one stone or one scale escapes the attentive eye. The distant lowing of an ox at the trough hardly disturbs a peace that reigns right up to the horizon.

But those times are long gone; as the all-enveloping rat race expands, ducks and cattle are abandoning a river that is turning into a cesspool. The standard of living is rising, the carcass of a calf, its belly turned towards the sun, proclaims it; a discreet, peaceful and rosy calf's belly, which does not yet exhale its carrion lyricism. Consumption increases; and to no avail, in the swirl of an eddy, barely discernable amidst a raft of bottles, an old fashioned bloated dead cat lingers as a reminder of a bucolic past. It is the future of the country that is at stake; the river also participates in this hymn to labor that rustles in the gravel. We find ourselves on the front of Production, in the Drainage section; here, in its red and white uniform, an invincible column that will

[4] A reference to the play, *Comment s'en debarrasser?*, written in 1953, translated under the title, *Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It*, in which a couple has to deal with a corpse that, having mysteriously appeared in their apartment, keeps getting bigger [Spanish translator's note].

never cease to advance with the current is deployed. Empty oil drums and more metal drums and cans. Esso[5] gives them to us for free, the river transports them for nothing.

From now on, History leaves its mark on these river banks, which had for so long been abandoned to nature. The different eras of technology are depositing their successive layers. The Age of Wood has not yet come to an end; an endless array of boxes, of coolers stripped of their metal casings but still serviceable, testify to the survival of the arts of the woodworker. Indeed, however, the nail, so disastrous for the boots of fishermen, has for the most part replaced the carpenter's wooden peg. The present belongs rather to junk. At times it stands out, having become stranded in an eddy or caught on the branches of a willow; but usually it is hidden in the mud, where it bides its time. Junk is not eternal, however, unlike plastic bottles, which pile up like the arms of glaciers on the river banks. All kinds of medicine bottles, and sometimes medical wastes, remind us of the irresistible progress of hygiene. Paper, which, along with steel, is the basis of our civilization, displays a more capricious, and at the same time, more constant presence: either it livens up the gravel with its multicolored patches and festoons the bushes like flowers, or else it animates the currents of the river, where, just like the dead calf or the old tire, it moves back and forth, caught on a branch. But its total prominence is revealed to the attentive eye, which detects it under the form of a powder of fragments suspended in the water, ground up, surely, by an assiduous administration. The last word is the plastic materials, which participate in the lightness of wood and in the indestructibility of glass. Like gaudy little gnomes, containers of Omo and Paic[6] enliven the bottoms of certain lakes that were once depressingly empty. Thanks to them we are assured of the cleanest laundry and the dirtiest river banks. But there is no need to lose hope, just around the bend the white flower of the first batch of soap suds is blooming.

Nor has poetry forfeited its rights. The SNPI (National Society for Unbearable Stench) has realized, most perspicaciously, that, after having benefited the atmosphere with the healthy odor of sulfurous gas, it would be good for the water to also receive its share. This is why it has formulated, with the astonished approval of the local press, a procedure to purify sulfur in the waters of the river. In this way, the passerby can assure himself from the heights of its bridges that Béarn is no longer an underdeveloped backwater; and, having reassured himself on this point, he only needs to get away from there as quickly as possible. Similar attentions have been lavished on the neighboring river, famous for its salmon, whose waters are still colorless and bland. Let us hope that industry will give it that chemical aroma without which no *standing*[7] is possible. And the variety of sensations multiplies; under the still all-too-organic perfumes of sulfurous gas, one can now detect a complex disinfectant aroma, which announces the first inroads of the chemical industry. And if, as a result, the *flora* disappear, the *fauna*

[5] A major U.S. oil company, first known as Standard Oil (S.O.=Esso), now Exxon [American translator's note].

[6] Brands of detergent [Spanish translator's note].

[7] In English in the original [American translator's note].

are benefited: the ferocious trout and pike give way to the peaceful barbel,[8] a hardly-edible fish that now acquires a phenolic aftertaste that seasons its otherwise insipid flesh.

The odors, colors and sounds complement one another. The river, normally a murky but somewhat monotonous gray, a color conferred upon it by the activities of the mines and gravel pits, suddenly acquires a lovely mahogany color: this is the modest contribution of the old-fashioned shoe industry. But the hat industry has not disappeared yet; the water that turns dark blue reassures us of this fact: fortunately, in a democracy, the humble have the same rights as the mighty. Agriculture is also being industrialized. From the water, a fishy odor rises, and it is full of sticky filaments: they just opened the new industrial dairy. And when, by chance, on Sunday the water becomes a little more clear, the brownish slime that covers the pebbles everywhere reminds us of the productive activities of the weekdays. Just like the countryside, the water is enriched with complex sediments. Where it is calm, the silt, delicate and romantic, conceals what might have been crude sand or pebbles; mauve and golden foam spice up with their fantasy the delicate monotony of the puddles on the shore.

Displaying its generosity, industry everywhere dispenses a beauty that ornaments with its baroque treasures the plan of nature. And man is not left out of this exposition of its works. Like pale lads from the north, condoms lazily float by in the swirling waters. One of them suddenly quivers: a small fish tried to eat it. Life thus nourishes Life.

If the current trend of development continues, the era of rivers will come to an end and the era of sewers will commence. Warmed up in the power plants, contaminated, and then cleaned up to be used once again, very soon there will not be enough water to meet the increasingly greater demands of more and more numerous masses of people. Rivers, increasingly burdened with trash, salt and detergents, will become a solution that is saturated with the wastes from household drains, factories and agriculture. In thousands of rivers in Europe, swimming and eating their fish has become impossible. They had to bury the Bièvre under the cobblestones of Paris; and soon they will have to cover the Seine to put so much space, wasted for the pleasures of the last leisurely pedestrians, at the disposal of the automobile. And while the cities and the incipient industry of the 19$^{th}$ century were capable of transforming the Bièvre into a sewer, in the future the Rhine and the Rhône will end up being turned into the gigantic sewers of the European agglomeration.

They will be nothing but a system of tubes such as certain factories near the sea have, that expel their wastes directly into the ocean. But this would only postpone the problem; because the human presence has now attained a cosmic scale and very soon the oceans will have been turned into a septic tank saturated with wastes. No coastal region more truly evokes the oceanic infinite than the immense stretch of the beaches of The Landes. Even here, however, nature has been defeated; over a distance of two hundred kilometers, there is not a single strand of seaweed that is not inevitably

[8] A small, carp-like fish, native to Europe [American translator's note].

covered by black pearls of tar. The pleasures of a day at the beach have changed; from now on, the mother of the family, instead of lying down and sleeping on the sand, must keep an eye on the danger zone to make sure her children do not get too close to it. And when the time comes for their evening departure, she gathers her children together and inspects with an expert eye the weak point of this somber front that indicates the limit of the high seas. But sooner or later, the tar impresses its oily mark on this vain return to nature. And at night, in the cottage, the gasoline bath ends up being the complementary rite to swimming in the sea.

The capricious fuel oil nevertheless wanders over the surface of the ocean, communicating to the mullet that incomparable aroma that only a truly modern kitchen would be capable of appreciating. As for the scorpion fish, it will not participate in the march of progress until it begins to benefit from radioactive contamination. With regard to this point, we find ourselves facing the extreme case, given that the biggest problem is not how to produce fissionable materials, but how to dispose of them. On this question, the authorities have divergent views. The person who is responsible for addressing this problem, Monsieur Francis Perrin, is logically in favor of dumping the radioactive wastes in the Mediterranean, while the specialist in sea bottoms, Captain Cousteau, opposes this solution. And as the representative of incompetent public opinion, that is, the politician, points out: "When the barrels in question touch the water, they are no longer the affair of the experts in nuclear research, but of the experts in oceanography." Since the air is the business of the physicists and water is the business of the oceanographers, for the average Frenchman all that remains are his illdigested opinions on the Algerian question. As for certainties, we only have one: that we know nothing. But if, in those esoteric domains, the knowledge of causes is no longer any of our business, at least no one can deprive us of the fact that we will still be subject to their effects.

How to get rid of it? If we are careful, and assuming the best of all possible worlds, a world without crises or wars, we will end up living in a climatecontrolled cave, isolated amidst our own wastes, in which we will have everything we need: color television and all the rest. And as for what we will lack, it will only consist of what is superfluous: fresh air, clean water and silence. This closed world, systematically organized to guarantee man's survival in spite of himself, appears to be inevitable in the short term. The sea of wastes from economic and demographic growth will bring us face to face with a choice, which becomes more inescapable every day, between an anarchy that is necessarily unsustainable over the long term or an equally totalitarian order that will make it possible for us to avoid that anarchy.

In any event, the only way to escape a terminal disaster, whether in the name of health or in that of man's freedom, consists in devoting time to examining the question: the large scale employment of nuclear ingenuity will very soon render this examination urgent. But then we have to learn to consider the means (industry, for example) as secondary with respect to the ends: life and happiness; and to recognize, as scandalous as it may seem, that walking along the banks of a river is just as vital as working in

an office. Why would we want a car that would allow us to escape from the city only to bring us to the banks of another sewer?

## 4. A flood of petroleum

Not long ago, the coastlines of northern Brittany were covered by the "black tide", and the front pages of the newspapers were temporarily blackened by the oily cargo of the *Torrey Canyon*. There have been worse disasters, but this one merits our attention because of its novelty. We are not yet living in the century of the atom, and we no longer live in the century of coal. We are living in the century of hydrocarbons. They transport us and keep us warm, but the oil is also what pollutes our water, poisons our air, and sometimes burns our cities and utterly disrupts our societies.

The only way to properly avail ourselves of this useful and poisonous black gold is to have a perfect understanding of its advantages and its disadvantages. But industrial society, like its predecessors, refuses to be lucid. There is no cost, there is no risk; we build one hundred, one thousand megaton bombs; we build oil tankers that can carry a hundred thousand, five hundred thousand tons of oil, and then what? An accident? But my good man, please be reasonable! Today, ships navigate by au-to-ma-tic pilot. The captain can fall asleep, and the machine will au-to-mat-i-cal-ly bring him to port—or it will run the ship aground. And on the day that a one hundred megaton bomb or a six hundred thousand ton oil tanker explodes, man will perform miracles with a shovel and a bucket.

It is this spirit that explains the incredible optimism of the French officials at the moment that the *Torrey Canyon* ran aground. The director of the national park at Île-de-Bréhat had several days to watch the inexorable catastrophe unfold that would devastate the park; but the experts appear not to have foreseen the impact of the wind. For everyone knows that northwest winds are extraordinarily rare in Brittany and that, besides, they have no influence on the surface of the sea. I am ready to believe it, since *Le Monde* published it in black and white, no matter how much the textbooks tell us that the wind gives rise to waves and currents.

If the oil of Land's End had paid attention to the advice of the experts, it would have peacefully continued, against the wind, in the direction of Greenland, after carefully avoiding the southern coast of Ireland. And it would have disappeared into the sea without affecting either the coasts or the ocean floor. Because crude oil, as everyone knows, is a highly discreet and volatile product. The prefect responsible for managing the black tide announced it to the press: should the oil reach our coast, it would be in the form of a thin film. Furthermore, French technology, unlike English technology, has foreseen everything; our experts had in reserve a miraculous product that will precipitate the oil and at the same time enrich the ocean floor. Oil will solve all the problems caused by oil: Omo will wash the clothing that Shell has befouled.

There is no problem, there are countless options for dealing with the situation, and the press told us all about them. A boom that would surround Brittany, purine pumps to clean the estuaries, refineries to distill the gasoline and the tar heated by our nuclear reactors, sawdust, mobilizing high school children to wash the one hundred thousand marine birds transported in planes to less inhospitable locations, etc. For every evil, science rapidly invents a thousand remedies. As for the oysters, the solution is even easier: the oyster is disciplined; it fraternally waits, calmly and en masse, for the coagulants to precipitate the oil to the bottom of the sea. Nothing could be easier than to order it to relocate to the south, to Arcachon, where it will be able to await better times.

The truth is that the master of nature is, for the moment, disarmed in the face of his own products, especially this one. Everyone knows that oil keeps us warm and fuels our cars; it is used, among other things, to transport a minority of people to distant locations, to the last bodies of water without tar. But oil is also the ideal waste: odorous, iridescent and above all incredibly hard to dispose of. It is not by chance that the Earth retains this precious excrement in its deepest recesses. How do we separate the oil from the water, from the sand or from the rocks? What should we use, a bulldozer or a teaspoon? Napalm or a toothbrush? Between the reef, thick with seaweed, bristling with sharp rocks and crevices, and the oil, there is a mutual attraction: even if the tides and storms give us enough time, I am afraid that our reserves of metal scouring pads will not be sufficient for scrubbing the coasts of Armorica. It is likely that we will have to stop and wait for the tar to disappear naturally; and this will take time, since oil does not decompose, for it is already the quintessence of putrefaction. Happily, with time, it will form part of the landscape; we have already become accustomed to beaches where nylon has replaced seaweed. And in the meantime, all we need to do is put a sign on top of the pile of sticky sludge at the Seven Islands that reads: “A gift from BP.”

Why this vain mobilization against tar? Why this love for sand, for rocks and for the oysters of the Belon, and all this hatred of the indomitable oil? You have to completely lack a sense of *aggiornamento*, the capacity for keeping abreast of the times. Man must be a-dapt-a-ble, he can never insist too much on this manifestation of his freedom. And we are living in the century of Esso. In our era, sand and rocks seem to come from the Jurassic era and the Belon oyster from the Miocene, not to speak of the penguin, barely from the Quaternary, while oil is there, right now, in the estuary of the Tréguier. It smells good, it is edible—or it will be edible, some day. We are victims of a subjectivity inherited from the past, all we need to do is change it to dissolve the oil.

Oil has broken loose, and if man does not put a cork on it, it will go wherever it wants, it will visit Biarritz or Coney Island; it is hard to play on two tables, that of nature and that of industry, you need to have the skill of a tightrope walker and, above all, the cunning of a serpent. We may be assured that oil will go wandering around at the mercy of the winds, waiting to find its port of destination among the rocks somewhere. Or, by virtue of its property of giving off a scent into the air, it

will dissipate into the sky, or it will join with the red mud and nuclear wastes at the bottom of the ocean. Until the day when another generation will pay the price for this economy of pillage. Because sooner or later it will have to be paid, and in many ways. For man, there is nothing free in this world; these are the costs, natural or human, and also the risks, that are commensurate with the enormity of our means. Three hundred thousand tons, six hundred thousand tons.... Some day, one of these tankers will not just run aground on a reef, there will be a collision, and at least twice as much damage. As our means acquire a global scale, our catastrophes will be cosmic, and the Atlantic will be as filthy as an ordinary factory tailings pond.

The least that should have been done with respect to these gigantic oil tankers would have been to consider in advance the possibility of an accident, draft legislation for dealing with the damage, or find a way to immediately destroy the cargo. If these tankers are, so it would seem, profitable, neither the oceans nor the coastal populations should have to pay by being subjected to the risks. If we do not take account of the natural and human effects of industrial and urban civilization, we will have to consider that the end of nature is probable, and that for some time we will survive comfortably amidst all the waste: solid, liquid and acoustic. And if an accident breaks the big machine, it will no longer be just the fish that will rot in the open air, but humanity, suffocated physically and, above all, spiritually.

# II The costs of Megalopolis

The accelerated growth of cities poses problems that are becoming increasingly more difficult to solve because they are too vast, too new, and because the rate at which they are evolving leaves men with no time for reflection. It is becoming an increasingly more complicated problem to assure the circulatory system of this organism stricken by gigantism, that is: to feed it, to distribute its products and to evacuate its excrement. These functions can only be performed at the price of an enormous squandering of energy, a growing complexity of the administrative apparatus and its coercive powers, enormous investments and a rapid degradation of the human material. And the costs of Megalopolis grow even faster than Megalopolis itself. At any price, we have to deliver more energy—and that is still the easiest part—and more water. We have to guarantee the transportation of living beings, dispose of the corpses and other wastes. Megalopolis is a city under siege, but it is only besieged by its own mass. That is why it can only be saved by the sacrifice, increasingly more pronounced, of its liberties.

## 1. Scarcity through abundance

As people accumulate, the city-monster accumulates wealth. If we are to believe the statistics, the average income is much higher in Paris than anywhere else: you need only drive through Aubervilliers to be convinced of this. But the statistics do not take certain kinds of wealth into account, such as, for example, space, time, silence, air and freedom. I propose that we should calculate the price in francs of a square meter or a cubic meter of fresh air, as they do with kilowatts; are they not equally necessary for the comfort of the average citizen? And thus we would be able to obtain a much more precise idea of the average income of the Parisian. It is not money that is lacking in Megalopolis; besides, the bigger the city, the more it needs, since here everything has to be bought. Paris is a insatiable monster that relentlessly demands, both from society and from individuals, money and more money. And it is here that you have to pay, and at a very high price, for the authentic goods that are free elsewhere, particularly space: fifty thousand persons share one square kilometer in downtown Paris.

The city, which was always the human environment par excellence, the Jerusalem where the human species tried to create a microcosmos that would meet the requirements of its spirit, might very well become the center of inhumanity par excellence; but it would be a social inhumanity, since the currents of this maelstrom are made of men and their products. The urban world is becoming a concentration camp world

that the density of the crowds and above all of their machines is rendering increasingly more uninhabitable. It is true that man has the capacity for adaptation: to escape the noise he can make himself deaf; he can make himself blind to protect himself from the intense glow of the propaganda; and he can make himself insensible to man in order to free himself from human propinquity. But if the urban tide must continue to rise, then there will be no other alternative than to perish physically or spiritually, and to cease to be a man: to renounce the use of one's senses and, even more, of one's consciousness.

I will not belabor the physical threat that physicians have so often denounced and have described in detail as that pathology of the city that they have called "urbanitis". Even if the use of hydrocarbons for heating and transportation continues to increase without provoking physiological reactions, air pollution will reach the threshold beyond which the organism can no longer endure it. Meanwhile, one can only suffer, and breathe this air that is full of odors that only become more concentrated under the dense skies of the cities. And drink and bathe in water that is only the "recycled" water from their sewers: just like the survivors of shipwrecks, the city is obliged to drink its own urine. An advertisement for Evian shows us a young boy drinking big gulps of water from a spring.[1] Poor unfortunate! He had everything he needed to be happy—television, cars—but he would die of thirst in this desert, and not only because of a shortage of water.

And the more strictly human—that is, noble and therefore delicate—the functions that it performs, the greater will be the danger that the urbanization of the city will have disastrous results. The noise attacks our nerves. It is unthinkable to walk down boulevards where machines roar as if you are in a factory. Conversation and listening become impossible. The city, whose center was once a promenade and an agora, has become a place where one is silent amidst a constant racket. Just as he breathes air that is increasingly more full of particulates, our contemporary city dweller lives in an atmosphere that is increasingly more dominated by noise: what use is it to prohibit blowing your horn ten times, if a thousand motors are roaring simultaneously? Like a man with a fever, the city dweller no longer grasps reality except as a buzzing sensation that corresponds to the degree of his stupor. His wounded sensibility is exasperated; on the other hand, however, these impressions, repeated again and again, end up generating scar tissue under which his sensibility atrophies. Adapt or go insane: the only protest that is raised today against the inhumanity of the huge modern urban agglomerations is the plebiscite of skyrocketing rates of neurosis. The proliferation of delusional thinking follows hard on the heels of the progress of comfort.

The city lacks, above all, space; an element whose substitute the city has not managed to manufacture up until now. How can we accommodate—we might as well say store—so many persons? As soon as you find places for them, the flood brings more. The city's reason for existence was to shelter man behind walls, to give him a roof over his head, a function that, however, it no longer serves. The housing crisis, especially in

[1] Cf. *Paris-Match*, 1966-1968 [author's note].

Europe and the socialist countries, develops in parallel with the growth of the cities; it seems as if, the more housing is constructed in them, the harder it is to find a place to live. The same thing can be said about housing that we have said about water supplies or traffic: if resources increase by 10%, the urban population increases by 20%, and the situation gets worse. Perhaps the only way to put an end to this inhuman growth of certain urban agglomerations would be to allow the scarcity of housing to reach a threshold that, by making it obvious how disadvantageous it is to live there, will discourage people from relocating to them. To the contrary, however, the development of the means that are intended to solve the problem only exacerbates it: the traffic problem will not be solved with more costly and ridiculous parking lots, but by the impossibility of driving in the cities. Under current conditions, except for the rich and government personnel, the question is no longer to inhabit the city, but to make do, one way or another, with a hole in the wall:

concerning this point, progress has come to a halt. With the astronomical prices of real estate, our apartments jammed full of machines are smaller and noisier: we have sacrificed the essential on behalf of the superfluous. Theoretically, we have the technology to soundproof apartments; in practice, we do not use it because it is too expensive, not even in our schools. And although we have central heating, we lack living space. Walls? Often a luxury! A roof, even if it is made of mass produced roofing materials? Thousands of us are squeezed into one building to have a single roof. No one bothers with the beauty of the material, what matters is how fast it can be built; all our cities are cities built in a hurry.

And the population is still flowing into our cities. And let us not forget that with regard to urbanization we are only at the very beginning of the process: if we are to believe the experts, the rate of growth of the cities must rise steadily, almost vertically, that is, to the absolute. To allow this phenomenon to continue, if not to control it, however, the architects only have two choices: to build vertically or horizontally; or, failing this, to combine the two modalities one way or another. In France, after the Liberation, the most logical option was chosen: to stack the population vertically. With the return to the asphalt that occurred after the "return to the land", the myth of a technological collective life encouraged the construction of these "shining cities" and those vast complexes of high rise apartment buildings that were not so "shiny". Now everyone admits that these hastily constructed cement beehives are more appropriate for bees than for people, whose response, to the extent that they possessed the means to do so, was to look for a single family house or, failing that, at least a smaller apartment building. We must recognize that a minimum of solitude and private existence is just as elementary a need as bread. But if the single family home exercises such attraction, the miserable little cottage in the forest of Saint Cucuphas can be converted into an exclusive *dacha* for either a big capitalist or some high level government official, depending on the case.

Nor does the current inhabitant of the city have any chance to find space for himself or for his children outside of his apartment, because all the space is occupied by

cars: every square or sidewalk is a potential parking lot. For the French municipal councilman, who is still too close to his rural origins as a peasant "commoner", the part corresponding to the "green zone" is purely literary: an opportunity to dream or to make speeches. And the city becomes an asphalt plain studded with cement silos for the storage of human beings. The Anglo-Saxon towns, and the Nordic towns, more sensitive to nature or urbanized much earlier, display a concern, on the other hand, with humanizing their neighborhoods by dispersing houses amidst vegetation; and apart from the downtown skyscrapers, the single family home is generally the norm. These green stretches, however, in which the same charming little cottage with the same front lawn is repeated endlessly, were always luxury zones. And in the United States these comfortable deserts even have a tendency to evacuate the white population from the cities properly speaking, transforming the latter into impoverished suburbs. The urban explosion ends up destroying the city, and only leaves it with a single choice between verticality, which threatens to inflict an ischemic stroke on the city center, or horizontality, the confused deployment of an undifferentiated fabric where the automotive lymph circulates endlessly.

## 2. The threat of ischemic stroke

In Europe at least, the threat we face is that of an ischemic stroke. In the big city there is no space, so it can only survive by causing men and things to circulate at high speed. Only at the cost of great efforts would it be possible to irrigate and drain this enormous organism. In the countryside and the small cities people live in the same area where they work, or, if by chance they live somewhere else, they can drive their cars to work on almost empty roads. In the big cities, on the other hand, they have to drive many kilometers and, above all, lose precious time because of traffic jams. And often their children must look for a college or high school on the other side of the city, at an age when the organism does not tolerate boredom. People go to the city, among other reasons, because they find a wide variety of means of transportation there. This same multiplicity of opportunities, however, ends up hindering the effectiveness of the transport networks. And someone who is shocked when a colleague cheerfully moves to a house in the middle of the countryside, a five minute drive from a little village, will find it perfectly logical to live in a suburb that is a one hour drive from his job in Paris. For what is terrifying to him is not the commuting time, but the idea of leaving the city; and five minutes from Tarbes you are outside of Tarbes, while one hour from Paris you are still in Paris.

To have a job, the city dweller must drive or take public transportation, but he drives even more when he is not working. When he is in the city, he wants to leave it, and he is all more intent on doing so when the city closes in on him; on Saturday, a kind of volcanic fever precipitates the urban masses towards the exits of the highways

and the *man-car*[2] must, here as well, "get in line" at the gates of freedom. A good part of the life of the city dweller is spent traveling. His work day is measured out by the implacable timetable of the commuter train stations; for him, dawn and sunset are nothing but a black tunnel humming with wheels, a freight car in which the human cattle are jammed, as if, every day, he was going to war. All he can do is defend himself, lock himself up in his shell, become immobile like a rock; remain inert, blind to the faces that besiege him from every side, to the deafening chaos from which he flees on the other side of the grimy windows. The man who takes the subway at six does not look at anything; and if anyone by chance looks at him, they will immediately look away, because they will sense that they are committing some kind of violation.

The daily transport of masses of human beings imposes a waste of labor and money on society, and this enormous system only survives because the whole nation subsidizes it: it is all the same whether this involves commuter trains or expensive highways. Above all, however, man pays the price: the 19$^{th}$ century had its grueling industrial jobs, ours has the daily hell of commuting. Every day, the worker must add to the duration of his working day an increment of time that is equally laborious: one or two hours of added servitude, that is the fee that the Frenchman pays for the privilege of being Parisian. Every morning he has to traverse that gloomy purgatory presided over by the Saint-Lazare train station. And, under the ominous full moon of the clock, both in the morning and in the evening, he repeats, like a robot, from the ticket booth to the turnstile, the magical gestures that will open the door of his home. And for the less favored inhabitants of the suburbs, those who live in the distant "bedroom communities", beyond the time that lies between that dawn and that sunset, all that remains is the night.

Besides its discomfort, the horror of mass transit has favored the myth of the automobile. And yet every neighboring city has sought to provide itself with its own subway, whose hours of operation it can fix in accordance with its needs. But the city is the territory of the masses rather than that of individuals: when all of them really try to be individuals, this leads to chaos. This is what is currently taking place in the old cities of Europe, especially in Paris.[3] The automobile ended up turning commuting into a hellish ordeal. In cities without subways, cars block the passage of the buses and a trip that should take five minutes takes thirty instead, and it is increasingly more common for workers who used to go home to eat lunch to be unable to do so anymore. This is why the "continuous working day" was established. But this system only makes the five o'clock or six o'clock commute even worse; so that neighborhoods that in the past were close the commercial and industrial districts now run the risk of being transformed into "bedroom communities", too.

[2] An allusion to the author's book, *L'Hommauto*—to which he refers below—written in 1967. A selection of passages from this book, translated into Spanish by Javier Rodríguez Hidalgo, was published in 2007 in issue no. 3 of the magazine, *Resquicios* [Spanish translator's note].

[3] See my book, *L'Hommauto* [author's note].

Thus, the multiplication of movement tends to give rise to immobility; the dreaded "traffic jam" has come to obsess the city's administrators as much as riots. And at least in France, and especially in Paris, everything is done with traffic in mind. The docks of the Seine will be demolished, the parks will be converted into parking lots, and houses will be destroyed if necessary: that is how the Paris of Renault is built, since it is not the Paris of the Parisians. But the car is more demanding than man and it is hardly likely, if the inhabitants of the city are not expelled to surrender it to the car— which is already the case for a good number of squares and sidewalks—that its demands can be satisfied. The day will come when there will be no other remedy than to prohibit private vehicles. The result of urban individualism, on this terrain as on so many others, is its own negation.

**3. Chaos or termite mound?**

The bigger the urban agglomeration gets, the harder it will be to conceive, much less control, the development of the city. Paris only survives by extracting resources from the surrounding region; if all of France were to be converted into a formless urban zone, where would it obtain its air, its water, its space? By organizing, rationing, and compelling the human material, which is infinitely malleable.

The growth of the cities increasingly condemns them to having to choose between chaos and the termite mound; and meanwhile, both are advancing at the same time. It is—or rather it was—a commonplace to consider the big city as a termite mound; and, as long as the city was still the heart of individualism, this was an unfair characterization. Unfortunately, the very moment when this expression went out of fashion was also when it began to reflect reality. Like the termite mound, the new urban agglomeration has a tendency to build cement towers with countless climate controlled cells, while its network of activities is buried in the ground. Above all, however, the increasingly more dense masses of human beings and machines that swarm through its passageways are becoming increasingly more uniform, less independent, more strictly subject to remote control by the collective; their survival demands this. As in the termite mound, this uniform mass is increasingly divided into categories that ignore each other and that are distinguished by the gestures and the language of their functions. Blind and deaf, but strictly informed by the messages emitted by an unknown central command center, they toil away in an indifferent and closed world, increasingly more enormous and rigid, without feeling this growing pressure as anything but a vague unease. Unless, on some auspicious day, a catastrophe blows up the termite mound, bringing, too late, with the light of day, death.

The quantitative increase of the urban population and its activity entails qualitative effects. The city that we now have before our eyes is completely different in its external aspect, in the life that its inhabitants lead and, finally, in their spirit. The home of individualism, of intellectual, moral and political revolutions, the city might very well turn into its opposite: the place where social pressures attain their maximum intensity, and life attains its maximum impersonality. Thus, the walls of the city, which for so long had protected man from the oppression of nature, allowing him to live in a place

whose proportions were human, will end up being the walls of his prison. And from this prison, which will cover the entire Earth, there will no longer be any escape.

Until recent times, urban society, that of Paris during the Third Republic, for example, was constituted by two antithetical terms: the masses and the individual. The external framework that contained the masses spared the individual from the narrow and unendurable social relations that characterized the village. Once he had given unto Caesar, that is, to the guardian and patron, that which is Caesar's, man was free to ignore his fellow man: nowhere was he more alone than in the midst of the crowd. But the sky was always open over his roof, and there was enough time to find a friend; and in the street, the voice of the city was not yet so loud as to drown out all conversation. Between the chains of the past and those of the future, a very fragile and precarious freedom began to be born. To help its birth along, however, it was necessary for the city dweller to become more closely acquainted with it.

Human freedom is not an absolute, it is caught on the horns of a dilemma: it only escapes natural determinations by submitting to the determinism of the social organization, which protects it by absorbing it. In the limiting case, if we are not careful, we only exchange one set of chains for another, more terrible set of chains, because it is within man. This is particularly true with respect to the city, which is the spatial concretion of society. Once it exceeds a certain size, the city threatens to destroy a freedom which is, in other respects, born within it. More than ever before, the city-monster multiplies the superficial contacts between individuals, while at the same time preserving their anonymity. On the other hand, however, the autonomy of each person is limited by the dense masses of the others, and man suffers in his innermost being from the impact of social currents and stereotypes, at the same time that the preoccupation with preserving his privacy drives him to conduct himself among other people in such a way as to pass unnoticed. Finally, such a complicated machine can only function under skilled management and with docile masses. And the greater the number of people and things, the more subtle and meticulous this organization must be.

The more the city grew, the more it restricted freedom; the proliferation of regulations went hand in hand with the proliferation of buildings. Then the Paris traffic became a kind of Kafkaesque ritual whose understanding, and above all whose reasons, were reserved for a handful of initiates. Once a certain level of development was reached, it was evident that the pedestrian could no longer cross the street just anywhere; he had to do so only at pedestrian crossings, or else face a fine—or death. And this need for conformity spread to all everyday conduct; thus, freedom was expelled from customs before it was eliminated from speech and laws. It is true that the city dweller is hardly aware of this, insofar as obedience has become a reflex reaction for him. An effective government, and a subject that is amenable to its directives, are the indispensable preconditions for the operations of enormous societies. The management of the city therefore tends to escape the hands of its elected representatives in order to fall into those of the administrative heads of the various departments and technicians,

who end up becoming the invisible masters of the city—and are in turn subject to the pressure of that enormous organism. In many cases, the city is so large that it comes to depend exclusively on the technocrats of the central government. The city, which was once autonomous, is no longer anything but one element of a single whole, even when, as in the case of Paris, it becomes its center.

However, because the city dweller is not yet perfect, that is, he is not yet adapted, it is necessary to compel him to comply. He must have police: that scandalous sign that, for the whole monster-city, denies freedom, testifies to its survival. The police are therefore increasingly more numerous and influential; but we must not forget that their political power is justified by their technical functions. The mythology of the big cities testifies to this fact, by causing the myth of the hated "*poli*" of the special brigades to coexist with the myth of the friendly traffic cop.

The explicit coercion exercised by the police is evidence of the persistence of rebellion. Everything tends to make the Megalopolis a kind of social ticking time bomb in which violent explosions of rage follow long periods of apathy; at least as long as there was no sociology that would allow for the manipulations of persons as well as of things. The destruction of all internal social frameworks—trade, neighborhood, reason and morality, family— favors a freedom that now prevents no one, in theory, from doing whatever they want, while in practice they constantly run up against prohibitions. Everywhere, the city invites us to have fun, and spend money, but the

poorest people, the youngest people, cannot satisfy these instincts that the city excites at every step. Hence the malaise, which is normally confined to the ghettoes of the city's outskirts or to the "criminal underworld", and above all repressed in the unconscious of the city dwellers. The cold, shiny order of the big city has always had its dark underside, a hell, concerning which popular literature and novels provide us a glimpse. Behind the scenes, however, this disorder continues to ferment until it suddenly explodes in riots, which sometimes turn into revolutions. The first stage of urbanization favored the riots of Paris and Lyon under the July monarchy, back when they still had their political motives or pretexts: whereas the "purposeless" revolt of the *blousons noirs* and the black ghettoes of the North American cities, or the anarchist uprisings in Berlin, and, especially, in Paris in 1968, take the form of a pure explosion of violence in which the most wretched and those with the most far-reaching demands fraternize. Then the cobblestones fly, and the cars burn: the people once again take control of the street. Later, the repression gets underway and order is reestablished. And it would appear that this instinctive revolt is condemned to be the victim of the environment that engendered it as long as it does not subject that environment to a systematic examination. Thus, calm returns, in which new storm clouds accumulate.

Beyond a certain level of urban growth, it is no longer possible to choose between the termite mound and chaos. Order gives rise to extreme disorder, and vice versa. The smallest accident—a war or a strike—transforms Paris into a pandemonium of people and cars. And since it is evident that chaos, unlike the termite mound, which is climate controlled, only brings inconveniences in its wake, the easiest thing to do is to

endlessly reinforce the forces of coercion. While it is impossible to gauge the periodicity of urban explosions, prohibitions can always be multiplied: if the catacombs cannot be transformed into parking lots, private cars can be prohibited in the city limits. It is possible that some day science will succeed in creating individuals as undifferentiated as peas in a pod, and then, saved from disorder, the city will be able to expand until it covers the entire Earth.

# III The birth of the rural suburb

Until 1945, industrial agriculture only really existed in the United States and in a few new countries. The second industrial revolution—that of hydrocarbons and chemistry—imposed it on the fields of Europe. And, very soon, France will become the rural suburb of Paris.

## 1. Agricultural "revolution" and industrial "revolution"

The first wave of technological change, based mainly on steam power, bypassed and isolated the countryside without penetrating it. The rail network carved up the rural space, but within these rural islands, up until 1914, one had to take a horse-drawn cart from the train station to get to town, and sometimes one had to walk from the town to the village. And the penetration of ideas, trades and customs was even slower. To cross the horizon of hedges that enclosed the horizon of the peasant was for him to cross over into another world. To cause him to leave his island required very good reasons: a serious illness or an inheritance. For many French peasants, the barracks or the trenches were the only opportunities they ever had to get to know another world. Thus, lodged between the veins and the nerves of the modern network of circulation, the countryside constituted a kind of inert tissue: a silent reservation of space and of people which nourished the dynamism of the cities.

Two institutions began to integrate it: the military and compulsory education. The latest wars uprooted the peasantry and put them in contact with the cities, their masses, their offices and their machines; although they temporarily reinvigorated peasant life, the wars ultimately provided the impulse for an ever larger rural exodus. For the peasantry, however, even more than for the city dweller, war is a holiday outside of time, a nightmare without any relation to everyday reality. War is nothing but a terrifying cataclysm, a gigantic storm, that one suffers but does not understand. In the barracks or at the front, the bewildered yokel bided his time and waited for the return of good times. The return to the country and to his everyday activities, after the descent into the hell of 1914-1918, left him with only a memory of a journey to the Moon: an opportunity to brag about his exploits at the local tavern. The disorders of 1939-1945 would have a more lasting effect.

In its early days, not even elementary education would transform the countryside more rapidly. The school of Jules Ferry was conceived for the country, for the context

of the small towns. That is why it contributed to the survival of that environment as much as helped to put an end to it. It played an important political role, by leading the peasants to vote for the left in the south half of France, but its cultural and moral influence took longer to have an effect. Although democratic, elementary education was a kind of bourgeois colonization of the countryside. At the same time that he learned to read and write, the young peasant had to unlearn some things, too: his language and his folk culture; the latter would be restored to the rural world by the school, but only when the urban bourgeoisie decided to do so. And the teachers of the Third Republic participated all the more eagerly in this enterprise of colonization insofar as they were the children of peasants, for whom becoming bourgeois represented social advancement. This is why, as long as the Church was the center of the rural landscape, the school was generally a building isolated in the backwoods, lost in the forest, like a lost child, but today it is sacrificed, and sent to the front ranks of the great army of the city. It is possible to imagine a different evolution, in which the school could have been the extension of the Church among the people, embedded in nature and in tradition at the same time that it contributed, with education, the dimension of consciousness. But it may be that the peasant can only become conscious by dying in order to be reborn.

Given that the period of instruction was then limited, the peasant rapidly returned to the cycle of works and days; he once again spoke in his local dialect, even if he did so with a certain sense of shame. And he allowed himself to once again be bound to the soil. And it would appear that prior to 1939 the influence of the "mass media" did not yet replace the school. The countryman only read a local newspaper that told him in detail about the insignificant events in his canton. This is why his political perspective was hardly elevated, for good or for ill, above issues that were of personal interest for him. Going to the movies was a big event, a festive night out; and rural electrification did not imply the generalization of the ownership of radios. It is true that the automobile began to change the habits of the peasants; but the bus only shortened the journeys that he previously made in a horse-drawn cart. At first, and above all, the car favored the penetration of the bourgeoisie in the rural world.

But the Second World War, even more than the First, brought a new wave of progress, illuminated by the flash of Hiroshima. From then on, thanks to high yield sources of energy—oil and electricity—there was no place that could not be rapidly traversed or whose most remote corners could not be accessed. The power of technology attained cosmic dimensions; it created artificial seas behind walls of cement; it changed the course of rivers, it made them flow uphill to irrigate deserts. But it also made advances with respect to flexibility and subtlety; by miniaturizing the machine, electricity and hydrocarbons were introduced everywhere. The tractor ceased to be the monopoly of the big landowners, and mechanical tools—the tiller and the chainsaw—penetrated the garden and the hunting preserve. Chemical products—we can also call them poisons—fertilized the soil and reduced the labor of the peasant by killing weeds and scrub. Since, however, they had to be paid for, they ultimately made

the peasant work more. Rural electrification and the municipal provision of water, at the same time that they made life easier, multiplied the number of things that had to be done, integrating the farmer into the urban system. Agricultural outreach services, the mainstream press and above all television, as well as the need to be kept informed about the vagaries of the market or legislation, ended up dragging the countryside into the orbit of the cities. And the rural population acquired cars. Following in the footsteps of the urban population, the rural population began to be uprooted.

## 2. Agricultural "revolution" and political "revolution"

The countryside was an exception that could not last indefinitely; industrial society tends to constitute a unity; it must therefore integrate this alien element. In a new country like the United States, this task posed no problem since there was neither a countryside nor a peasantry, but only wilderness and a handful of Indians. In that virgin land, the agricultural enterprise, like the big plantations in the colonial countries, was constituted according to the capitalist model, manufacturing standardized industrial products for the world market. Wherever there were older and more complex rural societies, however, destruction was a necessary prelude to construction. Because the mechanism of competition was not sufficient, a full scale attack was necessary—a kind of war—to liberate industrial society from that dead weight that hindered its advance; what was needed was the action of the State.

War paved the way for the revolution that would follow. The revolution of 1917 may be considered from this point of view as a battle waged by the city against the country; a war of Education and Ideas against ignorance and instinct, a war for the urbanization of rural society. To win the support of the peasants, Lenin had to begin by promising them, along with peace, land. But to turn them into proletarians, he immediately had to uproot them by collectivizing their property; later, we would again encounter this same procedure in the people's democracies. But the forced transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society is not without its difficulties: this was just as true in China as in Russia. In these countries, agricultural progress did not proceed at the same rate as industrial development—far from it—because the peasantry, abruptly separated from its land, opposed the project of integration with an unorganized and unconscious force of inertia. In this way, despite increasing mechanization, yields sometimes declined, particularly in stock raising, where the human bond between the producer and the product is even more important. Only rationing, organizing on the basis of scarcity, made it possible to prevent famines. And the only thing the State could do was to reestablish the Kolkhoz market, and allow private cultivation of gardens and raising livestock. And the same agronomists who in France celebrate the virtues of large scale agriculture tell us that in Russia most of the pro-

duction of fruit, vegetables and poultry is due to "small scale, family farms that do not rely on outside labor".

These brutal methods are not the most effective ones, however, and the statistics for rural population (around 30% in the USSR, as opposed to 12% in the United States) show us that the liquidation of the peasantry is much more advanced in the countries at the cutting edge of the vanguard of capitalism than in the socialist countries. And between 1955 and 1965, the mere mechanization of the French countryside destroyed an apparently immobile peasantry more rapidly than any political revolution could have done. As in Russia, this revolution was the result of a plan, drafted in France's case by empiricists rather than ideologues. And as was the case in Russia, France passed through two stages: the technological revolution destroyed the property that the political revolution had granted: the Monnet plan uprooted the peasants who had been embedded in the soil in 1789 when they were given land. Except that this process, which began much earlier, took a century and a half instead of a few years.

Under the Third Republic, the landowning peasantry was a secure repository of values; anyone who questioned small scale property was suspected of being either a fascist or a revolutionary. This unanimity, however, was not itself exempt from contradictions. The Right saw small scale peasant landownership as an element of social stability: hence the role of the rural communes in the election of the Senate, and the protectionist laws of Méline. On the other hand, however, the financial power of capitalism increasingly relied on the concentration of industries and goods; and when it had to choose between its principles and its wallet, the Right never hesitated to decide in favor of the latter. As for the Left, it also had its Vendée, blue or red, on the fields of the Midi. The Third Republic was simultaneously a capitalist oligarchy and a rural democracy, unlike Weimar Germany; and it was this peasantry of small landowners, the base of the Radical Party and even of the SFIO (the French Section of the International Workingmen's Association—Unified Socialist Party), which probably prevented it from becoming a fascist State during the crisis of 1934. But the Left also had its own contradiction; it was in favor of the "little guys", but it was also in favor

of progress, which presupposed the concentration of the means of production. As long as it maintained its commitment to freedom and democracy, it defended small scale property; but from the moment when the taste for power and for efficiency, as well as its socialist ideology, were imposed on its values, it, too, ended up accepting the idea of the liquidation of an institution that was condemned by History.

The final crisis of the French countryside is characterized by both the idealization and the subsequent denigration of the peasantry. The defeat and the Petainist reaction led to the momentary glorification of "the land that does not lie". But with the Liberation, the Parisian bourgeoisie that had sung the praises of the virtues of the life of fresh air to the French returned to the city; and, for a generation, the countryside was identified with those dark years when, in order to get an egg, you had to beg for it from the hicks. The miseries of the war would once again cast a new luster on the little car and on progress. Anxiety and absurdity were reserved for professionals— philosophers

and writers—and it was evident that, with respect to serious matters, that is, material ones, human progress depended exclusively on the rational expansion of production.

In this inversion of values, the Catholic Church played an important role. Traditionally right wing, backed by the rural masses among whom it recruited its parishioners and its priests, it ended up committing to reaction with its precipitous support for Petainism. When the reactionaries lost the war, they had to redeem themselves by playing, like the capitalist bourgeoisie, the card of industry and the city. A new generation of Catholic intellectuals and militants set to work replacing the myth of Sin with the myth of Progress. They did so with the enthusiasm and lack of critical spirit characteristic of repentant reactionaries, for whom the ideology of progress was totally new. The vanguard of working class priests was set in opposition, not without some friction, to the bulk of the rural priests. The *Jeunesse agricole catholique* (JAC) discovered the tractor with the undimmed faith of the primitive Church. It was these Catholic peasants, now transformed into trade unionists, agricultural educators or agricultural engineers, who were responsible for the accelerated liquidation of the countryside. A liquidation that was at the same time an act of suicide.

## 3. The Plan and the countryside

The engineers are therefore responsible for the destiny of the country; meanwhile, legislatures and parties are responsible for maintaining the smokescreen and veil of words without which the technocracy would be rejected by the public. The economy is managed: this management is oriented towards the economy itself, that is, for the purpose of achieving an accelerated growth of production. This is why the growth of agricultural production must lead to the destruction of the countryside: the economy commands, society obeys. How could the economists have considered it from any other point of view? How could engineers conceive of the countryside except as an industry? If the Monnet Plan had been drafted by theologians, they would have considered the countryside exclusively from the point of view of the construction of cathedrals. From this perspective, the French countryside was obviously "underdeveloped" and it would not even have made any sense to distinguish, for example, between a rich region like Alsace and an impoverished region like Brittany. Since those who defined this "development" were Western bourgeoisie, they logically took their society as the standard of measurement. The criteria were exclusively technical: yields per hectare, energy consumption, possession of an automobile or a telephone. Certain other, more basic factors, or even ones more necessary for life, were not taken into account: soil conservation, the taste of the products, space, time, the purity of the air and water. Even less consideration was given to certain human factors, such as the fact of being one's own master. If "development" is defined in this manner, Babbitt, caught between his bathtub and his television, stuffed full of proteins and newspapers, is obviously infinitely more developed than Socrates or Jesus. This naive economism explains why

the opportunity to launch a real modernization of the countryside was missed, which would have enriched it without destroying it, and which would have entailed greater benefits for the inhabitants of the city as well as the inhabitants of the countryside.

It was therefore necessary to transform the countryside, or, more accurately, to liquidate it; otherwise, economic expansion would have been curtailed. The Plan therefore called for a transition from subsistence agriculture to market agriculture that would integrate the peasant into the cycle of money and machinery. Agriculture had to be mechanized and it had to consume more chemical products: Renault and Pechiney agreed. The peasant could have his car and spend his vacations in nature with Trigano.[1]

But market agriculture, like the tractor, requires a social base. Small scale farming was not profitable, at least from this point of view. It was therefore necessary to bring about the disappearance of the majority of the small farms, to concentrate a myriad of smaller parcels into larger parcels, and, above all, to foster the concentration of ownership: this would free a mass of workers who were indispensable for industrial expansion. Two tractors per square kilometer were required in zones with no more than fifty inhabitants. And then the textbooks that had previously lamented the "depopulation" of the countryside, began to deplore its "overpopulation": fortunately, the decline of the rural population did not take long to follow in the wake of progress as measured by the production of tractors and the yield per hectare.

This brought an end to the contradiction of the first industrial

"transformation", characterized by the extensive division of property in the rural sector and its concentration in the industrial sector. With respect to this question, however, as with respect to so many other questions, the transition from the past to the future took place without consciousness imposing its mediation on these contradictory terms. And even today we still find left wing agronomists who, with respect to the Mediterranean countries, simultaneously advocate agrarian reform and the mechanization of agriculture, without asking themselves if these terms are not antithetical, and without asking why small scale property has been more efficient than the large scale plantation in the Mediterranean countries for so many years. How can the tension between the values of freedom and democracy be reconciled with the demands of progress? They just do not think about it at all.

During the first stage of industrial development, the countryside escaped the clutches of rationalization, and Taylor ruled only in the factory. In the second stage, with the whole country in the process of being transformed into a factory, the Plan could no longer continue to ignore the rural areas; space had become too precious, for the first time France was considered as a whole and the "regional planners", now possessing the effective weapons tested during the war, could contemplate the systematic planning of whole regions, their populations and their activities. Urban planning, whose ageold failures are so well known, had sought to subject nature to

[1] Gilbert Trigano (1920-2001), president of Club Méditerranée [Spanish translator's note].

reason in the cities; the methods of regional planning—or, to use the term coined by LeLannou, regional "disordering"—was then extended to the countryside.[2]

Up until then, rural space was the affair of geographers. But geography, as its name indicates, was primarily descriptive: its object was to understand, rather than to transform. Its science did not take the form of a technical discipline. The geographer was basically, without knowing it, the victim of his love for the countryside. He travelled in and studied regions through the lens of their landscapes, attempting to discern the reasons for the local equilibrium, which had been achieved gradually, between the natural environment and human society. Geography—Vidal Lablache's introduction to Lavisse's *History of France*, for example—is the description and subtle understanding of what exists; "active geography" is nothing but a plan for action. Geography might ultimately be transformed into a technical discipline, and the geographer might then satisfy his desire for power. Now, he can get in on the action, too: eviscerating the land, evacuating towns; and, as the chief engineer, the State or the big corporations will pay for his services and he will be respected as a result. The geographer, who was once a simple doctor, will then become a surgeon and in the future he will have at his disposal, like a scalpel, the H-bomb.

If the geographer has been taking his time to think, the regional planner, or, more accurately, the urban planner of the total suburb, has no time to lose. Impelled by indisputable truths, which are those of the society to which he belongs, he charges forward like a bulldozer. The France of regional planning is the France of production and profit; at best, the France of the leisure industry. The planner allocates the factories and the warehouses; he distributes the buildings, he lays out the routes of the highways and draws up the plans for the airports. And wherever investments do not appear to be profitable, he sends the army of machines to the mountains or to the coast to build the future public park. But since there is no way to stop demographic and industrial progress, we can be sure that regional planning, barring some kind of catastrophe, will never end. Furthermore, future generations will have plenty of reasons for revising this botched "regional planning" that was guided by purely economic rationality.[3] The bulldozers will then return, soon enough, to erase the work of other bulldozers. Thus, after the France of landscapes, we will see the France of desolate construction and demolition sites.

[2] Cf. M. LeLannou, *Le Déménagement du territoire* [author's note].

[3] Cf. Jean Labasse, *L'Organisation de l'espace: éléments de géographie volontaire*. Jean Labasse is the president of the scientific research program on "Urbanization". His book gives you an idea of just how "regional planning" works. [Author's note.]

# IV Aspects of the new garden suburb of Greater Paris

There are countries whose landscapes were slowly created by human activity. These landscapes were countless, yet everywhere the form of the countrysides and orchards, the arrangement of the pastures and woods, the location and the style of the houses, all constituted a totality in which each part participated: the beauty of the landscape was nothing but this totality. Whereas today, when logic nonetheless claims to rule everything, we find a chaos of debris and half-finished projects whose elements clash at random. The landscape is decomposing, at the same time that the peasantry is disappearing. We hope that it will be reborn.

## 1. The end of the landscape

The countryside, or the city worthy of the name, is generally a pleasure to behold: anyone who has travelled though it has savored the countless details of the landscape; whereas, rich or poor, you drive through a suburb without even seeing it, even with your eyes wide open. The countryside is undergoing the first stage of the process of urbanization, however, like the cities of a hundred years ago. It is being transformed into a suburb, but the landscape of the industrial environment in its beginning phase is more like that of Aubervilliers than that of Queens. Thus, the beauty of nature or the countryside is made up of apparently squandered space and wealth, and from now on everything has to be profitable. In the new space composed of terrain devoted to industrial crops and utilitarian buildings, only pure utility subsists, without anything that could satisfy the spirit or the senses. Soon, in this void in which the tractors roar, there will be nothing but hectares; there will be no trees, only cubic meters of wood; there will be no hedges or walls, only fences topped with barbed wire; there will be neither forests nor meadows, only corn or wheat; there will be no houses, only residential modules. A countryside or a landscape will exist only in certain cultural zones administered by the Museum of Man. But only if our society realizes that the preservation of a forest or a town has as much value as the preservation of a cathedral.

The landscape is formed of a complex structure of roads and enclosures that highlight and unify the diversity of fields, fallow lands and woodlots. The impact of industrialization erases all this in one stroke; and it is just as violent as one would expect. The agricultural revolution is laying waste to the French countryside, leaving nothing

in its wake except an empty expanse, dusty or muddy, in which the tractor traces its straight line towards the horizon. There it goes, indifferent to the lay of the land and to the past: all that counts is the yield per hectare and the immediate profit. The landscape loses its structure; perhaps traces of its existence survive under the furrows, as in those Neolithic fields revealed by aerial photography. And it loses its diversity; the countryside formerly lived amidst every tint of brown and green—in the future there will only be one color, depending on the season—and it turns green as if it was painted.

Industry is obliged to make a profit, and that is why it is standardized. That is why the agricultural industry replaces deciduous trees with conifers, and willows with Canadian poplars, which are then cut down as soon as they reach the necessary diameter. What good are all those patches of shadow and gold, which grow slowly, and turn towards the sun, from the depths of time: the woodlot with its oaks and beech trees? They are no good at all, they take centuries to grow and their wood is too knotty; Capital and the State are replacing them with industrial forests. The French mountains, after the German mountains, will thus be covered in a monotonous mantle of mourning.

The countryside is being evacuated, and not just of men; all its substance is being lost due to the countless roads that are eviscerating it. Previously built to conform to the contours of the land, the roads, which once took the habitat into account, formed part of the landscape; bordered with trees, they even contributed to its beautification. Now that the trees have been cut down, what remains of the insipid plain of Lower Languedoc? The local roads of the 19$^{th}$ century were an example of successful modernization, which humanizes rather than destroys what it transforms; what a pleasure to ride on those winding roads on a bicycle from the farm to the village, between two hedges, going deeper into the heart of this land! But today the roads are no longer roads, they are just openings, galleries open to the sky where cars perforate space, launching pads that cut the country in two in a much more continuous way than the railroads ever did. For their part, the side roads, which are multiplying thanks to the bulldozers, constantly fragment a rural space that is now being devoured by the proliferation of military bases and industrial complexes. Cars can go anywhere now, and with them the masses, 'No Trespassing' signs, walls: the city. New roads never fail to end up dissociating the territory, which is chewed up by missile bases, and by airports; trees are being cut down constantly and the land retreats before the wave of asphalt and cement. How much longer will we be able to continue to carve up this shrinking land?

And this rationalization—this evacuation—of the countryside does not take place without conflicts. Up until now the countryside has evolved slowly, allowing the delicate partnership of man and land the time needed to evolve. The impact of progress, however, explodes like a bomb, and leaves nothing in its wake except the void and the chaos characteristic of rape or war. The fields and woodlots seem to be eternal, but if the hedges are uprooted, the backhoe can transform them into featureless wastelands

in a few hours. The machine does not get tired; and the peasant no longer has either the inclination or the time to work any harder: besides, the farm properties are now too large. And everywhere, on the cleared land, roots and branches accumulate that the machines push towards the edges; instead of hedges, a mountain of dead wood that will very soon be covered with brambles: nothingness enveloped by chaos. While the bulldozer is effective, for this kind of work an atomic bomb would be even more effective. Combined with the chainsaw, it would make it possible to clear the forests or open up roads at the speed of a walking man. But the machine goes too fast for thought: its use always precedes the consciousness of its effects. The chainsaw no longer leaves the time for reflection that was afforded by the axe; and, in the countryside you see trees that were cut down and left to rot everywhere, whether just for no reason at all or for pleasure. Unfortunately, although now one can cut down a tree in seconds, it still takes a century to make an oak. And the machine is inexorable: it has to work. A backhoe has to be profitable; for the peasant who rents one by the hour, for the business that rents it to him, for the *trust*[1] that manufactures it. Each year, the mechanical caterpillar must devour so many hectares of vegetation; hence the State's subsidies—although they are of less assistance to agriculture than to big industry. We may thus calculate the average area that a bulldozer needs to clear to exist, especially if the species continues to multiply, and thereby estimate how many years of life remain to the French countryside.

Especially now that the urban avalanche is spreading everywhere. Like the highways, the course of the rivers was marked by huge trees; to extend the area of the cropland a little, these trees are being cut down and left to rot in the water. Instead of the *saligue*[2] or the *ried*,[3] now there is only a big hole that is only getting bigger. And while the ulcers of the gravel beds are consuming the valleys, the open sores of the quarries and cement factories are gutting the verdure of the hills. The countryside is being buried beneath the dust. Moreover, since they have to dispose of the rubble, mines and gypsum mills are burying the little valleys under their rust-colored or chalkcolored sludge.

Up until the last war, the dying countryside was bleaching under the sun, while today it is rotting; the automobile, industrialization and the rising standard of living have extended to the totality of the national territory the halo of waste that surrounds the cities. Alongside the highways, garbage dumps spring up like mushrooms, where the wood and steel from the past mix with the plastics of the future, and in the meadows, instead of bees, flies buzz over the excess of mass production. And it seems that the asphalt reaches everywhere, and it is on the most remote roads that a driver can exceed the speed limit without fear of the police. But the river is so convenient! All you need to do is stop and throw that box of spoiled fish that has been bothering you into the water: no one can see you. In this way, the most beautiful confluence between

[1] In English in the original [American translator's note].

[2] A local French dialect term for a wetland forest [American translator's note].

[3] A German term for a type of wetland [Author's note].

man and water is destroyed: the areas around bridges; not a single one remains that is not decorated today with some obscenity, the cars congregate around their own filth. Since man evolves more slowly than things, the urbanized peasant still treats the river or the stream as a "sewer". Although it is in ruins, the village is modernized and its population is increasingly nourished on canned and packaged food. The peasant of the past left few traces, since he buried the few wastes that he generated in order to make compost, whereas now there is no village that does not have its garbage dump towering over a beach or a crossroads. And the meadows are full of junk cars and tractors. In the countryside, the civilization of sewage arrives before the construction of sewers.

There is no longer any nature; today we know that a river or even a sea can die. And a stream can die much more easily: all that is needed is a few hoses or pipes to drain it in the summer. The stream ended up being converted into the effluent of a terrain saturated with chemicals. What was the secret life of the little valleys like, the lifeblood that ran under the leaves? Nothing is left but the dead water of the tailings ponds. In the industrial desert we can no longer skinny dip in a cascade of Evian waters, the real thing is extremely scarce, it is sold in bottles under strict government control. A few years ago—although now it seems like centuries to me—I hiked up a creek bed and found myself, in the middle of the summer, at that cool, shady pool where the trout dart and frolic. From the shadows I suddenly emerged into the sun of the ford where the clear water flows between flat rocks; then I slipped back into the shade. And when the sun set on the creek bed that was so dark and closed off, I retraced my steps along the bank of the creek to find the sun. I was in paradise; it belonged to me alone, yet it was open to anyone. Later, an organization had the intention of promoting trout fishing and building a dam in the valley, but relented when the Sociéte Nationale des Pétroles d'Aquitaine began to make inroads in that zone.

The landscape is fermenting; it is being hollowed out, it is being weakened; it is being plucked or skinned: everywhere, together with development, open wastelands are spreading. Given that the machine is going full steam ahead and that the people have lost the habit, the new generation has forgotten how to use a scythe, and the hedges and the verges are neglected. Where there was once a poplar grove bordered by a carefully trimmed carpet of grass, studded with hawthorns or carefully trimmed boxwoods as at Versailles, there is now only a sea of mud full of tires, surrounded by nettles and thorns. In the new suburb, there is no middle term between intensive yields and abandonment. Here and there patches of brambles tower above the flattened hay, and dense underbrush occupies the place of what was once a wooded wetland or water meadow; the jungle advances with the factories. A vegetation that is adapted in this respect as well to the new world; tenacious, prolific, like its fauna of rats that swarm over the garbage. Born opportunist, the creature of putrefaction, the sewer rat, like the bramble or the criminal underworld of the cities, is the final protest of a wildlife that bides its time in the depths, waiting for the moment to invade the whole world.

The unity of the landscape is not due solely to the harmony of trees and countryside; the farms and villages formerly merged with the hills. But this harmony has been

shattered: alongside the ruins, the red color of the roof tiles proclaims it everywhere against the green background of the countryside. On the one side, the landscape withers and falls apart; just as the brambles cover the old structures, a veil of filth erases the contrast between the foliage and the farms that were formerly repainted so frequently. The forests are being torn apart and the roof tiles are breaking loose, patched up with bits of asbestos; meanwhile, here and there, a farmhouse restored with too much fidelity to the old style preserves more or less the aura of what was once a home. The landscape is dissociated; water is stored in tanks on the crests of the hills: unfortunately, certain architects who are too concerned with beauty have designed them to mimic feudal or futurist forms. The water towers are scattered about haphazardly: lost children in the forest of the great host of factories.

And the rural habitat is losing in space, duration and style, what it gains in comfort: but comfort here, just as in Aubervilliers, is reduced to the vital minimum. The peasant's standard of living is rising and sometimes, next to the family farm whose stone walls are crumbling, the new inhabitant of the suburb builds his Basque chalet. The countryside has borrowed from the city and now it has become even more miserable; since the peasant is not rich, the walls are made of cement blocks, the roof is made of industrial shingles and the paint is Tyrolean whitewash. Space is no longer used liberally as of old: every centimeter counts; that is, the colors are loud, and more or less shout at you. And in front of the house, since the farmer no longer has time on his hands, instead of flowers there is a mountain of manure.

As for the farm buildings, which in the past beautified the countryside, there are no more stone walls or roof tiles, all that you need is a few poles and some sheet metal. The sheet metal is nice, you can see it from afar, it shines. While the income of the farmer has risen, the price of farm buildings has risen much more. That is why you sometimes see the farmer dressed in rags as he drives his tractor, although he is less threadbare than his house and the surrounding countryside. In this stage of the industrialization of agriculture, if we carefully note the state of the landscape, we can speak of a pauperization and an abandonment of the countryside.

And more than any other factor, the rural suburb is threatened by the Leisure Industry: as happened of old in Suresnes, alongside the garbage dumps, and the industrial or agricultural landscapes, taverns and bars proliferate. Because the automobile now allows the Parisian to go to Morvan to find the greenery he once found at his door, and because he takes the city with him to the country, the banks of the Yonne or the Gartempe have become like those of the Marne. Scattered here and there, campgrounds and theme parks are multiplying, with reservoirs for motorboats and trails for *karting* on the hills; and the crowds, loudspeakers and motors shatter the peace of the countryside. For now, they are surrendered to a more vulgar and crude mass leisure, as they await the regional park with its benches, its signs and its guards, when urbanization, finally completed, transforms the cleared wasteland into a park in the Buttes-Chaumont style.

This is what the future holds in store for us; but for the moment the countryside has not yet disappeared, it is disappearing, and when we leave the highway we cannot help but get a glimpse of its reflection in the windows of the car. However, what we must keep in mind is the endpoint of this evolution, which is not far off. In two generations, the landscape will have become inconceivable. We should imagine what it will be like then, not what it was like before: one cannot invent Paradise, the densely populated Ruhr amidst giant trees, the banks of the green Rhine in which salmon frolic. But this paradise can only exist for the inhabitant of the city over which the threat of losing it looms, at the very moment when he can finally hope to enjoy it without fear of plague or famine.

## 2. The end of the peasantry

In the future there will be nothing but Rome or the desert. The peasant, who was embedded in the cosmos, will be embedded in society. In a semicapitalist economy, the peasant, who is defined simultaneously by his relation with the natural environment and by his autonomy with respect to the social totality, depends on the whims of the market and the vicissitudes of politics at the same time. He once lived, in part, on the diversified crops of the family farm; now he, too, is a specialist. From now on he has to buy to sell, and sell to buy. He must buy the superfluous things to which he is beginning to become accustomed, and the things he needs, too: machines, fertilizers and even food. The farmer's vocation, which was once characterized by multifarious activities and prolonged physical effort, but carried out at a slow pace, is transformed into a specialized activity that must be performed according to the pace set by machines; an industrial and commercial activity: today a peasant can go bankrupt. Life in the countryside once entailed relative isolation, and participation in a restricted group, but one with strong bonds; now, the administrative and trade union organization, the dissemination of state mandated education, and the press and television, absorb the peasants in global society. The contrast between the city and the countryside is largely attenuated: the latter has ceased to be different, it is only inferior.

Progress means concentration; this truth, evident in the case of industry, has taken a longer time to be imposed on agriculture. Mechanization implies large-scale exploitation, and where it is needed, it is created. In France, many small- and medium-scale landowners, caught in the net of easy credit made available by the State, went into debt to buy a tractor they did not need, but which was a sign of upward mobility. The exponential growth of indebtedness of this kind is a sign not only of economic progress but also of technological inflation, caused by a myth that devours its believers. The economists have spoken of "overcapitalization"; and the tractor has proven to be more useful for uprooting small-scale marginal farmers than weeds. Today, the only people who remain in the villages reflect two extremes: a handful of big landowners and a few small-scale landowners who refuse to enter the cycle of industrial agriculture. It is

above all the rural middle class that has suffered most from this conflict. Thus, for the furtherance of a certain idea of economic progress, a social transformation has taken place on a vast scale, whose effects can be debated, but concerning which we can in all certainty say that they are immense and that they have not been taken into account.

The oldest structure in the West is therefore disappearing: the parish, the commune, that is, the village. While the Church, faced with a shortage of priests, transfers them out of the rural areas, the school transfers teachers to the rural areas and organizes a system of transport to bring the last children of the village to school. One more reason they will have for not remaining in the village. The automobile, which was supposed to bring life to the countryside, ended up evacuating it. Instead of bringing the children of the village to the overcrowded central school of the district, why not let them attend the vacant schools in the villages? Why not preserve the village by renewing it, maintaining a society on a human scale that the expansion of mass society renders increasingly more necessary?

The peasant who has not been eliminated by the tractor certainly sees how his "standard of living" increases; but, once again, this "standard of living" is conceived solely in economic and monetary terms. He is transformed into both an industrialist and a merchant, or, more accurately, into a hybrid economic subject, who somehow pursues both activities at the same time. The system of social security and an embryonic system of insurance against agricultural disasters allow him to escape the consequences of natural catastrophes to some degree; but just as important is the fact that with specialization one can no longer live by directly consuming the products of one's own property. Monoculture, which makes him totally dependent on the whims of the seasons, also puts him—and this time with no way out—at the mercy of the whims of the market.

Herbicides save labor; and they are becoming even more necessary as the number of times they must be applied multiply, and this ends up becoming an essential part of the work of the farmers; above all because the crops, selected and protected, are increasingly less capable of defending themselves. As for the machines, they save some labor for the farmer, but only to shift it to other people. Thus, if the tractor allows one to work three times faster, it is undeniable that one will have to work three times as much to pay for it. In the old days, the peasant worked from dawn to dusk. Fortunately, today floodlights are so easy to use that they allow us to work in the fields even at night. Now, the countryside is alive when the sun sets, sometimes you can see the lights blazing everywhere; just like the city dweller, the peasant now knows what it is like to live in the city that never sleeps. The incidence of neuroses, a sign of material and intellectual development, will continue to increase. For, although the peasant still does not know what a vacation is, he is less and less likely to celebrate the local festivals. And his labor becomes true labor, that is, factory labor. It is no longer slow or silent. In this respect, agricultural machinery is still very primitive; the tractor and the chain saw are horribly loud, vibrating machines, to which man is intimately connected: the worker is at his work bench, the farmer sits on his engine all day long.

The village has broken out of its isolation and is no longer alone thanks to the highways. Now it participates not only in the economy, but also in culture. The peasant is becoming accustomed to reading and to textual criticism. Agricultural trade unionism and Social Security oblige him to adapt to the mechanisms of bureaucratic abstraction: to comply precisely with all the formalities is becoming more important than harvesting before the onset of bad weather. This new world presupposes another mentality, in which one's experience with the familiar environment counts less than the meticulous observation of legal forms, which are, for those who have to abide by them, even more arbitrary than the changing times. Thus, like any subject of the world of industry, the peasant pays for his greater security with less autonomy; he is beholden to a distant center that he cannot control because its reasons trump his interests.

For he owed his knowledge and his good sense less to his formal education than to his lifelong experience of the place where he lived. You would have to prolong your education far beyond the primary and secondary levels to obtain the equivalent of this living, syncretic knowledge. For the peasant is being integrated into urban culture, but it is not the latter's higher forms that he is exposed to: he is in the boondocks, culturally as well; and his suburb, the most remote, is the worst informed. While the villagers still read few books and few newspapers, they nonetheless watch a lot of television, which threatens to become generalized, since the antenna, like the tractor, is an external sign of wealth that everyone must have: a house without an antenna represents a dishonor for the village. Television is an admirably effective medium for the integration of the most dispersed human groups. Thus, forest rangers and shepherds will be "informed", in the cybernetic sense, that is, remotely directed from Paris, instead of being guided by custom or by the Church. Like the inhabitants of the city, those who live in the countryside will from now on live in "the present moment"; they, too, will participate in the contemporary political event or fashion trend. But this participation will be even more passive, since they are less adapted than the city dwellers to the toxins of urban life. In this new world, so far removed from their native canton, they are defenseless, and even less capable of intellectual selfdefense. Ignorance once allowed the countryside to escape the propaganda of the cities and its magnetic power of attraction; semi-education will place it entirely in their power. Formerly, the peasant farmer consulted the signs of the heavens to know when to do something, and although he was often wrong, he was also right on target because these signs were characteristic of his country. Today he consults the radio the way people formerly consulted oracles. "The radio said...." And, like all oracles, its sibylline revelations apply to all circumstances; it is useless to explain that the oracle can be mistaken and that the high priests of meteorological forecasting will be the first people to say that their predictions are only good for short-term forecasts. "The radio said that it will be a warm winter...." If the winter is glacial, this erroneous forecast will quickly be forgotten, because the peasant is still a man of faith. He accepts the dictates of the new sorcerers just as he accepted the dictates of the old sorcerers.

The evolution of the countryside reflects customs. Until the last war, the French countryside lived on, it never changed, it only withered when it lost its vital essence. Walls and habits were still the same, but they were slowly being eroded. Today, however, its body is decomposing because it no longer has a spirit, or a life of its own: the local reality has disappeared. The peasant is no longer isolated, he depends on the center; therefore, like any city dweller, he no longer has any reasons to associate with his kind; integrated in an external and general organization, the only thing he has to do is "comply". He, too, becomes an individual, closed off to everything that does not affect his possessions or his interests. Since he suffers from the pressure of the human masses, above all during the vacation season, he no longer has any reason to open his door to strangers; to the contrary, he must protect himself from strangers. And the countryside, formerly subdivided by invisible borders that you would unknowingly cross while taking a walk, is gradually being closed off by fences, as in the vicinity of the cities. Prohibitions multiply: "No hunting, fishing or trespassing...." And it seems that the summer invasion of Parisians is more terrible than a plague of locusts.

Stuffed full of work today, and tomorrow stuffed full of entertainment, why would the peasant invent a culture? Folk culture is the creation of illiterates left to their own devices. Why sing, when society brings Mozart and Sheila[4] right into your home? At a time when tourists are wearing the dirndls or berets of the peasants, the peasants are abandoning the last remaining vestiges of their traditional attire. And it is no use for the school to try to resurrect popular songs or dances, any more than to try to disseminate Proust among the rural masses; one would have to be a decadent bourgeois to appreciated the tasteful simplicity of folk culture. It is too late; you do not sing on a tractor, the worker's coveralls or the military cap are more appropriate. And unfortunately, because farm work is still arduous and filthy, this proletarian often looks like a beggar.

The peasant who clings to his land can still survive; but he does so in vain, because progress is proceeding ever more rapidly. He can try to keep up with it on his tractor, but its tires are too deeply embedded in the soil: in the century of rockets, the tractor is nothing but a motorized ox. The farmer is urbanized, but this former "underdeveloped" person is still not fully developed, like most of the colonial populations that industrial progress has transformed from without. The opportunities offered by the old diversified agriculture of the family farm—stability, freedom, a certain way of life—are disappearing, but the standard of living is still rising more slowly than in other social categories. In this commercialized and specialized rural economy, there are many farms that can only survive with the greatest exertions; except for a handful of large farms in the North, the French peasantry as a whole is still "marginal". The countryside is being industrialized, but in this first stage progress is manifested in its most brutal and crude forms, destroying rather than creating. On the farm, water and

[4] Anne Chancel, known as Sheila, became the icon of French *yé-yé* music during the sixties and seventies, selling millions of records [Spanish translator's note].

electricity are good things, as long as they are used for human ends and not just to increase production. It is very often the case that progress in the countryside is reduced to more machinery: a television or a car in a backwoods district that has otherwise remained unchanged. You no longer have any time to beautify your house, you have to make your monthly car payments. Popular culture has disappeared, but the peasant class hardly participates in any other kind of culture. It is always at the end of the line and only gets the leftovers from the city. It is not with polytechnical schools, or even with agricultural "institutes", that the levels of Art and Science of the countryside can be raised to the levels that prevail in the cities. For the farm worker lost in the void of his rural suburb, all that remains is the most vulgar products of mass civilization. He can rise to the level of the certificate in agricultural or technical studies, that is, the certificate of elementary studies of the technological era. For now, the machine provides him, along with security, worries he never knew before; it gives him more work than rest, and because he must still take care of his livestock he cannot really go on vacation. The peasant, like any inhabitant of the suburbs, is outside the City of Light. The final balance sheet of the destruction of the countryside is not so simple as the increasing yield per hectare might lead one to believe.

## 3. Rural France faces its own end

The peasant of the Third Republic was more impoverished; it is not so obvious, however, in most cases, that he was more unfortunate. He did not make a lot of noise, he was inconspicuous, he was not begging in the streets. The poverty, or, more accurately, the hardship, that most peasants endured was real; but it only really existed when the city dwellers, the children and grandchildren of the peasants, became aware of it; and it is obvious that, from this perspective, to be a peasant was to be an outcast: if there were intellectual farmers, they would say the same thing about the inhabitants of the outskirts of Paris.

The farmers are wealthier now, but they are nonetheless discontented. The current peasant malaise is not due solely to oscillations in prices, it is a deeply rooted malaise. The French peasant is suffering because he is dying. And this death is not a natural death, it is a death desired by those who are responsible for the management of the economy. The condition of the French peasant was indeed a hard life, but it had its advantages and its pleasures; and above all, the peasant was accustomed to it: he had found, like any living being, his equilibrium. An equilibrium that, at least in certain provinces, was expressed in that radiant symbol of harmony represented by the beauty of the garden and of the house. But now he has been banished, and his only hope is to become a specialized worker somewhere, in a factory or at a waste disposal site. And when he manages to remain in his native district, the advantages that he was able to acquire are constantly threatened by economic instability. Some gentlemen tell him to produce corn. Docile, he obeys these gentlemen; and these gentlemen, one year

later, explain to him that there is a surplus of corn and that the only products he can market in France are fruit and early season vegetables. Large scale irrigation projects are springing up everywhere, and when all the farmers, being welldisciplined, plant cauliflower, the price collapses. In fact, in an industrial society, agriculture's place is always marginal; it fulfills a function that the laboratory and the factory are not yet capable of replacing. Feeding the population might still be an essential task, but that has not prevented it from being a secondary and neglected activity in the highly developed countries. In the century of space rockets, how can it be that man still has to cultivate the land to feed himself?

The French peasant is suffering because, even if he has left his farm behind, he has the vague impression that he is not yet a citizen enjoying full rights in the industrial paradise. And this fact is beginning to sink into his consciousness. He is more defenseless than anyone else against the extraordinary transformation that is convulsing his world. Because the machine is something completely new to him, it preserves a prestige that it has lost wherever it has become an everyday fact of life. For the farmer, the tractor is not just a tool, but a kind of toy, the magical sign of his promotion to the status of worker. And this is the view of French society as a whole, insofar as it is still closer to its rural origins than England or Germany. Just as the workers movement is controlled by Marxist cadres, the peasant movement is controlled by Catholics, who are all the more diligent in their worship of progress the more they manage to forget the time when their Church preached the "return to the land". And that is why they are somewhat behind the times. They are eliminating woodlots and hedges at the same time that the Americans, and even the Russians, concerned by the terrible effects of large scale mechanized agriculture, are plowing the land along its natural contours and subdividing large parcels. The French are cutting down trees when the Americans and Russians are planting them. They are advocating monoculture crops when the *farmers*[5] of the Midwest are beginning to practice crop rotation. The myth of modernization makes us forget that France is in Europe. And rather than imitate the USSR by transforming Gers into a steppe, it would undoubtedly have been better to follow the example of the countries where intensive, diversified agriculture is practiced, such as Denmark, which has been capable of reconciling modernization with the preservation of the traditional habitat. But rural societies that are in the process of industrialization are not normally distinguished by their display of the most sophisticated forms of the modern spirit: they are not looking for modernity in spirit, but in machines. If anyone must save the French countryside, it will probably be the Parisians.

For it deserves to be saved. The error of these grandchildren of peasants transformed into technocrats is that they omitted certain factors from their equation. They were so concerned with obtaining the right result that they failed to consider those elements that are not very susceptible to numerical expression, and that is why in the end their sum is false. They attended to the economic, but they forgot the social. And

[5] In English in the original [American translator's note].

in this way they have blithely cut the great tree of our liberties at its roots. They have emancipated French production, but they have probably destroyed that which constituted the originality of our nation: contact with the elements that were the blood of our reason, the stability that compensated for our revolutionary individualism, the space in which it flourished. Bringing progress to the countryside should not consist in destroying it, but, to the contrary, in developing it; how can you speak of progress if this progress consists in making its object disappear? But to do this you must love it. You have to try to do everything at the same time, which is not easy: you must introduce material improvements and preserve the family farm. But the pace of human betterment does not increase on demand like the production quotas of a steel mill. It is possible to adapt machines to the needs of society, rather than society to the demands of machines; if it is true that they are only inert tools, they should not have any demands. Without the countryside, what would become of the city? The city only acquires its prominence because of the plains that surround it. Until now, it was based on the land that quietly fed it with its forces and its people: it is the slumber of the latter that has until now permitted our wakefulness. Without a countryside, there is no city, either, but a closed world, condemned to generate its own substance by feeding on its own excrement.

# Part Three: The “feeling of nature”, an industrial product

Such a vast transformation was necessarily accompanied by a human reaction; for even though man is dominating nature, he is also a product of nature. This is why we see a "feeling of nature" developing in the industrial and urban societies, precisely reflecting the magnitude of their break with the cosmos. This feeling was born in England in the 18th century with the industrial revolution, in the cities rather than the countryside. And within these cities, it first arose among the aristocracy and the rich bourgeoisie, rather than among the common people; that is, in milieus that were remote from nature, due to their living conditions and their culture. At first it involved a handful of Englishmen who had free time and could travel, and who frequented the seashore or the mountains. Later, the fashion spread throughout the entire West: the United States—although not the "Wild West"—Germany, and France. Except for Catalonia, which was already industrialized, Spain would not discover that it had mountains and beaches until after 1950. Now, the equalization of living conditions is propagating the "feeling" of nature among the masses of the "developed" countries and is beginning to win over the ruling classes of the "underdeveloped" countries, too. Before long, the peasants, too, will demand their right to spend their vacations in the countryside.

At the same time, the back-to-nature reaction is becoming more profound. Timid at first, the love of nature was only directed towards its less wild aspects: farmlands, the foothills of the mountains. Then, as its means grew, it became bolder. The big gorges were crossed to reach the last high peaks. At first, they were scaled quickly, by way of the easiest approaches; finally, the north face was assaulted in the middle of winter. Tourists no longer visit the Riviera in December, they get their suntans right in the middle of the day in August. They flee the all-too-humanized oases, and sojourn in the *hamadas*,[6] which are much more fun. It is our civilization's degree of culture that gives it its taste for nature. We need wild regions, and primitive countrysides—and above all, primitive peoples. As a result, a day will come when they will no longer be primitive.

[6] Arabic: *hamada*; an inhospitable part of the desert composed of rock-strewn regions interspersed with barren plateaus [American translator's note].

# I. Nature as Culture

## 1. The feeling of nature, a sign of contradiction

When Adam lived in Eden he did not feel any nostalgia. Even today, the peasant hardly seems to have any consciousness of nature. You have to be a city dweller to experience it—you have to wear clothing to be shocked by nudity. However, can this unsatisfied knowledge of an object that has become external be authentic? Is it not lost once it becomes conscious? No, if you try hard enough you will come to know it.

For the man of the city, to live, both physically as well as even spiritually, is to return to nature. We seek contact with the elements: the sky, the water, the land. What was necessary in the past has become a necessary superfluity. Oppressed by clothing and artifice, we lie naked on the sand; but since we are artificers by nature, we turn our nakedness into nudism. We look for the original, when not the primeval. That is why our tastes have changed over the years, and from the Renaissance we proceeded to the Gothic, and from there to the Romantic, and finally to the cave art of the Pleistocene, as if we were fleeing from ourselves. We like everything that is a natural product, especially the natural man: the noble savage or the spontaneous individual, the hero of the novel who only follows his instinctive impulses.

In this century of artifice we therefore feel a passion for this nature that we are destroying. We are technicians and bucolic poets at the same time; normally first one, and then the other. Our practical hostility and our theoretical love are equally immoderate; like our women, occasionally naked under the sun and then wearing wigs and makeup and covered in nylon from head to toe. That is the way it has been since the beginning of the modern era: the ladies of the court who admired Rousseau wore the heavy, multilayered clothing and were very fond of the ornate towering hairstyles that were popular at the end of the $18^{\text{th}}$ century. It was the civilization of the automobile and the airplane that scaled the high peaks; it was the most civilized individuals of the most civilized peoples who studied the life of the "primitives"—they were the ones who described and praised their customs. We are covered in clothes, laws and morality, and that is why we feel the need to shed them. And on the streets new tribes appear that sing and carry the signs of their clans. New pagans roam in skins over the beaches, even if only during vacation season. Some of the bolder ones even dare to go to sea on a raft, but they always end up telling us all about it on television. This is why it is doubtful that these new pagans have reconciled man with nature. When they go so far as to provide theoretical reasons for their reaction, as in the case of D. H. Lawrence, they

vehemently renounce their Christianity; and with respect to this point it is clear that they are the children of those Christians who, by rejecting nature, rejected their own nature more than any other. The barbarians? Today they are the civilized. The thesis? It is the antithesis: the big city is going camping and reading Giono-style literature; this will tranquilize those who are worried about the technological transformation. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true: camping and the bucolic novel? In reality, the big city; the antithesis is the thesis. As for the synthesis that is supposed to abolish both, History does not supply it automatically. It has to be born in the spirit of the person whom I am provoking here.

The more we distinguish ourselves from it, the better we know it, the more we experience the feeling of nature—basically, did nature even exist, in the current sense of the word, before the 18$^{th}$ century?—but, at the same time, the more remote we are from it. We invented nature by destroying it and this invention contributes to its destruction. At the end of this process we can catch a glimpse of a world where, with nature destroyed, the love of nature will be stronger than ever; and in which the primeval Eden, having changed since the first human intervention, will finally be realized in a pure state in a handful of meticulously organized regions of the earth (or of our lives). The beginning is the end: the Eden in which wolves can coexist peacefully with deer, in which bears eat right out of men's hands, is the Yellowstone National Park. The primeval Eden is in the most highly organized country. The modern era is characterized by a violent back-to-nature countercurrent, but the violence of this countercurrent is secondary, it is only one aspect of the great current of organization that gives rise to it. And if it goes against the current, it still exists within the larger tide that carries it along.

The contradiction is becoming more acute, but the same thing is happening to the forces that are tending to integrate it: the need that society feels for maintaining its cohesion, and the individual his tranquility. The feeling of nature is a reaction against certain upheavals in the human infrastructure, a demand for the elements—for air, silence, space and time—and, above all, freedom. Society, having been challenged, then replies by enclosing this protest within the superstructure: labeling the necessary as superfluous and the serious as frivolous. It includes it under the categories of Culture and Leisure. And at the same time it expels it from consciousness in order to sequester it in the depths of instinct.

That demand and that reflex reaction of self-defense have been manifested since the beginning. The bourgeois who discovered nature was also the industrialist and the merchant who lived from exploiting it, and whose taste for comfort was incompatible with its presence. The place for nature was therefore poetry; he had no objection if his wife devoted herself to dreaming under the shade of a grove of trees: her limousine and her

chauffeur were waiting for her around the next bend in the road.[1] Between one and the other there was no relation, just as there was no relation between the virgin wilderness of the Matterhorn and the industrialist's blast furnaces. The industrialist, moreover, can have his blast furnaces in the Ruhr and his chalet on the cape at Antibes. In this regard, the progressive intellectuals are no different from the reactionary bourgeoisie: on the political and economic terrain, they are in favor of extreme industrialization, but in the cultural and private domains, they prefer light, silence and solitude. They like the masses, but for their vacations they flee the crowd. Politically progressive, the post-Christian intellectual is morally reactionary.

Like any human reality, the feeling of nature is at the same time the spontaneous expression of a person's need—physical and spiritual—and a social fact. The individual likes nature because he needs the air and the water of freedom, but also because nature is fashionable: how many people would go to the mountains or the beach if other people were not going there? The pioneers of the back-to-nature trend went to the beach for solitude: their epigones go there in search of crowds. In the 19th century, the feeling of nature, like all cultural phenomena, was the sign of refinement: a luxury reserved for the well-to-do classes. It was important to experience it in order to be able to distinguish oneself from the vulgar mob. Thus, the class that went in search of nature was the most sophisticated class. The village that Marie Antoinette ordered to be built next to the Petit Trianon testifies to this socialization of the love for nature and to the naively artificial forms through which it could be manifested. Today we still have our queens, however, attired by Dior, who play at being peasant girls while they talk about "authenticity".

In bourgeois society, nature is a kind of luxury; it is of the order of a spiritual bonus, and therefore not of the order of material things. It beautifies the financial, economic or political infrastructure, but it does not have too much of an impact on it; this ornament—generally in the form of wallpaper—conceals the operation of organization and destruction, which allows the latter's unhindered deployment. The feeling of nature is deeply rooted, and at the same time external to the life of individuals; it feeds on appearances, it belongs to the world of the image and the spectacle. With a

few exceptions, we like nature, but the mere idea of living in it strikes fear into our hearts. Isolated from nature in his car, but even more isolated by the machines and arrangements of every kind that facilitate his journey, the tourist observes the dull Technicolor documentary that unfolds on the other side of the windshield with an increasingly more weary expression. He may admire the glaciers from the window of a luxury hotel, but this will not prevent him from complaining to the management about how cold it is in his room.

[1] The double meaning of the original French expression ("*attendre au tournant*": "wait at the next bend in the road", but also "to lie in wait", "to take revenge at the first opportunity") is lost in translation [Spanish translator's note].

Thus, by expelling nature to the terrain of culture, it is possible to destroy it without ceasing to love it. The bourgeois Romantic could reckon the income from his investments and compose verses on the banks of a lake; these are two operations without any relation, all the more so insofar as industrial civilization, still only in an embryonic state at the time, would not harass him there. In other respects, society and its individuals defended themselves from the awakening of the feeling of nature by shutting it up in the mists of the ineffable. A reaction against a society based on logic, abstraction and discipline, the feeling of nature, such as it was manifested in Romanticism, presents itself as instinct, passion, individual spontaneity, private life. Analyzing it in detail, engaging in a self-critique, or proceeding to a synthesis, was therefore prohibited. Its field of expression is literature and, within literature, the lyric. Although this freedom, when it is sincere, allows one to go very far, it is like an anguished cry that has no consequences. And by rejecting reason, it cannot lead to association and action.

The spread of the feeling of nature among the masses of the industrialized societies did not change its essence; it simply extended to the whole population something that was previously the private property of a bourgeois minority. The fact that you do not spend your summers at the beach is a sign of exclusion, not only from the elite, but from society itself. Nature is the indispensable superfluity for industrial society. The real, the concrete, is the rocket that goes to the Moon: it is the necessary. Air? Space? Silence? The demands of a poet, which prove the subtlety of his soul, but also the lack of realism of the person who makes such demands. From the point of view of planning, the part corresponding to nature, like the part corresponding to freedom, will come later: when all the conditions for it are in place. That is, someday in the future, when nature has been destroyed. Thus, in modern society the feeling of nature exists, and it is becoming stronger. But this feeling, outstanding yet frivolous, instinctive and private, is mocked, and used to reinforce the very same state of affairs that is the cause of its revolt.

## 2. The song of the bucolic dreamers

Nature was, first of all, literature. It was invented by English writers like the author of *Robinson Crusoe*—the first outdoorsman. And in continental Europe it was the young Goethe and Rousseau who spread the idea, although Rousseau was much more revealing than Goethe with regard to the social aspect of the phenomenon: he was an inventor of myths, while the German was a Romantic of a very special type, a conscious Romantic, perhaps the only one; and this is why his work speaks to us of the individual as well as his time. Rousseau, on the other hand, is the quintessential personification of the Revolution, because he incarnates it both in its affective aspect as well as its political aspect. The apparent contradiction between Rousseau the theoretician of government and Rousseau the philosopher and writer cannot be overemphasized: on the one hand, the doctrinaire of Equality and the Republic, the rationalist theoretician

of *The Social Contract*; on the other hand, the enemy of civilization, the lover of nature, the panegyrist of instinct. Most commentators have resolved the problem by considering either the political doctrinaire of *The Social Contract* or else the author of *The New Heloise* and *The Confessions*. Each in his own specialty, literature or politics; this is the most convenient way: between the two disciplines there will always be a gap through which the problem is swept away. Not by chance was Rousseau the precursor, at the same time, of two traditions that we consider to be opposed: the Jacobin tradition and the Rousseauian Romantic tradition; just like us, he was the platform for two antagonistic tendencies that went their separate ways.

It might seem that the Romantic ideology (unconscious, religious, primitive) was opposed to the ideology of 1789 (reason, free thought, progress); but this antithesis is nothing but the result of a superficial use of logic. If one places the individual on the highest level, at the expense of society, one is placing passion on the highest level: the particular demand of the individual at the expense of social reason. A little individualism leads to reason; a lot of individualism leads away from it. On the other hand, the claim that man is good by nature implies distrust towards everything that civilization has been able to give him; if man is a god, what could it possibly mean to perfect him? To the contrary, it is necessary to recover the simplicity of customs, the original innocence of the times when the individual was not civilization but nature: the basis of society does not lie in the future, it lies at its origin: in nature. The same faith in man can engender the myth of endless progress and that of the noble savage.

The back-to-nature component of Rousseau's thought was one of the active elements in the revolutionary explosion, although within a particular context: that of the power of sentimentality. Rousseau is not the man of the Revolution merely because he is the author of *The Social Contract*. By proclaiming the right of the individual to reject all the constraints of civilization, even that of reason, he contributed to the passionate defiance of the Old Regime. By opposing the impulse of the heart to the critical spirit, he substituted revolutionary faith for Voltairian scepticism. It was Rousseau who imbued the abstract schema of Jacobin logic with emotional force: icecold yet inflammatory, Saint-Just was a Rousseauian. All the great revolutions are preceded by lyrical debacles; what was needed was tears and laughter, hope and fear, love and sadism, for man to be dragged by his demons far from the old world towards the new. If rationalist doctrines lie at the origin of constitutions, the lyricism of Rousseau lies at the origin of the revolutionary sensibility; this intransigent hope for the approaching kingdom of man, which was rapidly transformed into misanthropy, is found in Rousseau, Camille Desmoulins and Marat at the same time.

Thus, the revolution of reason was the revolution of Romanticism; the revolution of the philanthropists, that of the Terror; the revolution of Enlightenment, that of blood and death. Like reason, nature is not "rightwing" or "left-wing". Every social transformation is rebirth, a return to the origins, to the innocence of man; just as, in revolutionary action, the enlightenment of consciousness and the attack of the unconscious converge in the same impulse.

Above all, however, Rousseau lies at the origin of the modern individual: of his sensibility and his customs. It is to him that we owe the new education, marriage for love, camping, whole grain bread, the cult of the ego and the totalitarian State: all our contradictions are present in his work. Modern man was born with a discourse that proved that civilization corrupts man.

The authentic and the false are combined in Rousseau: the person and the personality. The same cannot be said about his admirers in high society: their English gardens were even more artificial than Versailles. And among the French Romantics one often detects this theatrical trait. For them, nature is a kind of "backdrop" whose function is to highlight the value of the personality, as in old photographs. "Don't move!" Thus, René[2] was immortalized in a flattering pose in front of the Niagara Falls. In the AngloSaxon world the feeling of nature is much more natural. Literary personalities no longer meditate on the shores of lakes, but go skin-diving in the lakes themselves; they scale the summits that once served as the decorative stage scenery for romantic daydreams; they set sail on that ocean whose waves once broke over René's feet. And not as first class passengers, either, but as simple sailors. Discourse becomes action; description becomes technique. The passion for the sea no longer takes the form of the daydreams of one of Pierre Loti's heroes, but that of the silent struggle waged by a deranged captain against a raging typhoon.

Among authors as different as Melville, Thoreau, Whitman, Kipling, Jack London and Conrad, until the culmination of this tendency with D. H. Lawrence, there is, beneath all the individual peculiarities, a profound continuity. The hero is the solitary individual who confronts the primeval forces of the world. Soldier or sailor: pioneer. And, more than just nature in itself, their works are about this struggle, which they describe in detail as it unfolds, they are about its technical means, and also about the men who are formed by this struggle. This faithfulness in the description of men and their everyday actions explains, for example, Conrad's superiority compared to the writers of exotic literature. Man in his struggle with nature is no longer that neutral being defined by moral conventions, but the individual of character who obeys a deep-seated instinct and who develops a style by renouncing all petty calculations: with sober attitudes and necessary gestures, man, the strongest of all animals, transformed himself into nature.

The relation to nature, for the Anglo-Saxon writers, is a relation of combat, and of individual combat. This is certainly because we are speaking of societies in which morality and industry were most oppressive, and the individual, when he managed to resist, was more demanding. And also because, in those Protestant societies, the habitual perusal of the Bible sharpened the perception of the tension that confronts, and also unites, man with creation. Melville's hero pursues the great whale out of

[2] An ironic allusion to *René* (1802), the novel by the founder of French romanticism, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), whose protagonist undergoes an extraordinary experience at Niagara Falls [Spanish translator's note].

hatred; but this battle encapsulates the meaning of life: in his attempt to destroy the great whale, the sovereign individual, captain Ahab, destroys himself.

Nor is Thoreau's *Walden* bucolic literature, but the straightforward account of two years of an individual's life in the woods. Far from the frontier, taking advantage of the vast open spaces of the country and the support of his friends, Thoreau led a pioneer's life in what would become the outskirts of the Megalopolis a century later. The life of a free individual who, like Robinson Crusoe, tries—this time voluntarily—to rely on himself and to turn his back on society and the State. Freedom is nature; no one tells us this with so much force and so much simplicity. But not even in the United States of that period did a lone man have a future, and Thoreau was destined to die young and without heirs. Currently, for Americans, he is nothing but one more of those exemplary personalities whose ghosts populate the literary firmament: a classic. And even the industrial society of France can allow itself the luxury of finally discovering him, and a publication like *L'Express* sings the praises of this enemy of comfort—in the literary section, of course. Thoreau is no more, and not even his words have any power against death. Nothing prevents industrial society from setting up his mummy in the display window of bucolic literature.

Other mummies, however, who are dedicated to writing about nature, are set up in that same display window all by themselves, and while they are still alive. Nothing better than such activity to make Messrs. Schneider or Trigano install them in the Académie Française. In France this has been a profitable business for a long time and still is. This literature is, for the most part, Romantic, and this implies a love of nature, all the more so if one is a writer living in Paris. However, since every fashion gives rise to its contrary, the abuses of Romanticism provoked a realist reaction that is manifested in Balzac and, above all, in Zola. The peasants of *The Earth* are not fictional; they display, in a polemical fashion, an aspect of reality that was concealed until then, and which by the way fits well enough with the situation of the country district of the county of Beauce, devastated and morally degraded by the proximity of the big city. But an anti-Rousseau calls for an anti-Zola, already latent in Rousseau's pantheism. Shortly after the First World War, advances in industrialization generated a new school, consciously bucolic, whose most famous representatives are Ramuz, Pourrat and, above all, Giono. And a column is published in *Nouvelle Revue française* that keeps its subscribers regularly informed concerning the state of the grape and hay harvests.

It is currently impossible to address the problems of the relation of man and nature, of countryside and city, without confronting the mythology inherited from *gionisme*, no matter how much the war may have devalued it somewhat. The countryside is the eternal, immutable peasantry; bread baked in the wood-fired oven and life in the open air under the stars, when in reality the Contadour of the 1930s is a country of old people and ruins, the triumph of death rather than of life. *Le Contadour* is nothing but fiction, a perfected edition of the village of Petit Trianon for Parisians who dream of getting some sun and making pottery. Yes, it is true that the rocks and the stars are still the same, but the real Manosque is boredom and the petty disputes of a backwoods

town that has seen better days. And its immediate future is called the Serre-Ponçon dam and the research center at Cadarache: the bucolic little village is turned into a nuclear suburb. When he deals with people rather than stones, the solar lyricism of Giono is not a step towards action, but a flight from reality and its conflicts. Paris? Very simple, Paris will be destroyed by trees. What did I say? Paris will be destroyed by trees. And everyone is content: the reader who closes his book and the author who goes back to his Mistral.[3]

Bucolic literature, when it is not written with the disenchanted modesty of a Ramuz, only serves to exacerbate the evil that it claims to denounce. *Gionisme*, after its provisional victory in June of 1940, discredited its cause by compromising its naturalist pacifism with the *Blut und Boden* ["Blood and Soil"] of the Nazis. And Giono, disillusioned, was the first to renounce his own doctrines: the lyrical enthusiasm of the pantheist prophet was followed by the rather dry rigor of the Stendhalian narrator. But industrial society has not been able to live up until now without its little dose of chlorophyll, and that is why Taillemagre plays a few notes on his Pan Pipes every week in the pages of *Le Monde*. Ah! When you can only live in the city, how pleasant it is to think that in some place under the bright sun there is a countryside where one can go on vacation, an immutable rural world where the tractors have something Virgilian about them. Nothing happens there, the demented howl of the chainsaws is only a bad dream; we can take refuge in that substitute for the countryside that *Le Monde* sells us.

As is the case with accounts of the Amazonian Indians, bucolic literature is currently merely hypocrisy that contributes, just like any other agricultural poison, to the annihilation of the nature that it seeks to extol. The experience of nature is today inseparable from that of its destruction. Love for the countryside and the peasants no longer means participating in the cosmic festival, but attending the death agonies of both as a spectator. At most, one can quietly inhale the scent of the withered flower. A supreme lightning bolt can illuminate the sky, and the scarlet forests exalt the catastrophe; night falls. Nature is no longer invincible, the peasant is no longer eternal. With regard to nature there is no longer any joy that does not conceal a note of constrained or repressed anxiety. We have ceased to be shepherds in order to become their opposite: actors who are playing a role. If we want to restore nature, first we have to assume responsibility for what we have lost.

[3] Charbonneau is playing with the two meanings of this word: Mistral, the Paris-Nice express train, but also Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914), a regionalist writer who wrote in the Provençal dialect, an advocate for the independence of Provence [Spanish translator's note].

# II Playing at being Indians

We like the future—progress—but also the past—the primitive. Probably what we find most disappointing is the present. We no longer annihilate the last primitive peoples; we preserve them in hermetically sealed jars called "reservations". But one thing is certain: we are still dissecting them and arranging them in a display case in the Museum of Man. And we still have the *western*,[1] which, along with the Indian, resuscitates that other extinct species: the pioneer. We watch the actors play their parts in their feathered headdresses, just as we played at being Indians in our childhood. But our childhood is behind us, and the travel agency will not restore it by inviting us to visit the land of the Navajos during Easter Week.

## 1. The children of the Sun

The same reaction, more or less profound, lies at the origin of the works of Giono, Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence. The latter is the culmination of a growing rebellion against a civilization that tends to convert the world into a single utilitarian organization, whose movements will be regulated on the material plane by technology and on the human plane by morality. Just like the lyricism of bucolic literature, Lawrence's rebellion is expressed in an anguished cry, not by way of reasons: in a work of art rather than a doctrine. Wounded at the heart of his biological and spiritual being, the individual breaks out in a song expressing his anxiety. His suffering is too intense for a more reflective expression: it is an exclamation. Lawrence's rebellion, like Nietzsche's—and like that of all the great modern rebels—does not arise from economic or moral considerations, or from an idea, but from personal experience. It is not the revolt of a nation or a social class, but the revolt of the isolated individual, wounded in his flesh as well as his soul.

Feeling rejected, the individual rebels against all the constraints of the modern world; his revolt explodes, and he tries to destroy this world at its foundations: not only money, the city, the nation and war, but consciousness and the concept. Lawrence makes no distinctions; he abominates our world in its entirety, from its machines to its sexual taboos and its religions of salvation. He wanders all over the world in search of a wonderful country where there is neither war, nor morality, nor religion: the Earth in the days before the machine, the Earth before worries; a country where the splendor of the sun makes you forget time, in which man is nothing but a resplendent animal. He

[1] In English in the original [American translator's note].

recovers primal innocence in the only act that our civilization has been incapable of integrating: the act of love, the last spontaneous act. The last natural act, along with death. But the moralists and, infinitely more dangerous, the eugenicists, will arrange things in such a way as to put an end to this scandal.

Fleeing from the England of morality and factories, D. H. Lawrence went to Germany, but the romanticism of that overcrowded country suffocated him, he was more comfortable in the underdeveloped regions: Provence, Italy. Then he went to Mexico, where he hoped to find in the Indian population the example of a community whose cosmic myths still occupy the place of morality and religion. But Lawrence would never find the fatherland where he, too, could be a "child of the Sun" and participate in universal existence. That peace in nature that he pursued eluded him. He praised life, and fate condemned him to endure a weak body; his appeal to the dream of unconsciousness and destiny made him one of the most conscious of all modern individuals. And perhaps he saw himself as being more distant from the innocence of the Indians than the tourists themselves, who naively went to see them in their reservations as if they were exotic animals. He was moreover the first to take note of this phenomenon and to be annoyed by this interest that drove the civilized towards beings from whom they will always be separated. The modern individual feels that he has to be like the Indians and return to nature, and that is why he studies the Indians with so much interest. But we can no longer be Indians; we bear our consciousness, our reason, and even our morality, in our very blood, and we can only practice myth, immorality and unconsciousness by deliberately brutalizing ourselves. There is nothing more decadent than those civilized people who amuse themselves by pretending to be primitives, and who even shed blood to convince themselves that their game is in earnest. The most perfect image of our artificial world is perhaps, more than the factory, the campground where a group of bankers wearing Indian headdresses play at worshipping Gitchi Manitou.[2] We can no longer be the spontaneous children of the cosmos, because nothing is more contrary to our nature as Westerners.

While the experience that Giono, and above all, Lawrence, had of the modern world is still true, their positive constructions suffer from a fundamental error. Such as we are, we cannot go back to being primitives. Lawrence is not the most naive, but the most civilized Englishman: the solitary individual, situated at the summit of that civilization. That primitive we are discussing, a peasant or an Indian, is nothing but the idea that modern man makes of an innocence that he has lost; we construct it with our words and our intelligence. An idea, and the worst idea of all, which he does not want to recognize for what it really is: the concept of the spontaneous, of the primitive. We are only capable of grasping this idea of the primitive externally, through the perfection of his gestures, from the esthetic side: of the "great feathered one" we only see the

[2] The "Great Spirit" of many indigenous tribes of the northeastern part of North America [American translator's note].

feathers. And when he becomes our equal, we feel, like Lawrence in his *Mornings in Mexico*, the nausea induced by his irreducible strangeness.

This inability to come to terms with this fact implies the inability to undertake the struggle against economic and social reality. The artist's rejection of reason and of morality in the name of nature entails the rejection of all collective action; the individual should only allow himself to be neutralized by society, by allowing himself to be shut up within the reservation of literature and culture. Instead of making a revolution, he writes a novel. While the individual plays at being a peasant or a primitive, society goes on its way, money still reigns over everyday life, and war continues to destroy people: confined in his individual dream, the pseudosavage can believe that he has abolished the world. The world, for its part, has not forgotten him; and one fine day the State's agents will know where to find him so they can cover his nakedness with a uniform. The escapism of the individual who surrenders himself to an irrational impulse only leads to a transitory escape, more or less successful. The most that the work of Giono or Lawrence can generate is a game that will only please the least sincere people in the long run, and which can only be played by those who are wealthy enough to build between themselves and reality the wall of a carefully enclosed park.

We are no longer children; time is irreversible. The tom-toms resound, magnified tenfold by loudspeakers, and the flags of the tribe wave in the stadium. We can always refuse to think, and to act irrationally. We can always reject man, and kill him. We are no longer primitives, but we can still become barbarians.

## 2. Love for the primitive

The modern individual distinguished himself from the landscape; then, as a result of contemplating it, he felt the desire to penetrate it: to live in it, surrounded by men. The passion for nature goes hand in hand with admiration for primitive societies. The first individuals liked the noble savages. We are interested in more variegated primitives: the Indians. Just like them, we live in tents; the *boy scouts*[3] and the youth hostels have taught us to associate in clans, to rediscover ritual symbols and festivals. If they have enjoyed so much success it is because they bring our young people closer to the youth of humanity, because they procure for them the illusion of an encounter with nature, but even more, with primitive society.

As long as there were no civilized people, there were no primitive people: only barbarians or backwards peoples, fearsome or contemptible, whom it was legitimate to eliminate by way of conversion or force of arms. Traditional societies—like ours up until recently—had no doubts about their own value, and were strangers to pluralism; they annihilated or assimilated, in any case they remorselessly destroyed societies that were too weak to resist them. The inefficacy of the available means, however, have up until now been confused with respect for one's neighbor. Compared to primitive

[3] In English in the original [American translator's note].

peoples, modern society is no more imperialist than any other, it is just that its means are more powerful. It does not commit massacres like the Assyrians—it even tries to accept the stranger: it kills by contact. Unlike the Greeks or the Chinese, however, who only felt contempt for barbarians, it is tormented by an undercurrent of bad conscience. It has learned that all men are equal and therefore that social forms that seem terrible and backwards are a reflection of humanity, since it is impossible to recognize man in the Melanesian without recognizing man, even minimally, in the reality of his customs.

And this is taking place at a time when the sense of the universal and, even more, the power of technology, are tending to level a world whose diversity a pluralism of Christian origin once tended to respect.[4] Paradoxically, appreciation for the value of primitive societies grew at the same time that modern organization was causing them to disappear; and in most cases it was their moral destruction that led to their physical destruction. An obscure sympathy, which gave rise to all kinds of misunderstandings, drew the Westerner closer to, yet also separated him from, the "indigenous" peoples of the equatorial jungles—or of the rural areas of Europe. Just as the vanguard of the bourgeoisie felt attracted to a proletariat whose virtues it praised—but not without deploring its alienation at the same time—the highly-developed American or European does not know whether he should feel sad about the backwardness of the "underdeveloped" peoples, or if, to the contrary, he should admire them for their spontaneity and for the quaintness of their customs. With respect to this issue, the attitude of the average Western intellectual is more or less the following: bourgeois civilization is abject, indigenous people are admirable—therefore, one must put an end to the latter by raising it to the level of the former. Unfortunately, this "therefore" is never explicitly expressed. And this is how we currently manage to convince ourselves that industrialization and the conservation of folk culture go hand in hand, even though the former actually signifies the end of the latter.

If the common people of the West, still too close to nature, only feel contempt for the gypsy, the Parisian artist feels that he is the brother of that other Bohemian. Although Babbitt scorned Negroes and Mexicans, Greenwich Village made him dream of Negro art and trips to the Yucatan. This admiration is not much better than the old revulsion, however; it is even proof of a much greater lack of understanding, since the revulsion produced by the primitive shows that he participates in the same humanity as us. Our superficial pluralism, however, grants him the same indulgence that we grant to the habits of an animal; and, as in the way we treat animals, we keep our primitives in distant, enclosed places. This admiration is nothing but a degraded form

[4] The Pléiade *Encyclopédie*, a compendium of modern knowledge—and therefore, of modern myths—informs us, through the mouth of R. Queneau, that its goal is to make Western man conscious of the fact that "he is not the only representative of the human species who is worthy of consideration...." It proposes to help us understand "the Amerindian, Kamul, Tougous cultures...", just when nationalism and socialism, taking over from colonialism, have finished westernizing the indigenous societies of the interior. And, naturally, the Kamul, Tougous, etc., cultures are included in the Bachelor's Degree curriculum. [Author's note.]

of terror: the terrible barbarian has turned into a colorful scarecrow that distracts us from our boredom.

Both revulsion and admiration for the primitive are based on ignorance and a sense of strangeness, in the absence of a shared way of life. In most cases, a sympathetic attitude would hardly survive everyday experience. It can only continue to exist as long as it remains spectacle or culture: literature. Can a humanist or a Christian seriously accept the caste system, polygamy or cannibalism? Is it not possible that, by recognizing the other person as our neighbor, we create him in our own image? It seems that man cannot serve two masters; he cannot truly recognize two societies, except by way of a miracle. And perhaps it is this miracle that our eclecticism is invoking.

## 3. The intellectual and the noble savage

Civilized man discovers the "primitive": his origins. And if he is no longer horrified, it is only to admire the childhood that he has renounced. He interrogates himself about this other self; and this is the secret of man that science attempts to describe. Ethnology is an objective science, but also the most passionately biased science. These strange and fascinating customs— are they facts or exemplary models? These magical objects—are they ethnographic exhibits or works of art? Do they belong in the Louvre or the Museum of Man? Thanks to ethnology, the love for primitive life can finally be taken seriously, and the former *boy scout* can really become interested in the Indians. The study of primitive men justifies the abandonment of civilization in accordance with their norms and allows one to share their way of life without being considered to be crazy. Certain surrealists might therefore find ethnology to be the profession of their dreams.

Because ethnology is the vanguard of the passion for the primitive, however, it is also the vanguard of progress, that is, of the contradictions of the West. These contradictions were effectively and profoundly expressed, although not resolved, in the book by Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*. The mistake of a large number of works that explain the life of the primitives to us—many such books have been published during the last few years— resides in the fact that they encourage escapism by presenting us with an idyllic portrait of primitive times. The book by Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, focuses on a tragic drama. For the gaze that discovers primitive societies is the gaze of the society that is destroying them: that face that seduces us is not the face of an invincible youth, but that of a moribund childhood that we have poisoned. "Lofty and lucrative are the revelations which these young men draw from those enemies of Society savages, snowbound peaks, bottomless caves, and impenetrable forests which Society conspires to ennoble at the very moment at which it has robbed them of their power to harm. Noble they are today, but when they were really the adversaries of Society they inspired only terror and disgust.... To have destroyed the Indians is not enough the public may, indeed, not realize that the destruction has taken place and

what the reader wants is to satisfy, in some sort, the cannibal-instincts of the historical process to which the Indians have already succumbed."[5] But the drama of the primitives is also that of Western societies. Catalonians, Auvergnese and even Frenchmen, we are all Bororos whose culture is decomposing on contact with an insatiable West.

Admiration for the noble savage is one of our characteristic traits, but the ethnologist is its most extreme expression. If ethnology is an objective science, then it does not make value judgments and all societies are equally valid: the culture of the Australian Aborigines is worth just as much as that of the French. No civilization has made as much progress in working bones and skins as that of the Eskimos; and while cannibalism is a repugnant custom, it is a sign of respect for the enemy that we do not find the least trace of in our concentration camps. These "primitives" are only primitive compared to our values; among themselves, the integration of the individual into society takes place according to rules that are as refined as those of our algebra, the product of a history that is as long and as complex as ours.

This objectivity is also a passionate subjectivity, however; it is hard to be objective when it is knowledge of man that is involved. Man is a social being; the ethnologist cannot rid himself of the prejudices of his society without falling prey to the charm of the object that he is observing. We no longer ask the noble savage to teach us a lesson in morality, we know morality all too well; instead, we ask him to teach us to be amoral: the spontaneity of a childhood that can forestall the onset of puberty. In this way, we seek the magical impulse that we have lost, we see our neighbor and at the same time our own antithesis in this increasingly more uniform world. "Are we to draw a parallel with the Marco Polos of our own day who bring back from those same territories in the form, this time, of photographs the heightened sensations which grow ever more indispensable to our society as it founders deeper and deeper in its own boredom?"[6] The underlying driving force of this objective science is nostalgia for a paradise lost: for a society that is not based on oppression. And Lévi-Strauss, following in the footsteps of Rousseau and so many other travelers, thought he could discover in man's origins the harmony that he finds at the conclusion of his work. Unlike most moderns, however, he has a premonition that, by escaping time, that society can begin right here at any moment. "The golden age which blind superstition situated behind

[5] "No longer can travel yield up its treasures intact: the islands of the South Seas, for instance, have become stationary aircraft-carriers; the whole of Asia has been taken sick; shanty-towns disfigure Africa; commercial and military aircraft roar across the still virgin but no longer unspoilt forests of South America and Melanesia. . . . Travel, in such circumstances, can only bring us face to face with our historical existence in its unhappiest aspects. The great civilization of the West has given birth to many marvels; but at what a cost! As has happened in the case of the most famous of their creations, that atomic pile in which have been built structures of a complexity hitherto unknown, the order and harmony of the West depend upon the elimination of that prodigious quantity of maleficent by-products which now pollutes the earth. What travel has now to show us is the filth, our filth, that we have thrown in the face of humanity." Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques.* [Author's note.]

[6] Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.* [Author's note.]

or ahead of us is in us."[7] But the secret of this transition has been lost in every human being.

The ethnologist has not liberated himself from this contradiction; the person who is responsible for discovering primitive societies is the agent of the society that is destroying them. And he is the initiator of that destruction. He, too, dreams of being the first civilized man to penetrate a virgin world: of deflowering the innocence of the savages. He brings them industrial products and in exchange he asks them for their souls: in another era the traders also offered the Indians glass beads in exchange for gold. But the excessive value that the indigenous peoples of the West attribute to efficacy sometimes makes them fall for such swindles. Above all, the ethnologist brings consciousness to the noble savage: he makes him understand that he is a primitive. The representative of a society that equips him with its most sophisticated and expensive means, but, more importantly, with a postChristian consciousness that is the basis of scientific investigation and of the remorse that accompanies it, the consistent ethnologist is trapped in an unsolvable contradiction. If he conducts his scientific research correctly and maintains his objectivity, he betrays the faith of those all-too-naive children by considering them, as small as they are, as objects. And if, yielding to a human sentiment of sympathy, he is tempted to see them as more authentic than civilized people, it is the objectivity of his scientific research that he endangers. But the ethnologist believes in science as much as he believes in Eden. Usually, however, the vain regrets of the individual pose no obstacle to society's taking advantage of the effective work of the scientist. The ethnologist may detest the missionary—a direct rival and, sometimes, a colleague—but he may actually inflict more harm than the missionary. While a true Christian faith can be man's salvation, the byproducts of this faith are tainted; but if certain missions have contributed to the moral extinction of certain primitive societies, what can we say about the effects of government bodies, trade patterns and industries that have taken advantage of the information provided by science?

Like anyone else, the ethnologist will be tempted to justify his profession by attributing a superior value to its object, but then it is this same justification that he condemns, because, having eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, he has just expelled Adam from Paradise. Sympathy for indigenous societies, often accompanied by the worship of progress that levels customs and tends to homogenize different peoples, can give rise, as is so often the case, to a folk culture for tourists superimposed over an abyss of uniformity, to an autonomy similar to that granted to the ethnic minorities of the USSR. In the best cases, nostalgia for primitive society will lead to crystallizing its forms in books and films—these are the vehicles of the propaganda for tourism that is destroying primitive society—or to preserving it by other means, locking up the last savages, like the last of the big mammals, in carefully protected reservations, where they can play the role of primitives for a public

[7] *Ibid.* [Author's note.]

of civilized people. What else are the Basques or the Tyroleans in Europe? If their reservations are a little more open, their customs are not preserved quite as well.

And the person who adores the noble savage? He is the same person who destroys him. And the person who rejects the constraints of civilization, the person who is eager to restore nature and freedom? He is the same person who wants to perfect the social organization. This man, chained to his contradictions, is the heir of Christ, the modern individual: each and every one of us. And who is the inveterate enemy of nature and freedom? The Western progressive reactionary. And the more he persists in his critique, the more deeply he plunges into contradiction—even if he does not pursue it to its logical conclusion. Not even Lévi-Strauss himself is exempt from this rule; the isolated sociologist, a Marxist and an admirer of the most elementary societies at the conclusion of a determinist critique that finds universal entropy everywhere. Now, all he can do is admit a paradoxical and misanthropic freedom: "let us grasp the essence of what our species has been and still is, beyond thought and beneath society: an essence that may be vouchsafed to us in a mineral more beautiful than any work of Man; in the scent, more subtly evolved than our books, that lingers in the heart of a lily; or in the wink of an eye, heavy with patience, serenity, and mutual forgiveness, that sometimes, through an involuntary understanding, one can exchange with a cat."[8]

In this domain, as in so many others, contradiction is the basis of our condition. And it will only be resolved when we accept it, when we acknowledge the Christian event that lies at the origin of the man that we have become: the destruction of primitive societies, but also their recognition. Unfortunately, the ethnologist—the modern individual—can end up finding in this event two reasons for hating Christ: accusing him of being *profoundly* responsible for the destruction of those peoples that he loves, as well as for his impotent bad conscience. He cannot go on, however, without justifying his profession—does he have any other? That is why he is still, like us, trapped between his sympathy for the past and his illusions about the future, without realizing that everything can begin here, at the very heart of the present moment, at the heart of these contradictions that are tearing us apart: in the heart and the spirit of each man. All that is needed is for this man to open his eyes to the light and rise up before the eternal in order to be able to mediate between the future and the past. But if the modern individual has invented the primitive by destroying him, only God can create Adam.

[8] *Ibid.* [Author's note.]

# III Weekend Pagans

Today, the feeling of nature has left the salons to circulate in the streets, waiting for its turn to go to the countryside. It has contaminated the masses. It is expressed in an ordinary way in the popular myths that nourish the press and the cinema. As a consequence of Christianity, of its achievements and its failure, a new paganism is emerging, a paganism that divinizes matter, the senses and the body: the Atom, the Star, the Champion. The multitudes once again gather to worship the Sun and the Water, and frequent the Sacred Places. This is the era of vacations. Their suntanned faces are only the other side of an everyday hell, a hell that is even more frigid thanks to mechanical abstraction.

## 1. Back-to-nature myths: the myth of the island

The feeling of nature is no longer the privilege of the bourgeoisie and its literature, it is no longer expressed only in individual works, but in collective representations: in the myths that give form to the society of which they are the manifestations. In our society, the feeling of nature is the human obverse of the technological phenomenon. To ignore it would be to ignore the forces that act on our contemporary world at the same level as television or oil.

Every day, the *mass media*[1] disseminate the myths of the Sea, the Island, the Mountain and the Polar Ice. And propaganda exploits them as well. The basis of this propaganda might very well be ideological and it might have as its objective the organization of the world, but everyone knows that in order to win over the modern masses you must promise them freedom in nature. Nature is photogenic; our civilization of the image is prone to exploit it to compensate for the rationality of its mathematical infrastructure.

Unlike the theater, which derives its power from the artifice that it is condemned to be and that, in its highest expression, is becoming a kind of closed ceremony, the cinema is an external art. In the darkest heart of the cities, the doors of the screen suddenly open upon a beyond of clarity and space. It is to this sense of the specificity of the cinematographic art that the best American or Russian films owe their originality, while the best French cinema seems to be literature or theater. The *western* is an American-style paean to nature: the wide open sky, endless herds, the cosmic pillars of

[1] In English in the original [American translator's note].

the "mesas". Nature, untouched: savage Indians and outlaws. Man finally establishes himself in this wilderness: the pioneer who comes to impose order on nature, the hero, without whom there would be no adventure, but because of whom the wilderness is destroyed.

As for Soviet cinema—perhaps the only cultural achievement of the revolution—it paradoxically exalts the splendor of the primitive Earth, and the simplicity of the people who were born from it, more than the building of socialism. It is true that, at first, it sought to sing the praises of the beauty of machines and the impulse of communism. But the beauty of machines and of the formulas of the revolution were rapidly exhausted; if there was no background of magnificent clouds to give them grandeur, and if under the worker's cap the wrinkled face of the Russian *mujik* did not reappear, they would soon provoke boredom. The power of the great Russian films is rooted in the innocence of a land and a people that are still primitive. A majestic rhythm is exhibited in infinite skies, heralding storms whose approach causes the fields of grain to undulate all across the horizon. An expression of a nature from which the superficial quaintness has been removed, in the style of the art of the Far East, the great Soviet film is capable of expressing the immensity of nature in symbolic detail: in some humble reeds, in a few ordinary water lilies: the proletariat of things. But it is the abundance of all the harvests of the world that makes the sprout burst forth from the seed. And just as it rejects the garrulousness of the picturesque, it rejects the actor, too.

This is a curious contradiction of an art devoted to praising the victory of the idea and technology, and the colonization of a virgin land; of an art that derives its beauty from a new nature and a new people; that offers to the public of the West the example of its machines, while that same public discovers in it the power and the innocence that the victory of science and technology have caused it to lose.

In our society, the artifice tries to lead us back to nature everywhere. The virgin jungle fills the screen and there is Tarzan: "To make our existence in our overpopulated cities bearable ... the civil servant buried under a mountain of files notes that he is being invaded by waves of rising joy with the first scenes of the jungle whose foliage is stirred by the breeze.... In this way, those who cannot go on a cruise to the islands of the Pacific find in exotic movies a tonic for their nerves. Nature never denies its powers to those who ask."[2] Adam is reborn and by shooting down airplanes with a bow and arrow he shows the masses that the muscular and spiritual power of the individual will always prevail over machines. Flash Gordon, his outer space heir, is still the man of nature, even if he is perfectly capable of repairing the rockets that his friend Dr. Zarkhov manufactures, that precursor of the great Russian-American Alliance for Progress. Gifted with exceptional moral virtues, Flash Gordon nonetheless owes the greater part of his fame to the less abstract qualities of his muscles. Progress may be endless, but human nature, fortunately, is immutable: they have not yet offered us a

[2] *Pour vous*, a weekly magazine devoted to the cinema. [Author's note.]

Superman with three eyes and pliers instead of hands. And in the end, at the other end of the universe, the space fleet leaves us on the Earth of prehistory or the feudal era: the atomic transmission of thought does not prevent the use of the Roman sandal.

Above all, however, we need Islands. "Ah, the islands in the breeze!". If Marius[3] walks to the end of the dock and, like us, contemplates the empty expanse of the ocean, it is because, beyond that restless infinity, he hopes to discover the lost island: his island, at the antipodes of the existence that he leads. In a mass society in which men still aspire to freedom, the myth of the island is the myth of the individual. The individual, the isolated man, the creator of his world, is Robinson. From the foam and the darkness of the hurricane, Robinson is transported from London to the desert island, and in the nakedness of the shipwreck a new birth begins. Just as God created the world from chaos, the isolated man builds his world: against nature and in nature. But his solitude is only bearable if there is another person: every Robinson needs a Friday. What the hero then loses is his nostalgia for a return to nature; and with the appearance of other men, savages or sailors, Eden comes to an end. Robinson's adventure has no resolution; the only possible resolution is to leave the island in order to avoid perishing miserably there. There is no island, nor is there even a free individual, without a family and without companions. In that case the desert island would not have been a precarious refuge, as hated as it is beloved, but a permanent homeland, like the island of Pitcairn in *Mutiny on the Bounty*. There, of course, it was no longer just a matter of building a hut, but of organizing social relations. They were not brought to these islands by a shipwreck, but by their own choice. *Robinson Crusoe* is not just a book like any other book; Defoe is only the inventor of a myth that the modern individual already bore within him. From then on, we have seen many Robinsons—from *The Swiss Family Robinson* to *The Mysterious Island*—in which the role of the plot was always secondary compared to the passionate construction of a civilization from scratch. Inevitably, however, at the end of the book the enterprise fails. There is no other remedy than to grow old, get married, leave the island to rejoin society. The ocean swallowed the mysterious island to keep it from being annexed by a warship. The most that the former shipwreck survivors can do is construct an imaginary island on terra firma.

The modern individual feels a powerful attraction towards islands. In the 18$^{th}$ century every English garden had its little island. The island of the public park is the only island that the children of the cities know; and it is no less solitary or less populated by monsters. For the vacations of the petty bourgeoisie, there are the islands of the ocean and the English Channel. For the entertainment of millionaires, Madeira, Hawaii or Tahiti, where they can sunbathe under the palms and play at being noble savages in the solitude of a private beach. Any little piece of ground surrounded by water, even if it is a little parcel of land in the outskirts of Paris, is sharply defined, as is the case

[3] An allusion to the play of the same name, *Marius* (1928), by Marcel Pagnol; a film version of the play, directed by Alexander Korda, was released in 1931 [Spanish translator's note].

with a lake on terra firma. The limiting case is the island on a lake: the double wall of the Borromean Islands.

Generally speaking, island dwellers suffer from the oppressiveness of the island, besieged by the life of the ocean; and if they can, they leave. Those who live on the continents, however, in this totalitarian era of masses, in which men and events form a featureless block, dream of an isolated microcosm protected by the immensity of the ocean: the personal island that each modern individual bears within him. The unbreakable rock at the very heart of chaos, enveloped by the storm, just as the family home is enveloped by the night. The solitary island separated by the sea from the misfortunes that are common to all men: far from politics, far from business. Affirmed at the summit of the limitless, the perfect island, distinctly defined in its contours by the aureole of the reefs, where things are more clear, their density greater. The little island on which men, tired of flying over the world in an airplane, find a world more to their measure, in which they walk from the harbor to their house; the island-park where cars are prohibited. The island closed in on itself, whose flora, fauna and ancient customs are preserved in their integrity by the zealous guardianship of the ocean. The island of utopias, forgotten by the world. For the inhabitant of our planetary civilization feels nostalgia for the country district, and nostalgia for the little town. The archipelago, where the traveler goes from one island to another, from one solitude to another, from one lonely place to another, is the symbol of a pluralist society where men go from one man to another by crossing over the expanse of the sea of distance and absence; rather than that planetary fraternity in which, from pole to pole, catastrophe merges the peoples.

Eden is an island: the Tahiti of Bougainville or the Samoa of *Moana*.[4] History passed them by and their inhabitants lived naked under the sun, without any knowledge of labor or sin. Once discovered, however, every island ceases to be an island, and, together with their Bougainvilles, modern times delegate to them their merchants, their soldiers and their priests, who, besides their virtues and their hygiene, introduce corruption and death. The illusion of forgotten islands is even more ridiculous than the island of the public park—the oceans are today more narrow than the stretch of stagnant water that isolates the gazebo in the city park. Our world is a total world where airplanes fly indifferently over continents and seas, American skyscrapers and the hut on the atoll. There are no more islands; the Eden of the Pacific where Gerbault[5] died is no longer anything but a strategic point where, on a few square kilometers, the enemy continents concentrate their means of destruction; where a handful of terrified primitives see how a hundred tribes of greasy soldiers fall from the sky, while explosives turn the jungle into a vacant lot that the victors will cover with cement for their airplanes. After the war, there were no more islands. Eniwetok, Bikini, Montebello, Touamotou:

[4] A documentary film directed by Robert J. Flaherty, released in 1926 [Spanish translator's note].

[5] Alain Gerbault (1893-1941), a French sailor whose devotion to Polynesia led him to oppose its colonization by the European powers [Spanish translator's note].

radioactive tombs. Tahiti, Gran Canaria: new Saint-Tropezes to which the masses flock, overwhelming the last natives.

There are no more islands; on his desert island that he rents by the month, Robinson-Decaunes interprets for us, in front of his camera, this impossible miracle: a solitary man.[6] And the ocean whose center is this island, is a human ocean.

There are no more islands, or, rather, the world has been turned into the smallest island, a land convulsed by furious activity, trodden upon by the multitudes, dragged through the flames of planetary wars. A Devil's Island where humanity is dying, surrounded by the infinity all around it. Is there any escape from the Earth? There is no more beyond, and soon a new flood will inundate everything. Man can no longer escape, there is no ocean that Power cannot cross to harass him even in his most private refuge. Tomorrow there will be no more islands, except those of madness and death.

## 2. From the Garden of Eden to the national park

Ever since Paradise, there have always been gardens. In the East, man very soon felt the need to surround his house with flowers and fruit trees; to capture the void of the sky in a marble basin and to cause its image to tremble with the fine cascade of a thread of water. The garden is the sum of all the pleasures of life: the siesta in the shade in the monotonous drone of the cicadas and the tinkle of the fountain, a conversation with friends under the arbor. There is a myth of paradise that is the myth of the garden, both for the Bedouin as well as for the modern socialist, who imagines a perfect society as a city in the middle of a park.

But the garden of the ancients is above all a victory over nature. It is the paradise that man has conquered thanks to art, eliminating from creation everything that might be dangerous and annoying: the dappled shade and the gentle light of the sun instead of the night of the jungles and the dazzling light of the desert. It is fresh air and the murmur of running water, and a handful of domesticated animals that come to eat out of your hand. In his garden, man surrenders to pleasures of life that he could not find in wild nature. The meaning of the Arabian garden is precisely the opposite of the purpose of our public parks. That is why the garden was so easily transformed into a work of art. It was not a question of preserving nature, but of defeating it. The trimmed bushes, the long paths of Versailles, are the highest expression of a civilization; that is, a wild nature that maintains its forces inviolate, dominated by an even stronger need for order: the geometry of the gardens of André Le Nôtre is the response of an urbanity that was at the time affirming itself against the violence of custom.

The radical transformation in the art of gardens that took place in the 18$^{\text{th}}$ century is one of the signs, among many others, of the human transformation that took place in that era and that, as one would expect, was underway in the countries where industry

[6] In 1962, the French journalist Georges de Caunes spent several months alone on a desert island in Polynesia, filming his experience with a movie camera for French television [Spanish translator's note].

and modern individualism were born: in the England of nascent manufacturing and in the France of the *philosophes*. The English garden is, compared to the "French garden", one of the faces of the modern revolution. It does not involve the subjugation of nature by art, but turns art into nature. The architect imitates in the garden the "picturesque" curves and accidents of the landscape. For the romantics, however, this picturesque aspect composed with such painstaking care from those ruins and waterfalls would seem too artificial; if we still encounter this aspect in the public parks of their time this is because the taste of the masses is always backwards with respect to that of the cultured minority. We want a virgin nature; or if it is a garden, like Zola's Paradou,[7] we like it because it is disused and reverts to nature. We plant selected grasses between the meticulously arranged flagstones, and on the borders of our gardens the flowers are mixed together in deliberate disorder. Nonetheless, since then it seems that we are building decidedly classical gardens. Perhaps this is a sign of a new stage in the history of society: one in which man understands that he can expect anything from art.

The modern city dweller is enchanted by flowers (if you have any doubts about this, just consider how popular floral expositions are), but he likes trees even more. For the French peasant, "cutting firewood" is not just a chore, but the pleasure of winter, the natural function par excellence. The grinding of the steel teeth as they chew the wood, the tree that shakes and then suddenly shudders, split to the crown by a deep crack ... all this awakens in him an ancient passion that he only finds otherwise in hunting. The Parisian, on the other hand, defends his trees; in the winter he likes that labyrinth of black branches tortured by the cold; in the summer, he likes that hurricane of greenery in motion, that constantly changing play of colors and forms whose variety never bores him, for he is tired of the geometry of the cities. In the countryside, the sun-bleached house of the peasant often stands out in contrast to the summer residence of the bourgeois, buried under linden trees. Trees line the streets of the modern big cities, which also try to preserve their nearby woodlands. The apostles of reforestation say they are motivated by objective and utilitarian reasons, but they are also driven by an even stronger passion; not only do they want to regulate the water level of the rivers, they also want to stabilize the land with roots and immerse it once again in the shade of the forest.

For the tree serenely presents us with the image of an existence that is no longer ours. The Tree of Life, a silent and trustworthy life that feeds on the depths of the soil; trees that are many years old, and even centuries old, in a civilization that lives for the moment. Immovable trunks whose crowns flutter in the slightest breeze. Trees of glory, whose roots feed from blind darkness the blaze of leaves that glitter in the blue of the sky. What explains this popularity of wood, this taste for smooth surfaces on which the spiral forms of knots stand out? Because wood does not possess the icy hardness of metal, or the lightness and blandness of plastic; it is still alive in its sinuous smoothness, in its changing reflections and its subtle aroma. The man of our era of

[7] A reference to Émile Zola's *The Sin of Father Mouret* (1875) [Spanish translator's note].

steel yearns for an era of wood; he enters the night of the forests with the vague hope of getting lost, in order to forget the shelterless land where an implacable sun haunts his every step.

Urban humanity yearns to go to the country to relax. In modern cities, an attempt is made to preserve "green spaces", at least in England and the United States. In France the peasant-bourgeois is too obsessed with utility to waste space in such a way: Paris owes the few parks that it has to the magnificence of the kings. Our urban planners smear their blueprints with green, but in vain. In practice, they order that the last trees should be cut down. Unfortunately, the car demands parking space: will we have to till our cities, after having tilled our countrysides?

At present, however, these green veins are no longer sufficient for the enormous stone body of the urban area, for its need for fresh air and, above all, for freedom. By fleeing from the cities, the urban masses are fleeing from those phony public parks, where they are prohibited from really exploring: people dream of camping on the grass and seeing the wild beasts escape from their cages. The masses want wide open spaces where they can have the sensation of being in touch with the life of the primal wilderness. In new countries that are also super-industrialized, like the United States, the national parks are the public gardens of a State-continent. In England, regional development plans include provisions for large nature preserves alongside the industrial and urban zones, while France has hardly even begun to address these issues. The national park is not a garden, but a piece of nature artificially preserved by the law. Strict regulations prohibit all economic activities, hunting, fishing and gathering of plants within its borders. Tourism is restricted to certain designated campgrounds. In today's civilization, this might be the only way to save nature; however, it only saves it by putting it beyond the reach of man. This nature that survives under police surveillance is no longer nature; a planned wilderness is not the primal wilderness. A Garden of Eden, without either dangers or victims, that is not more remote from, but closer to the conflicts of earthly life, where the wild animals do not hesitate to beg for food from its visitors, the national park is an absolute artifice. And perhaps the last rural areas of Europe, with their polluted rivers and their large tracts of abandoned farmland, respond better to the demands of those who are fleeing the city; because if they flee from it, they do so, among other reasons, to escape from planning.

The national park is not nature. It is a park, a product of social organization: the public park of the total city. There, too, you are prohibited from picking flowers, and walking on the grass—and finally, walking on the trails. In some countries there are now nature preserves where not only are members of the public, but even scientists, prohibited from entering them: otherwise their natural equilibrium would be disturbed. This is the case with the nature preserves of Northern Australia, which harbor the last specimens of the most delicate animal of all: the wild man. It is possible that in this way a few examples of nature can be saved, in a hermetically sealed enclosure that will preserve them from being violated by the multitudes and by industrial pollution. At most, beyond the park's perimeter fence, we will be permitted to cast an impotent

glance at nature through that peephole known as television. But this nature protected by a shield, isolated from the rest of the universe—can it still be living nature? It is the whole Earth that will have to be transformed into a national park, and the human masses will have to go to live under a protective shield on some other planet.

## 3. Fishing with live bait

What good are public parks or national parks if fishing and hunting are prohibited? To encounter nature means not only seeing it, but also grasping it: activity. Within the modern individual, the primitive man, the fisherman or the hunter, still lives. And this inclination, or rather this fierce desire, is exasperated when it cannot be satisfied: when he cannot hunt, the accursed hunter stalks a shadow. In the countries whose population is composed of modern individuals, fishing is an act of freedom. In England, the trout is the fish of the *gentleman*, for whom fishing is a sport: a game that requires that you respect certain rules. In France, under the Third Republic, it was, on the other hand, more popular among the common people than among the bourgeoisie; and the French fisherman, still very close to his peasant roots, practiced it as a poacher, since freedom, in a nation that was still a monarchy, was identified with breaking the law. Most of the time, what did men talk about? About sports, when not about hunting or fishing. We will not dare to admit it, but deep down we feel that if we cannot hunt or fish, we have been deprived of our greatest pleasure, and therefore have no reason to live.

For thousands of years man was a fisherman or a hunter. Fishing and hunting comprise one of those few domains in which men can fraternize beyond the barriers of nationality or class. The bourgeois, the worker, or the peasant who ordinarily would have nothing to say to each other suddenly find, when they meet while fishing or hunting, a common language. A basic instinct survives in fishing and hunting, reduced to the ridiculous dimensions of a recreational activity: casting or shooting; one of the last primitive gestures of man, along with the act of love. The fisherman who sees how the trout rises towards his fly feels overcome by emotion in the depths of his soul. It is rising; and that magical flower that opens, now it is here, indolently swallowing the bait. The die is cast, the fisherman abruptly sets the hook; and a quiver of anxiety links the fisherman with his prey. No, the Earth is still alive, as long as there are still big trout! The pool is not empty, there is a splash and movement: a dark monster has taken the bait. At these moments, has the fisherman caught the universe, which is suspended by a taut thread that is on the verge of breaking? Or does the universe have him on its line?

Fishing and hunting are the last activities that can completely unite us with the cosmos. The tourist flies over nature, the fisherman and the hunter penetrate it. Nature ceases to be a spectacle. Forms cover life and acquire a meaning: they are signs, and the fisherman and the hunter must respond, body and soul. The gaze of the hunter in search of prey, like the eye of the bird of prey, penetrates the mist and notices the

smallest detail; there is no nuance in the blue of the pool that is not noticed by the salmon fisherman. There is nothing like February, in the middle of the day, when the water is running so clear on the pebbles, when the first fly flutters over the foam of the rapids. The relation of the fisherman and the hunter with nature is total, because it is an active relation. The Paris office worker who is hypnotized while contemplating the bobbing of his cork off the docks of the Seine is much closer to primitive life than the tourist who contemplates the glaciers of Spitzbergen. He is alone, yet submerged in the universe. Today it takes an hour to go to Ecuador, but you still need a whole lifetime to really get to know a river: at least if you want to discover it on your own, since it is necessary to inspect every meter, and the river changes with each passing day, with each passing hour. For here it is not enough just to pass through, you have to live.

The modern traveler, conscious of the vanity of his adventures, always carries his fishing rod in his backpack: which momentarily gives him the illusion of being at home in those countries that he is traveling though as a foreigner. But he will have to set down roots to become an inhabitant of the river, and he knows that he has to leave soon; and he goes away, his only catch being hope and disappointment. Because the conscious fisherman, that is, the unsatisfied fisherman, knows perfectly well that he will never find happiness on the banks of the Lethe. In the futile diversion of fishing, in a world where abstraction and cold calculation rule, he pursues the most serious prey of all: the bloodiest prey in nature, a fantastic and shining prey, indolent like seaweed; and sudden like a bolt of mercury unexpectedly rising from the bottom of the water.... That fish: life.

In industrial societies, however, where the passion for fishing and hunting is becoming generalized at the same time that factories are springing up everywhere, the fisherman and the hunter are merely impotent witnesses of the last days of the rivers and the countryside. And the man of the cities then feels overcome by nostalgia for a past when the forests were deeper and the rivers were full of fish. When will the time come for big fish and giant prey? When will the time come for space and an abundance of prey? Here, too, repressed by society under the frivolous category of leisure, a fundamental human demand is concealed: the demand for life against death, against a universe in which man is alone, in the presence only of man and his products. Without fish and without prey, no matter how magnificent society and its achievements may be, as long as there are sons of Adam, the Earth would only be a desert or a prison.

## 4. The tourist's *tour*

The urbanite hates the city as much as he adores it. He cannot leave it, but he has to get away from it. Regardless of the price. He goes; but he has hardly started on his journey, and he has to return. A *brownian* motion is therefore stimulated in industrial society, which constantly increases in velocity and extension. The tourist flees the city,

but since even in the desert he brings the city with him, his return to nature inevitably lands him right back where he started.

As man breaks his bonds with the cosmos, he drifts in search of a shore. Nothing is more alien to primitive peoples and peasants than the idea of tourism. Anyone who has traveled across countries ignored by tourism knows just how surprised their inhabitants are to see a person going from place to place out of pure pleasure and, so that they do not think he is a madman or a spy, he has to invent a false excuse for his presence there. As a matter of principle, man only moves about from necessity: to escape an enemy, to make money or to obey the commandment of a god. Tourism arises when economic and social conditions allow the individual to break with his environment. It is born with prosperity, safe roads, curiosity and boredom: in the upper classes of the most civilized nations. The first tourist may have been the Emperor Hadrian. On the other hand, the taste for travel diminishes with poverty and insecurity. An epoch of invasions is never an epoch of tourism; at such times, the individual clings to his land to survive, or he is swept away as booty by the tide of invasions. During the Middle Ages, the traveler is a pilgrim or a merchant.

Tourism appeared with the humanists, although it was not yet the kind of tourism with which we are familiar. They went from one Roman ruin to another, from library to library; rattling along on their mules, they crossed the Alps without really noticing them. Tourism properly speaking was born in the 18$^{th}$ century and spread from England all over Europe. Travel ceased to be an affair of the aristocracy and became the practice of a whole social class—the bourgeoisie—and finally, that of the common people, too. Its progress was linked to the progress of the security guaranteed by social organization, the increasing speed and capacity of the means of transport, and the rise of vacations. Once it had reached a certain level, tourism became a social fact; for no good reason at all, the individual had to go places because he had to do what everyone else was doing. Besides technological progress, however, the emergence of tourism was also due to the human consequences entailed by technological progress: it was a spiritual cataclysm—in the depths of man's spirit—which drove people onto the roads.

To pack up and leave.... Nostalgia for a beyond, a better world, but also an aversion towards reality. A modern form of restlessness, traveling is the reflection in space of the endless pilgrimage of the individual spirit: of its search for transcendence and of its flight from itself. The place where it lives is the place of unhappiness, or, at least, of boredom. When you leave it behind, you have nothing to lose, and even when in that other place you find the same unhappiness and the same boredom, you will always have had the transitory entertainment of departure and the void of traveling. But since change is also becoming an everyday fact of life, the only recourse is to change even more rapidly—until the traveler is nothing but a snoring passenger, sprawled on the seat of an airplane flying a thousand miles an hour.

This new nomadic lifestyle no longer has anything to do with the old nomadic lifestyle, which plunged its roots into the cycle of trails and seasons. The modern individual is fleeing forward, trying to find in space the time that he otherwise devours.

"He must have novelty, even though there is nothing new left in the world."[8] With respect to traveling he is eclectic, and indifferently goes from the jungles of the Amazon to the polar icecaps. His fatherland is not enough for him, he thinks that he can be part of the world: he wants to feel at home in the icy blast of the Canadian blizzard as much as in the unremitting sun of the bazaar at Cadiz. In fact, the more he travels, the less he understands. Victims of our seven league boots, we rush from airport to airport, which are all the same; but we leave behind all the riches of the Earth. Because while the means at the disposal of man have multiplied prodigiously, the human being has not changed: he only has one life and, as of old, one life is not enough to know the truth of his own country, because man has to advance one step at a time. And to leave it for another is to lose it. The real traveler knows that he is only fleeing his fatherland to find a new one: because nothing is given to the contemporary individual. For him, the journey is a quest, and each step an ordeal. You said: this is where I want to live.... And you built a house. But this is a choice; and now you will never see Lake Baikal.

The tourist does not participate, because he has no time, and because he dislikes hard work and above all the effort required to exercise his freedom. He is nothing but a voyeur for whom the journey is a mere spectacle reduced to the monument or to the guidebook. The views are only an insipid backdrop. In the early 20th century you often heard people say: "It is so beautiful that it looks like the stage set of a theater!" A significant exclamation. The spectacle must compensate for its external shortcomings with the baroque and the shocking; but since the spectator wants thrills without risk, this quest for surprises is the vain pursuit of a shadow. When suffering or danger is too great, the emotion becomes intolerable; but if there is no longer any danger, the affair has no more taste and the tourist is condemned to seek out increasingly stronger visual condiments. Hence the escalation of the "picturesque" and the exotic that characterizes the brief history of tourism.

When travel was a risky and arduous enterprise, travelers hardly enjoyed "the great spectacles of nature". The tourist, on the other hand, needs more and more of the "picturesque", that is, more surprises and more of the unexpected: the contemporary taste for the picturesque is similar to the taste for the sensational. We need lakes in the countryside or islands in the sea; and, lacking small islands, political islets like Liechtenstein or Andorra have to suffice. We need contrasts, a city of marble built on the water, like Venice, or an Eden at the foot of Hell, like Naples at the foot of Vesuvius.

The picturesque is contrasts: rocks, canyons, waterfalls. The valley of the Rhine with its ravines and its ruins synthesizes well enough the pure picturesque according to the criteria of the Romantic era, but it lacks the waterfalls of Niagara. The more organized a civilization is, the more picturesque the picturesque must be; we need Congos falling from the heights of Mont Blanc, we need the Moon—and we shall have it.

[8] A verse from *Clymène*, by La Fontaine [Spanish translator's note].

The human equivalent of the picturesque is the exotic. Ancient societies, apparently less pluralistic than ours, considered foreign customs to be absurd and immoral. For the modern tourist, on the other hand, the stranger such customs are, the more interesting they become, on the condition, of course, that this strangeness is not threatening: in any event, the travel agency does not propose that we attend festivals that include prostitution or ritual crime. Exoticism is therefore superficial. The tourist is disengaged from what is profoundly original—when he does not detest it—and from what is profoundly common to all men: their everyday life. As for "politics", he dreads it. He reminds us of those Europeans of the colonial era who, refusing to see indigenous persons as individuals or merely as their fellow men, simultaneously refuse to grant them autonomy or to assimilate them.

Like the picturesque—and perhaps even more than the picturesque, because the reality of men is even more threatening than that of things—the exotic is spectacle rather than participation. It is unthinkable that one could live in those Andalusian villages that are so beautiful and so full of life, but so impoverished. Besides, the tourist does not live, he travels; he has hardly set foot on the ground when the car's horn sounds and he is called to order. This is why tourism does little for the fraternity of peoples. The tourist is enclosed by the organization and by his own weakness in a ghetto of information bureaus, hotels and shops, monuments and *souvenirs*: tourism and real life do not mix any better than oil and water.

The love of the exotic, strange customs and folk culture became widespread at the very moment that the Earth was standardized, and precisely because it was standardized. And tourism participated in this leveling. Hordes of rich invaders inundate the most beautiful countries, because they are the poorest countries. They come with their uniforms, with their Leicas as their machine guns and their dollars as ammunition. Riddled by snapshots, the Christ of Holy Week in Seville disappears from reality, and is projected on the plane of comedy; swamped by tourism, the Festival of San Fermín has been turned into a Franco-American party that the Navarrese locals will occasionally come to watch. In a virgin country, tourism amounts to rape, and is almost conscious of being just that. At the present time, the beauty of local dances is no longer good enough, you also need the "authenticity" of poverty, and Dior models pose for the cameras in front of the filthy walls of Nazaré.[9] Thus, some peoples offer themselves as a spectacle to make a living, and the tourist who thinks he is embracing a virgin is only grappling with a prostitute.

The tourist likes surprises, but does not like to be caught off guard. The travelers of the past had to endure discomfort and unforeseen accidents, and, above all, they had to display initiative, while now we need comfort and therefore organization. But the comfort that is required to spare us from the efforts of traveling is what prevents us from penetrating the foreign world that is our reason for traveling in the first place. The car, which allows us to go from place to place with ease, also imprisons us. Behind

[9] See the magazine, *Elle*. [Author's note.]

the windshield of the magic box, the landscape flies by, it would seem, at the mercy of the traveler. It is not hard to go somewhere in a hurry, but it is hard to stop. Where the pedestrian spontaneously stops to make a detour, where the bicyclist only needs to brake and dismount his bicycle, the car keeps going. Should we stop? Too late: you hardly even get a glimpse of the place before it is far behind you. The car in which we go places also immobilizes us, with our ass buried in its seat.[10] In theory, we are free to choose our itinerary, but the automobile prefers asphalt; and if by chance we do get out of the car, we are soon obliged to get back in. Thus, thanks to the car, some zones of the Pyrenees that do not have highways receive fewer visitors today than in the time of Russell or de Chausenque.[11] In the future, however, the bulldozer will allow the modern centaurs to invade the mountains everywhere, without any danger that their delicate little rubber hooves will be damaged.

Is travel still a vital need of the modern individual or is it only a matter of "keeping up with the Joneses"? Do we only go somewhere if we do not have to drive on rough roads? Do we go on a trip if the travel agency does not propose it to us? The organization of travel responds to the need and at the same time the inability to travel. Its goal is to permit the tourist to leave his house without leaving his habits, to spare him that discomfort par excellence: making choices and the encounter with the strange. The travel agency presents its customer with a handful of destinations at a fixed price: forty-eight hours in London, eight days in Spain, a world tour in one month: Nicepalmerbleue, Parismannequinvendôme, Kenyarhinocerossafari. All the wealth of the world is reduced to a handful of "picturesque places" whose value is expressed numerically by the number of stars on the Michelin Guide: if by chance the garbage dumps of Aubervilliers are ever marked with three stars, we can be sure that the multitude will stampede towards them. Having made his "choice", the traveler has nothing left to do but to abandon himself to it. The infernal machinery, once set in motion, will lead him from monument to monument until his time of departure, without his having experienced those special moments when a traveler can learn something: arrival in the rain at an unfamiliar inn, wandering around a strange city, anxiety or boredom. The ideal is the cruise; like camping, it brings the traveler to the end of the world without having to leave a closed social environment. Between one dance and another, he undertakes a motorized excursion on land. When he scales Santa Cruz de Tenerife he will see the valley of La Orotava, and from these islands he will bring home the rather bland image of a tropical public park lost amidst the banana plantations. He will never know that, above the clouds, the giant pines rise triumphantly amidst the light and that at their feet black headlands plunge to the sea, girdled in silver by the

[10] See my essay, *L'Hommauto*. [Author's note.]

[11] Henry Russell (1834-1909), a Franco-British mountaineer, made numerous ascents of the high peaks of the Pyrenees, including about thirty first ascents and some impressive winter ascents. Vincent de Chausenque (1781-1868), a naturalist and mountaineer, was one of the first explorers of the French Pyrenees [Spanish translator's note].

surf. The real Isles of the Blest only yield their secrets to those who come to them by way of forgotten paths.

With capitalist society, tourism has become a heavy industry. The travel agencies manufacture certain standardized products assembly-line fashion, whose value is noted in the Guide. Thomas Cook sold 1,642,723

"Moonlight-in-Venice" tours—three stars (the equivalent for Italy of a mine that produces ten million tons of coal)—and only 10,643 "Sun-of-Cerdeña" tours—one star. And Cook only blazed the trail for Intourist:[12] the capitalist agency bases its quest for profits on organized mass tourism; the only thing the government-owned agency has to do is exploit mass tourism for the purposes of power. For the tourist organization, while it serves to obtain foreign currency, serves above all to keep the tourist, domestic or foreign, within the limits that are established for him. Thus, in Hitler's Germany, the *Kraft Durch Freude*[13] organized cruises that allowed Germans to see foreign countries without ever leaving the Third Reich.

The tourist wants to travel, but he does not want to pay the price, which is an effort of imagination and breaking with his old habits. By sparing him from paying this price, the organization spares him the journey. He can look; since he does not act, he will never penetrate that enchanting world that unfolds before his eyes. He does not leave himself or his world, and everywhere he goes he brings with him the same car, the same luxury hotel, the same menu. Everything that he thinks he absorbs loses its original color in the process. Everywhere he finds the same people from his native country and the same obsequious merchants. At bottom, what sense does it make to have to go somewhere to find the same old things? The ultimate opportunity for the traveler is no longer to catch a flight for Sidney, but to take the untrodden path just outside his door. Why flee if one is a prisoner everywhere? The day will come when taking a plane to Honolulu will be as routine as taking the subway at noon. Tourism? A closed circuit that leads the tourist exactly to his point of departure. Or, rather, henceforth, a way to move about without ever leaving the same spot.

This is why, within the great touristic current a countercurrent has developed that is favorable for real contact with nature. The era of the great hotels was also the era of camping, while the latter was, in its origins, an affair of an elite of taste rather than of money. Camping was the invention of a small number of individuals who were passionate lovers of nature and of hiking or bicycling, which they practiced in total freedom because society scorned it. Most people did not go camping, because they did not have paid vacations, but also because those Bohemians who went camping, who did not have the excuse of necessity, only made them laugh. Society had yet to put a price tag on camping, or turn it into an industry. Later, however, camping became more popular, and society organized it, which would make it even more popular and

[12] Intourist: the government-owned travel agency of the former USSR [American translator's note].

[13] Literally, "Strength through Joy". This was the name of the institution responsible for the management of free time in Nazi Germany. It offered all kinds of trips and excursions and became the largest travel agency in the world during the 1930s [Spanish translator's note].

render its organization even more necessary, which would cause it to lose, along with its rustic charm and its freedom, its very reason for existence, since areas set aside for fully-equipped campgrounds would become mandatory. Along with the possibility of choosing one's campsite, the camper would also lose more and more of his solitude. Camping is losing its genuine interest and becoming little more than a cheap alternative to staying in a hotel, occasionally even creating a "shantytown" of tents, where the petty bourgeoisie reconstruct, on an even more reduced scale, their own familiar world. Alongside the little cabin he will park his compact car and tie up his dog, and take a nap on a lounge chair in front of the door, lulled to sleep by the transistor radio. But since the walls are even thinner, and space even more constrained, the individual has to defend his privacy in an ever more violent way.

Where some people seek solitude in nature, most people seek life in society. And the Polynesia Club is now selling them all the pleasures of tribal life on a desert island. It is adventure, but without all the inconveniences of a shipwreck: Robinson can drown, he has insurance. He can lead a primitive lifestyle with all the pleasures of modern comfort: he can deposit his money in the bank in town and live for eight days without money for a thousand francs! As in Eden, man is once again naked under the sun, but it is a picture postcard Eden maintained within the framework of implacable calculations.[14] Sometime in the future, the State will nationalize Rothschild's business,[15] and, if necessary, night classes on morality will make it possible to contain the anarchic hedonism of the new Polynesians within the limits of wholesomeness. In the meantime, as the campers swarm by the thousands in campgrounds buried ankle-deep in garbage, camping is becoming a concentration camp world. The circuit of the camper is closed in turn. He, too, finds himself at the center of that industrial periphery that he had sought to escape.

[14] See my book, *Dimanche et Lundi*. [Author's note.]
[15] Club Méditerranée [Spanish translator's note].

# IV Views of the sea and the mountains

The beach or the mountains? That is the dilemma of real life today, that is, the dilemma of where to go on vacation, from which the bland countryside was soon excluded. The sea, boundless and changing, or the unyielding mountains?

## 1. Views of the sea

For the modern individual, freedom is movement: "Rise, swiftly longed-for storms!"[1] And in the dull sweltering heat of custom the wind from the west announces itself with a shudder, and makes the leaves dance before dragging the sky in its wake, and the forests that tell us what to expect become tense and squeak: the promise of a great flood in which men will once again be born to life. The grey sky of storm clouds, threateningly overcast, vast and resounding like the downpours that it precedes, the wind from the west crosses countries that it tries to tear up by their roots. But in its trees the country stiffens and resists, resolved to remain terrestrial. Meanwhile, in the shade of his house, man likes to feel the winds of great changes caress his face. Until the first drop of rain, until the torrential downpours, when the horizon is buried like consciousness in sleep. On the soil and on the roof tiles, on men and their anxieties, the rain falls and runs: tears on the face of the liberated world.

At the source of the winds, the sea. But of old no one dared to venture upon it just for the sake of pleasure. Its restless void then opened on the high seas of infinite possibilities. The horizon was the edge where the land sank towards the abyss. Like the Styx, which eternally flowed back to itself in the perpetual breaking of its waves, the mythical Ocean bathed the continents with its raging flood. The only country that lies beyond the seas—the country from which Arthur Gordon Pym never returned—is the region of the unnameable and unspeakable: the Kingdom of the Dead.

Then, one day, an individual built his cottage just above the great abyss; to play—as close as possible. Ever since then, magically contained by the cement curve of the promenade, the furor of the storms is exhausted and leaves on the sand those faint grooved lines that signal the final defeat of their great surging advances. The onrush of the hurricanes explodes in impotent flares of whiteness. In vain does one breaker follow

[1] A passage from Chateaubriand's novel, *René*. See footnote no. 37 above [Spanish translator's note].

another. From the poles and from the Americas, from the Kerguelen Islands and the Tropics, the maelstrom of a resounding freedom. Up to that point: up to the seaside promenade, where the shutters are suddenly closed, where paper swirls around the lampposts. A rebellious ocean to toss a few cups of foam on the ivy of a fake English manor house. Here the sea of swimming ends.

The civilized people of the era before the factory fled from the sea, which is chaos and therefore barbarism: Biarritz and Étretat do not date from before the Second Empire. But for the citizen of the finite and overpopulated land, the ocean opens up a breach in the continuity of the country: that appearance of unlimited space where the horizon traces its precise line between the blue of the waves and the blue of the sky. Today, at the seashore, the sky is broad and clear as in the color photographs at the travel agency. The salty breeze makes the light more transparent and gives a sharp contrast to the most trivial things: the whitewashed houses of the fishermen, the shimmering copper of the lighthouse, and even the black and white striped buoys. Modern happiness is painted in vivid colors: those of yellow and red beach umbrellas.

Anyone who comes from the abstract, petrified world of the city clearly senses that the sea is alive. He is hypnotized by the movement of the water, whose eternal destruction-construction of forms seems to be prodding his immobility. The spirit goes forth to play with the waves. Long webs of foam spread out in the smooth silences that the breaking of the waves shatters; roaring with indignation, the wave surges to the white paroxysm of a crest, only to fall, smothered, as one detonation of water succeeds another. Such is the way of all seas when they clash with the land. A wave comes, the horizon bends with a new wave. One ends and another comes right behind it; forming a spellbinding corolla, the majesty of its assault breaks on the sand, which will be followed tirelessly by new assaults. For the spirit that engenders the hurricane is inexhaustible.

The modern spirit has a vague intuition that the primal waters are the origin of life. It likes to breath their organic and salty odor, it likes to hunt in the briny pools for the monsters from the first days of creation: remarkable yet repellant starfish, meat-flowers or spider-flowers. It dreams of penetrating the restless paradise that it divines at the other side of the mirror of the waters. And, above all, it dives into them: swimming is the central ritual of this cult of life. Modern man no longer bathes, like the Romans, in enclosed baths; he has to submerge himself in the cosmic ocean. He plunges into the cataract of the breakers and is revived in the blue, fluid like seaweed. Then nothing, naked and alive in this vital serum. And when he leaves the water, exhausted by this hand to hand struggle, he lies down on the sand, which adapts to his form. Relaxed and without desires, with this baptism he recovers the innocence of Adam.

In modern society the sea is a social fact, as characteristic as the factory. In the early days of industrial society, its geographical region was the beach, wide enough to contain the multitude, but narrow enough to keep it all concentrated in one place. A gentle slope of fine sand that descends gradually to the calm waters of a bay, for the safety of the swimmers, and to rocky capes for the picturesque, stormy element. If, as

is the case with the Playa de la Concha of San Sebastián, it also has a little island, then the beach is perfect. Behind it, a forest that is more or less transformed into a park isolates it from the world of the peasants. The beach forms a closed universe that turns its back on the countryside: not only on the countryside, but above all on the city.

This society is polarized by "views of the sea". Contrary to all logic, the wealthiest people live as close as possible to the seashore—if necessary, even on an island in the sea, like Miami. Behind this first line are the layers of increasingly less opulent chalets, until you reach the train station and the shops, which are on the other side of the stage scenery. The only kind of housing is the chalet, the antithesis of the house. The chalet with the name, "My Caprice", is the antithesis of the useful, a product of individual choice, designated by a name rather than a number. A toy that its owner pretends is a rural hut, or, before 1939, a medieval castle. Mass civilization, however, has taken its revenge against bourgeois individualism by building the clifflike dwellings of skyscrapers from the year 2000 right on the edge of the sea. Everything is made up with the colors of Eden: cheerful blues, babyish pinks, when not a healthy bronze or an ostentatious red.

Due to these customs, this vacation society is also the antithesis of everyday society. Time spent at the seashore is a time for spending money and for exercising freedom; and even quite recently, it is trying to outdo itself in this respect: the bathing outfits of 1914 have been reduced to the *slip*.[2] In its own way, however, this society of Leisure is just as representative as the society of Labor. Even more directly threatened by boredom, it plunges, day and night, into a frenzy of activity that the automobile allows to be extended over ever greater distances.

The seashore is festival. There, morality is less strict and money is no object. There, neither time nor age exists: all the women are young and beautiful. It is the time of innocence, where there is no longer need or sin, only Love. Transformed into a baby, dressed in lively colors like a child, the senior director of the steel mill at Homécourt plays with Sophia Loren on the sand. There are those who play at being fishermen, there are those who play at being wild Indians; there are even those who play at being men of the world. The chalets are fake Basque cottages and the real fishermen's taverns are authentic *night-clubs*.[3] One does not know if the tuna fishermen are leaving to fish or to play their parts: those boats, that lighthouse painted in cheerful colors ... mere props.

But it is precisely because the seashore is only a game that it gives rise to such acute melancholy. Against a grey background of endless winters, a brief summer of light. Throughout the entire countryside, a narrow border of flower-filled parks; and seas that are endless like the rain. The cycle of the seasons highlights the ephemeral nature of vacations. The summer is only a sunset; despite the apparent immobility of

[2] In English in the original [American translator's note].
[3] In English in the original [American translator's note].

the August sun, the days are insidiously getting shorter; and at the seashore, nothing can dissimulate its fateful descent to the horizon. Like a vague threat, now and then a suspicious chill invades the night. Until the advent of the equinox, when a wind of defeat rattles the booths on the beach. A liberating denouement that sweeps away the last swimmers and sends them packing to the train station.

A life of lies. Love affairs without a future, fleeting friendships; once the suitcases are packed, one begins to live one's real life again. Ginette will not marry that man who has sworn to love her forever; so why does Robert insist on staying? The festival lights on the seashore are turned off; the squall vainly pelts an empty stage set, and the colors of the chalets fade in the rain. The hotel is practically deserted. The day draws to a close; the linoleum gleams in the gloom of a passageway through which the wind blows; the big table on the terrace, brilliant in the phosphorescence of the breakers, seems to be set to stage the spectacle of a hurricane to a banquet of those who were lost at sea. At the door, the ocean roars; Ginette is gone forever. This is the last day of the season, on the eve of the deluge.

Now, at the far side of the shadow of the storms, other pleasures begin for other men. Only under the rain, against the pressure of the winter, the last obstacle in the abandoned city: the difficult, the only pleasure—to stay when the vacation season is over.

## 2. Views of the mountains

For many people, the plains are boring: mediocrity. Today, all we need to be told about something is that it is plain for us to be disgusted by it. In the beginning, there were neither heights nor depths; when the Word was spoken, contrasts of high and low were created. It was necessary for the hand of a powerful sculptor to have engraved this inert surface; for the clay to be carved to the bone, slicing open the vein of water that springs forth from the gash in the fresh wound. We need the gorge bristling with trees, we need the storm. Until in the end the answer rises up: the mountain.

Mountains, immense forms, the only forms capable of filling the void of the modern spirit, the only forms high enough to respond to its demands. When the disappointing illusion of the clouds dissipates, they suddenly appear, between the sky and the Earth: shadows like night in the middle of the day, frozen purity above the mud of winter; real, yet nonetheless divine, on that horizon that is ultimately fate.

Above the plains that are concealed by the most insignificant hills, the stern walls of the mountains rise. The ground is vanquished, and suddenly you come face to face with them. And these erect masses are no longer inert matter, but movement, and even value. A harbinger of the others, the first rises with great effort above the valley. Then the next one joins the game. And then another turns with rage against the sky. This one, a black shadow under the stars, bides his time and shudders, and the crickets

of the night sing to lull him to sleep. And all of them strive to rise up to worship the highest of them all.

The traveler they attract is submerged in the shadow cast from the direction of the light. He penetrates the echoing caverns of the gorges, then he enters the forest, which the night guards like a secret from the dazzling outburst at its borders. Exhausted by the effort and by the oppressive weight of the walls of the gorge, he suddenly emerges in the winged freedom of the open spaces. The alpine meadow is the realm of clarity and fresh air. Here nothing is commingled, every object is outlined with a definite contour, highlighted by the patch of a dense shadow. Scattered over the grass, blocks of stone abandoned by spirits surprised in the middle of their games; the slab of an altar in whose cavity a pool reflects the stark outlines of the clouds. An unsustainable fragility of tiny, brightly-colored flowers spice up the flat grass: pure blue, pure blood, pure gold. Above the unbroken green of the meadow, the unbroken white of the snow, from which emerge—claws and teeth, dance and enchantment—the high peaks.

Ruins of the most powerful of all empires, the crests of this coliseum surround us. Eroded for centuries, the sharpest and most serrated cover their debris with vast skirts of impassible ice. At the summit, everything comes to an end. Here the eternal light of justice reigns, vertiginous altitudes where, indolent, freedom soars. The order resounds. Implacable, implacable.... Every wall repeats it. And in the void of our panic, the instruments of the sentence and the interrogation linger on. To break us, the rock, the ice and the iron oxide. Like the cup and the poison, in the rubble of the broken peaks, the sky-blue water of the lakes: dispersed fragments of a universal purity. Sometimes, to nourish our hope, through the storm clouds of forgetfulness a crack opens, an incredible bit of luck. A patch of meadow, a handful of tiled roofs, perhaps the brilliant thread of a road. Too far away to really make them out. Can you return one day, to the country of memory?

Finally, man has laid his eyes on the mountain. From the bottom of the valleys, to the highest of the peaks, he contemplates it. But to really see it he needs to be alone, on some height that he personally climbed; and it might be that tomorrow it will disappear in the mist. Meanwhile, it is there, before us, like a wall; that is why the temptation to climb up to see it is so great, when it is within ourselves that the ascent must first be made. What are you asking me, mute giant? Under so much poetry there must be some reason. Anyone who goes to the heart of contemplation finds it, and now I am going to try to express it.

In the days of old, the mountains did not exercise any power of attraction over men, they towered so high above them. A respectful fear made them raise their eyes timidly towards that immense shadow crowned with jewels. The mountains were sacred, and man had no authority over the Sacred. He would not scale Mount Olympus, just as he would not scale Mount Sinai.

Later, when the Ascension had elevated the God of the Christians far above the most sacred places, some curious persons climbed the peaks, where they found nothing but a desert of rocks that they made haste to leave. Until the 18$^{th}$ century, the civilized

felt revulsion for the summits, which, after ceasing to be divine, had become merely inhuman. Finally, the passion arose for the icy virginity of the mountains, which barely preceded the exploitation of their resources. A few solitary travelers compiled an inventory of the peaks, while the first tourists ventured to the foothills. As was the case with the sea, the fascination with the mountains increased in scope and intensity. From an aristocracy of individuals it spread to the bourgeois class and then to the common people; at the same time, after having advanced from the foothills to the summit, it systematically sought out increasingly more difficult approaches to the summit.

Just as they began to seek out the gentleness of a summer day in the middle of the winter, the first tourists began to go in search of the cool, fresh air of the mountains in the summer. Later they began to like the mountains for their own sake and frequented them until they reached their hearts of ice: in the winter. The first who dared to enter their darkness were there to be alone, like Robinson, to struggle and to test their strength. Their snows offered, in the darkest months of the world of labor, an escape that broke the monotony of the everyday at its very heart: in the blackest time of the year. And the most spellbinding time of all. Coming from the world of grayness and mud, the urbanite entered a world of crystal. What overwhelms and burdens, here grinds and pulverizes; what yields, here breaks in splinters of glass. Impalpable, time is deposited in layers of oblivion. In the sky an endless softness swirls, which buries the towns in the valleys and leaves the people trapped in their houses; a tomb of peace, upon which the black lines of the chestnut trees are engraved on the virgin page. The darkest forest of the winter solstice: the midnight fir tree; the bells of Christmas echo in the white snow. Snow.... The sounds of a civilization of grinding gears is followed by an impressive silence; and through this silence, merging with the inclination of the slopes, the skier glides, sinuously penetrating the most sacred mystery of the winter.

But not only does the winter snow respond to a profound need of man, it is also a social fact. In this case, as well, after the individuals, the masses came. January vacations at Saint-Moritz have become one of the rites of social status; and the purity of the snow became a trademark of the dolce vita of the social layer most corrupted by wealth. Later, the common people followed in the footsteps of the big bourgeoisie, but by the same road. Advertising, railways, and cable cars dragged crowds there that otherwise would have been incapable of going: thanks to the ski-lifts, the average skier only has to let himself slide downhill. The urbanite who escapes the city only finds it once again in the ski resorts, with their enormous crowds, their buildings and their machines. The peace of winter is shattered and the white of the snow is trampled and besmirched, it is no longer anything but a place marred by tracks and garbage. The solitary skier then flees farther away, towards deserted heights where his passage leaves on the virgin page the precise and fragile line of individual destiny.

Slowly at first, and then rapidly, the mountains have been organized: so that the inaccessible becomes accessible to everyone, and to make the pleasures of effort less arduous. First it was the bourgeoisie of the heavy cable railway and the corner of the forest converted into a health spa. Then it was the activity of those who passion-

ately loved the mountains which contributed to integrating them into our system of civilization. An unknown mountain range; then an explored mountain range. And because it is new, it becomes fashionable. Thus, the vanguard of the mountaineers, like all pioneers, escapes from technological civilization to pave the way for everyone else. Solitary hikers join alpine clubs: they call themselves "defenders of the mountains". The main force of the troops follows in the footsteps of the explorers and, as always in such cases, commerce and industry, followed by the public powers, accompany the multitude. To prevent accidents, the clubs mark the trails with red or blue signs, but in this way abolish the pleasure par excellence of the cross country hiker: to find the way. They spare him the risk, the work and the need to make decisions, and soon even the physical effort. To facilitate ascents, cabins are built; on the slopes that are too steep, footholds and hooks are installed to make the climb accessible to every degree of weakness. At the same time that roads divide the body of the mountain into ever smaller fragments, to spare motorists from having to engage in tedious hikes to approach its slopes, cable railways are constructed; and soon these cable railways begin to bring cripples to peaks that previously required exceptional ability and many hours of hard work to reach. A helicopter flies over a peak that was only climbed by the conqueror of Annapurna with difficulty. The mountains are therefore now within the reach of the masses who can pay to go there. But are they still mountains? Between yawns of boredom, from the glass observation deck of the hotel at Jungfraujoch, the tourist contemplates the frozen corpses hanging from the wall of the Eiger: how interesting. Thanks to the airplane, anyone can fly over the peaks—but are they still peaks? For mountains are taken in hand to hand combat. Those who reject the risk and the total effort that they demand only grasp a shadow: a spectacle. Seen from the outside, and from such a high elevation, the contrasts of high and low are leveled. All that remains of the mountains is a pretty photograph, and we will see much more when we go to the Moon.

When a crowd is lined up at the base of Cervino, the mountaineer who has a passion for solitude has only one choice: rock climbing. Nature only survives to the extent that it is outside the reach of man: in the ice and stone. There is no longer any halfway point between the thoroughly exploited plains and the vertiginous geometry of the cliffs. An increasingly more violent demand for nature is attracted to the inhuman character of the great summits. To the frantic need—which is all the more intense the more it is repressed—to act alone in nature, the implacable hardness of the ice is the answer; to an absolute but useless impulsiveness, the absurd lightning of the peaks; to the stifling gravity of our chaos, those dismal talus slopes.

Rock climbing is a specifically alpine sport. It is the sport of a particularly high and steep mountain that stands as a challenge to the very heart of industrial Europe; from a massif that you approach via long treks, up to the very foot of the walls of ice and rock which abruptly tower over you. More peripheral and at the same time more extensive, harder to approach yet easier to climb, the Pyrenees have up until now demanded a different style of mountain climbing, in which the initiative and the

prolonged efforts that are within the reach of everyone were more important than the acrobatic genius of the supermen of the "The Playground of Europe".[4]

Rock climbing, like all modern sports, is an affair of a minority of champions, whom few can imitate, while the masses watch from the sidelines. And, as is the case in all sports, what was originally a game is turned into a profession and a technique. The need to scale increasingly more difficult walls leads to the use of increasingly more expensive and sophisticated equipment, and the solitary ascent becomes a collective enterprise: this is how it was possible to conquer the Himalayas. The high peaks are in turn organized, their standards are defined by establishing a graduated hierarchy of ascents, and their results are compared to these standards. It is taught in schools, with its own lexicon and its own techniques, with its own values; these schools give tests and grant diplomas that open the door to a career that, in our Western society, can be either mercantile, industrial or that of a government civil servant. In such conditions, however, what remains of nature and the game?

The solitary adventurer, fleeing to the high country from the crowds and artificial life, takes refuge on the North Face of the Eiger, which, however, leads to the lobby of a luxury hotel. The personal vocation that motivated the first alpinists has become a social reality: Roger Frison-Roche's books were published in print runs of one hundred thousand copies.[5] And it seems that nature is the primary need of civilized societies; like the individual, the hero is indispensable for the masses' nostalgia for freedom. There is no public without an actor: the public needs, on the first page, the brazen face of the ham actors of courage. And there is no actor without a public. The leader of the rope team enchants the public when he enters the lodge dressed up in all the accoutrements of his specialty: the big boots, the blackened helmet, the ice axe, the rope. He enters, and everyone turns around to look at him; he remains impassive.

The conqueror of Annapurna, on the cover of the *Paris-Match*, is the Individual—for the masses. The archangel with a suntanned face, with a heart that is as pure as the air of the peaks, and with sentiments as elevated as the summits he climbs. Like his peer, the test pilot, he flies far above the haze of a time of confusion. But alpinism is also the camaraderie of men, who are loyal to each other under their leader: the lead man on the rope; the team, devoted to a deadly enterprise. They cannot hesitate, they have to proceed directly to the goal; this is no time for thinking, but for acting.

Victory—the summit—is the only God that modern nihilism knows; but on the summit there is nothing but sky, and to live you have to allow yourself to descend towards the everyday from that summit that leads nowhere. Generally, the passion for the mountains is exhausted in a grandiose and chaotic lyricism, like those peaks to which its devotees are attracted; and, in many cases, its language is as flat as its goal is elevated. It is incapable of expressing itself, as if it was overwhelmed by the power

[4] A reference to the book, *The Playground of Europe*, an anthology of articles first published in 1871 in which the English author and mountaineer, Leslie Stephen (18321904), related accounts of his alpine ascents [Spanish translator's note].

[5] Roger Frison-Roche (1906-1999), French alpinist and author [Spanish translator's note].

and the enormity of its theme. When the demigod of Annapurna, having returned to Earth, opens his mouth, he does so to offer the same commonplaces as the bourgeoisie that he disdains: "To France via the Mountain...." It was not necessary to climb so high to attain this revolutionary truth. When it comes to life, nothing remains of that revelation, unprecedented yet amorphous, to which he was exposed in those sacred deserted places. And the demigod becomes a merchant or a politician like everyone else.

However, this does not make his myth any less popular. The superman, the team, the absolute power surrounded by terrible dangers, action for the sake of action, made all the more meaningful because of its intensity.... I realize that I am describing the frenzy that motivated the revolutions of the 20th century. The alpine clubs of Germany and Austria were, moreover, hotbeds of Hitlerism; in the future they might be the origin of any collective enterprise that feeds on individual desperation. Alpinists, shock troops, *freikorps* who find in war the very same pure forces, as black as the gleaming shale, as sharp and as unstable as the serac; and who, faced with other storm clouds, will push forward to the front ranks to crash bleeding on the chaotic cliff faces in the rarified air of some hell.

Thus the mountain comes to an end; on one day, in tragic madness, and every day in mediocrity and comedy. Below, the all-too-new disorder of hotels and chalets, of parking lots reserved for buses. On the slopes, the calculated zigzag of carefully groomed trails, with all kinds of signs so no one gets lost. And a round trip ticket to get a look at the Other World. The world of the ordinary masses.

Emerging abruptly from the flatland of industrial organization, the risks of a meticulously gratuitous danger; emerging from the masses, the mud-covered hero enters the well-lit lobby of the Matterhorn Palace. With a weatherbeaten face and blue eyes, he is distinguished for his use of esoteric techniques and apparatuses. The superman who, to save himself from the everyday routine, has to disappear one day in an explosion of glory, annihilated by the overwhelming forces with which he plays. The legendary hero, so high above the vulgar tourist that he, too, seems to be only painted stage scenery: attitude, the base of the landscape, like those inaccessible cliffs that one gets a glimpse of when one looks out of the window of a car.

The mountains no longer exist; what remains is an increasingly more wellfurnished playground in which man, to have a life, is obliged to interpret what is alive. For the masses, an easy and uninteresting game. But for a small handful of people, a dangerous game, whose seriousness can only be proven by tempting death.

# Part Four: The failure of the "feeling of nature"

Nothing seems more obvious in our industrial and urban societies than the "feeling of nature" except its failure. Born from its opposite, it ended up leading back to its opposite again. "Authentic" is one of our key words, but you need only hear it spoken to hear the artificiality. And there are no places that are more artificial than those where nature has been sold. If, some day, it ends up being destroyed, it will have been destroyed first of all by the industries of the seashore and the mountains, which are creating a chaotic suburb in our alpine meadows and on our coastlines that will soon spread everywhere. But if a disinterested and intelligent "regional planning" is implemented to prevent this disaster, it will only be able to do so at the price of a sophisticated and implacable organization. Organization, however, means calculation, laws, police; the exact antithesis of nature.

Why this failure? Because the "feeling of nature", the accomplice of the society that cultivates it while at the same time defending itself from it, has allowed itself to be enclosed in the artificial and anodyne realm of poetry and leisure, of the superfluous and the frivolous. The back-to-nature revolt generated a literature, but not a revolution. It never embraced consciousness, reason, action; it never grew up. The *boy scout*[6] movement never left childhood, the *Jugendbewegung*[7] never advanced beyond adolescence.

This reaction therefore did nothing but reinforce the state of affairs that it tried to prevent. Its pioneers made the public aware of the most remote wildernesses, and by fleeing from the cities they only succeeded in bringing the city to the countryside. Apart from that, it might be that this vague feeling was only a provisional stage of industrial society, linked to the temporary survival of the peasant in the city dweller. We allowed this need for nature to be satisfied by fixating on inoffensive goals, and it will disappear *on its own* in a few generations. Basically, in its most usual manifestations, nature is nothing but a product of culture; men have no need to be alone in the desert, they need the City: society. But in that case, I doubt that what we still call "man" will survive the disappearance of nature. His only chance lies in becoming conscious of, and taking seriously, this rallying cry from the depths that arose against his will.

[6] In English in the original [American translator's note].

[7] A generic term used to designate various youth movements that originated in Germany and Great Britain around the end of the 19th century, all of which shared a sentiment of rejection of the city and industrial modernity, to which they opposed activities in the open air, the traditions of popular culture and the fraternity of the group. Henceforth, the term will always be translated as "youth movement" [Spanish translators' note].

# I. From nature to anti-nature

## 1. How, as a reaction against organization, the feeling of nature leads back to organization

In man's current state, there is no more certain criterion to characterize industrial civilization than the "feeling"—since it has not yet become reason—of nature. The progress of one rigorously follows the progress of the other, at the same time that the latter paves the way for the former. With regard to nature, the second industrial society is even more demanding than the first. The era of plastic adores the "beautiful material", the naked stone or the unfinished wood, preserved, that is, with *xyladecor*.[1] Aficionados of *Art Brut*, we decorate our living rooms with roots and stones that are no longer artistic objects, but imitations of nature. As opposed to the mechanical or chemical purity of industrial products, we prefer the impure purity of the living. We salt our dishes with gray salt and we eat "people's bread" baked in a wood-fired oven rather than a fuel oil fired oven; since the countryside has ceased to exist, however, such bread is only found in Paris. Since we are rich, we pay dearly for the luxury of poverty: handmade baskets, hand-thrown clay pots, homespun woolens.

For the proletariat, everything is new, clean and varnished; for the "elite", everything is old, rough, chipped and dented. Just as our bourgeoisie collected the cabinetry of their tenant farmers, our industrialists install restaurants on their farms: if the current trend continues, the old house of the pauper will end up being worth more than the rich man's mansion.

This phenomenon is not a reactionary tendency; to the contrary, it indicates the high point of civilization. But the modern back-to-nature tendency is far from being conscious of this contradiction. In an instinctive reaction against the world of the present, it rejects its vices, but above all its virtues as well— reason, methodical critique—and, engaging in a kind of double-entry bookkeeping, it avoids having to make a choice between nature and antinature. That is why the "feeling of nature" is cheated, and integrated into the totality that gives rise to it. An individual reality, it ends up being transformed into an economic and social reality, an industry and an institution; and into one of the most active forces for the destruction of nature, since nature is directly its object.

[1] A brand of wood stain [American translator's note].

Because the modern individual loves virginity, if a place is set aside to remain virgin, he goes there to rape it; and democracy demands that the masses do the same. And the first victims are natural societies: when the costumes and dances consecrated by tradition are no longer anything but stage scenery set up by a travel agency. The real suburb, sometimes the most hideous, but always the most rotten, is in Saint-Tropez rather than in Drancy; for the local industry there is the lie. The airplane transformed Papeete into another Nice, that is, into another Neuilly.[2] In that case, however, why bother going there? The means that make travelling so easy also make it useless. It won't be long before, if one wants to escape from the machines and the crowds, the best place to spend one's vacations will be Manhattan or the Ruhr.

Today, places and monuments are more threatened by the admiration of the masses than by the devastations of time. The time will come when the most famous places will be recognized by the fact that visiting them is prohibited: the breath of the crowds was already on the verge of destroying Lascaux. The fascination for nature spreads to the same degree that nature is disappearing, and since that fascination contributes to that disappearance, increasingly more numerous masses crowd into smaller and smaller places; it is becoming necessary to protect nature from the tourist industry as much as from the chemical industry. Camping and picking flowers must be regulated in an ever more draconian manner. However, since the need for free contact with nature was the profound reason for the back-to-nature impulse, the latter thereby loses its very reason to exist. Why escape from the city if only to wind up in a public park, under the watchful gaze of a guard?

Industrial society instinctively tries to protect itself from this force that threatens it, it takes preventive action to control it, and in this enterprise of integration it enjoys the complicity of individuals. Those who are passionate about nature are, generally, the vanguard of its destruction, to the degree that its trailblazers only anticipate the route of the highways, as they organize nature to save it. Singlehandedly, they open the door to everything that endangers and threatens it; but since every person is a potential actor, they must reckon on a public that is eager for new experiences. They write a book or go on speaking tours to invite the whole world to share their solitude: there's nothing like a lone navigator to attract the masses. Who is cheating, the masses or the misanthrope whose adventure is financed by the State or by a multinational corporation? When one makes love to a virgin, why not be generous enough to make her available to everyone? Always keeping in mind, of course, that you have to make a living somehow. When one feels a passion for nature, why not make a profession out of it, just as others make Art their trade? Society does not pay its servants for doing nothing, however, so the lover of the desert founds an association for the protection of the Sahara; and the passionate devotee of camping, who, as he grows older, has become wiser, realizes that he can avail himself of his devotion to the deserted beaches that he

[2] Drancy and Neuilly-sur-Seine are municipalities that have been absorbed by the Paris metropolitan area [Spanish translator's note].

discovered in his youth, and builds a campsite with the assistance of the Rothschild bank;[3] the avid lover of African fauna organizes safaris for two thousand dollars and devotes himself to leading executives right to the den of the last lion. It takes years to become familiar with the twists and turns of a whitewater river, but from now on manuals and guides will allow the first person who comes along to enjoy the fruits that a whole lifetime of passionate dedication is hardly enough to make possible; but it is likely that by then those fruits will have disappeared.

Such men make what they love public, which is quite natural; and they are recompensed with fame and money. That sailor who was so passionate about the sea was the first to enter the "silent world"—and by doing so, he broke the silence. The undersea world was his vocation, he devoted himself to it. The more inhuman the places that you have to go to pursue nature, the more organization and the more machines you need: climbing in the Pyrenees is a walk in the park; an ascent in the Himalayas is a military offensive and at the same time an industrial project—and this is all the more true of undersea exploration. Since captain Cousteau is an active and skilled man, he knew how to interest governments and big corporations in his work, which provided him with considerable funds to assemble a team and build devices that are increasingly more expensive, since they are increasingly more sophisticated. And to publicize the "silent world", he made a film that made a big splash.[4] He was therefore responsible for the increasing number of persons who engaged in the sport of spear fishing, which finished off the last fauna of the Mediterranean coast; now the exploratory operations of the oil companies can pollute the waters of the continental shelf. Tomorrow it will be the turn of the Red Sea. Captain Cousteau is one of the people who is most responsible for a development that he certainly deplores. I know that he

has loudly protested against the dumping of nuclear wastes in the Mediterranean: nuclear physics was not his specialty.

Thus, what was born in the city and in industry is reintegrated by the city and industry. Who is the enemy of modern society, and its founder? Who is both reactionary and progressive? Who is the Puritan who yearns to be a pagan in opposition to his personal Christianity? It is the modern Romantic, whose perplexing prototype was Rousseau; the theoretician of nature and of the revolution, in Rousseau all our contradictions were already materialized. The engineer who destroys nature and the hiker who enjoys it? It is the same humanity, often embodied in the same person. The senior general director of Électricité de France stops his Citroën DS and sincerely deplores the disappearance of the waterfall at Lescun; he forgot to mention that he wasn't there on business, but on vacation.

[3] In 1960, Edmond de Rothschild decided to invest in the Club Méditerranée, which was then on the verge of bankruptcy [Spanish translator's note].

[4] "Le Monde du silence" (The Silent World), a 1956 French documentary film codirected by Jacques Cousteau and Louis Malle, distributed that same year in an English language version by Columbia Pictures [American translator's note].

A reaction against organization, the feeling of nature leads, therefore, to organization. Spontaneous passion becomes a science and a technique; the game becomes a quest for profit or power: leisure becomes work. So that nature is transformed into a heavy industry and the group of friends is transformed into a hierarchical administration whose executives wear loincloths or swimming trunks the way others wear tuxedos. The last beaches and the last forest glades end up being transformed into cities; Nature leads to Anti-nature: to society.

## 2. Artificial paradises

Anti-nature is not the industrial city, it is the simulacrum and the lie of nature: the suburb dedicated to leisure. What is artificial? The paradises manufactured on the basis of beaches and snow-covered mountains. Seen from the outside, the flowers and the playfulness of Eden; behind the stage scenery, however, is the implacable machinery of an industrial hell. On the one side, the idler—the "beachgoer"; and on the other, the worker—the "native". A society that is even more profoundly divided than the other into antagonistic classes that ignore or scorn each other. The leisure of the former is only possible because of the hard work of the latter—because he has to make enough money in two months to live for a year, and because it is always degrading to make a living from catering to other people's pleasures. The era of vacations is the era of labor: labor that some enjoy, while others toil and scrimp and save. The tourist lives like a bourgeois in a world of flowers and smiles; but among all those smiles, there is not even one— including the smile of the sea—that does not have its price. This is what is sold here: everything that in other societies was given away for free. Amidst all the smiles and waltzes, ironic or impassive, the servant passes, dressed in a black costume that for others would be the costume for the festival, but for him is nothing but his work uniform.

The beach and the mountain clearly reveal the profound evil of a society that is based on the dichotomy of an implacably rationalized labor, and a leisure in which all the needs of happiness and freedom of the body and the human spirit are encompassed. This dichotomy that distinguishes everyday work time from vacation time is also manifested in the location where these activities take place. A wall separates the working class from the bourgeoisie of the summer visitors. The native mercilessly takes advantage of the summer visitor, all the more so insofar as he will not see him for the rest of the year; he is the poor person, and the other is the millionaire who is spending money like a drunken sailor—even if he is nothing but a worker at Renault. The native scorns the corruption and the wastefulness of the arrogant invader, and as soon as the latter turns his back, the former laughs at his naiveté; behind a façade of friendliness, he slyly opposes the vacationer's attempts to be friendly with the invisible wall of the solidarity of the real inhabitants of the place. And it would seem that the tourist, at the same time that he despises the greed of the natives, is tormented by the bad

conscience of an outsider and an idler, which causes him to smile at the fishermen and to frequent the bars where the local people hang out; but when the sailor's tavern is too full of tourists, the people of the sea go somewhere else, and the owner converts the tavern into a café or a nightclub. When the season comes to an end, the local population views with a mixture of regret and relief how the place is vacated of outsiders: October is for them the moment of vengeance against an invader who had imposed himself on the country with his numbers and his money.

The opposition between the native and the outsider is indicative of the similarity between the tourist zones and colonial society; and in the tourist zones, as well, the impact of industrial society destroys traditional society. The invaders first of all establish a beachhead on the coast. They expel the inhabitants from the place by buying rural real estate by the meter that they then sell by the hectare. Then they spread all along the coast and towards the interior, following the roads that they pave with asphalt for their motorized columns. When they find a rural inn, they occupy it, and when it has been converted into a proper hotel business, they move on. These operations are undertaken first of all by commando teams of nonconformists who are zealous devotees of nature and "authenticity". Then come the "famous" people—actors, artists, journalists—who lead the flock; then the terrain is completely occupied and the explorers who discovered Saint-Tropez can only move on from the beach at Pampelonne to La Garde-Freinet.

The zones occupied by this army might be outwardly charming; but there are none that are more devastated. There, too, the landscape decomposes, carved up by fences and later by walls. The traditional type of house disappears and the towns, their customs and their virtues are more definitively annihilated than if a steel mill had been built there. The tourist suburb is a socially devastated zone: a skeleton garlanded with flowers. It knows only the crowd or vacant space; when the winter comes, all that is left is a dead city where the wind blows: the only thing that instilled it with life was money. Hell is this false Eden, those artificial paradises where, for a month, modern humanity performs the comedy of real life. A paradise whose sky is painted, whose sun is a light bulb, where the demons wear masks of red cardboard over their snouts and feathers of white paper over their black iron wings. An Eden whose God is a manikin.

Places of the lie and desperation. If you are going to be deafened by noise and crowds, you should have stayed in the factory or the office. What is the meaning of these flowers? They are plastic and they are sold by the gross. Why that smile? He only smiles at me because I paid him.

What to do with this nightmare? I need springs that quench my thirst and sharp rocks that dig into my feet. I want to spend time among people whom I can hate or love, and I want it to be like this every day of my life. My need for play is too great to settle for the deception of free time; it is in work itself where I can find it. I am not an inert object, but a living being; I am a man, and not a spectator or an actor. I need to dismantle the stage scenery, to reach, behind the illusion of the forms and colors, that

which can neither be painted nor merely spoken; that which can only be shouted out loud: Truth, reality ... nature!

# II The suburb of leisure

For several years now, the explosion of leisure industries has been tending, in Western Europe, to expand towards a total occupation of the territory. By destroying nature precisely where it is most beautiful, it seizes the whole coastline to immediately spread, like an oil spill, towards the interior. Or else it descends rapidly from the meadows of the high mountain passes towards the valleys. Meanwhile, starting from the cities, the suburb of leisure merges with the residential periphery. Discreet at first, it is sowing the countryside with farmhouses converted into second homes; here and there it builds a hotel, paving the way for an "aquatic zone". Then, as the site is converted into an increasingly more expensive resort destination, it begins to grow vertically and collectively. On the seashore, it undergoes the transition from the stage of individual houses—a chalet here and there—to that of the large-scale residential complex; and around the beaches, like a border wall, a towering promontory of skyscrapers rises. In the interior, there are no more farms for sale, and from Auvergne to Savoy the business of renting apartments and rooms spreads like wildfire, along with the creation of recreational associations. The suburb of leisure expands because man seeks happiness and, even more, money: labor. This is why, incapable of any thought, just like the other kind of suburb, it is completely without style. And in this urban chaos from which the traveler can never escape, the hunter and the fisherman no longer find any prey besides other men.

## 1. An infernal Eden

In Europe, the stampede to nature is of such a magnitude that it verges on the absurd. In a few years, what was once the sea will no longer be anything but a holding pond polluted with fuel oil, besieged by crowds. Between Saint-Tropez and San Remo the saturation point has already been reached.

When it comes to judging a society, it is better to do so on the basis of its ends rather than its means; like an individual, it displays itself much more faithfully in its amusements than its labor. To discover the profound malaise of a person or a group, there is nothing like analyzing what he or it calls happiness. Our society is not exempt from this rule. It is not the spectacle of its industrial zones that allows us to discover its innermost being; it can always reply to us that they are the means, necessary and provisional, of an idyllic world, of the "best of all possible worlds". And what world is that? The world of the French Riviera. Selected at first by a few bourgeois, today

it has been endorsed by the elite and by the masses. To judge the French Riviera is therefore to judge the ideal of industrial society.

This Eden, however, has become a hell, at least for those who still preserve, if not a mind, at least some of their senses. The traveler who proceeds from the interior towards the coast first crosses a zone, the Massif des Maures, where he sees some of the telltale signs that presage the breakthrough of the main invasion force. The swell of the forests, marked here and there by fires, still lies under the sun; and the people who have remained faithful to their hometowns sleep under their carapaces of shale and tiles. Nothing seems to have changed. But something has indeed changed. A new roof, or a wall that is too perfect in its Provençal style, draw your attention. And most importantly: the cork cutters and farm laborers are gone, the town is an empty shell periodically filled with rich Parisians who are fleeing from the tumult of the coast. In the most remote valley we suddenly come across an abandoned farm that seems to have come right out of the pages of *House & Garden Magazine*. The old walls have been rebuilt and the shale *restanques*[1] have been restored. The spring flows again, this time from the mouth of a stone dolphin purchased at an antique shop; there is hardly anything that seems out of place, except maybe the gaudy colors of an umbrella. Then you see a sign that was previously concealed in the shadow of some cork oaks: "Private Property, Trespassing Prohibited".

The Massif des Maures is a protected zone where, if you want to build a house, you are prohibited from buying less than twenty thousand square meters. But the Riviera has surpassed, or has not yet reached, this stage. The closer we get to the Riviera, the more buildings we see. Finally, at the corner of some kind of street, we suddenly come across a wall of cars that we have to join if we want to go to Sainte-Maxime and Saint-Raphaël. The road runs parallel to the sea, which you can hardly make out beyond the swarm of people, cars and shops. From Saint-Tropez to Menton, and, before long, between, Marseilles and La Spezia, urbanization is total. In Monaco, after the twenty-storey apartment complexes replaced the villas, the bourgeois dream of 1880 was turned into a science fiction nightmare. Elsewhere, meanwhile, in the town of Issambres, for example, the human tide breaks against the rocks and forests, and a galaxy of villas in the Provençal style that display right down to the smallest detail a single obsession multiply all the way to the mountains. As if man is only now capable of choosing between the termite mound and the pseudo-village of a million inhabitants.

Space is crammed full to the bursting point. A noisy crowd of beachgoers are marinating in a deep blue soup seasoned with a wide variety of every kind of multi-colored plastic debris. And just as the Riviera flows back towards the interior, so, too, does it flow again towards the sea, which gradually ends up being covered in a glacier of plastic. The little harbors are full, and they are as ridiculous as the narrow little streets

[1] A Provençal term for the stone walls that are built to serve as baffles to minimize the damage caused by runoff from heavy rains, and thus to prevent the erosion of the terraces that make it possible to cultivate the mountain slopes [Spanish translator's note].

of Saint-Tropez confronted by the sea of cars: then you can begin to make out another coastline, where the cement of the harbors for recreational boats will replace the rocks. Meanwhile, along the national highway, another human tide advances, boxed in between the walls of private residences and that other, no less static, wall of cars. This army is wearing the uniform that Adam wore in Eden; the moist air, however, is thick with noise, with dust and with an aroma of gasoline concentrated by the implacable Mediterranean sun. A family exhausted by the hard work of going on vacation is on its way home—surely to take a bath. A handful of little children covered with sea salt and dust cling to their parents, terrified of being run over or getting lost, bewildered, while they wait for the light to turn green.... It is the horde of summer vacationers, who come here to escape from the traffic of Paris.

A gigantic illusion. The Riviera in the month of August is one of those phenomena that you have to see to believe and that help to provide a context for the "objective" analyses concerning the mass leisure that is now so fashionable: for a normal human sensibility, this best of all possible worlds is nothing but a hell. The bourgeois paradise of the 1930s was a cardboard Eden that was incapable of pleasing the aficionados of nature, but which assured a minority, besides comfort and the entertainments of social life, a minimum of space and silence, of tranquility and cleanliness. Today, however, the most elementary physical needs of the individual are denied:

purifying rest, air and a bath. Today's realism is characterized by its incapacity for apprehending the concrete, and it might seem that I am availing myself of a certain poetic license. However, a scientific investigation conducted under optimal conditions with the right instruments would probably reveal that the noise and the air pollution are as bad here at certain hours as they are in downtown Paris.

If Sainte-Maxime is the ideal that justifies the denial of certain basic human requirements on the part of industrial society, then the end is worse than the means. In this universe clogged up by masses of humans and their products, progress ended up negating itself: the car, for example, was transformed from a means of transportation into the proof of the impossibility of transportation. This convulsive universe deserves to be defined as a concentration camp world. While it is unaffected by the most flagrant horrors, although also the virtues, of war, it nonetheless practices invasion and genocide. Following behind an advance patrol, the main body of the troops disembarks, annihilating everything in its path: things, but also, more than anything else, people, who are even more fragile.

And its explosive is money. The Riviera has been proletarianized, but money has only papered over differences in status: in this system in which the elite mixes with the masses, like Brigitte Bardot with her public, it is the masses that spend the most money. You have to pay for everything, and the prices are incredibly high; except for one or another legendary multimillionaire, there is no longer any capital, but a slippery fluid that must be seized when the opportunity arises. You ask yourself where these crowds, which are not composed solely of millionaires, get the means that enable them to live here for more than a few days. But the French Riviera is pure bluff: wealth and

poverty, the bouillabaisse in the restaurants, and even the sun itself and the blue of the sea.

Here we come to the end of the process; here traffic comes to a dead stop, the car will go no further. We have no other choice than to start all over again, in Corsica, in Andalusia or in Greece; and then later in Turkey, where there are long stretches of isolated coastline that can be bought by the kilometer and sold by the meter. Until France reaches the goal established by our demographers, the countryside, where it is pleasant to welcome your neighbor because he is not too close to you, will survive. The sky is gray and it is raining under the big trees; some people would consider this a misfortune, and others happiness.

## 2. Venice with makeup

Certain extreme cases allow us to verify just how far the leisure industry, evolving towards extreme disorder and extreme organization at the same time, leads to the destruction of its object: whether nature or travel. Venice in August is one such example. Just like the beach, it has advanced from bourgeois tourism to mass tourism. But the prodigious quantitative increase has not been accompanied by a corresponding qualitative change; bourgeois tourism has been extended to the common people, to the petty bourgeois and sometimes even to the bourgeoisified workers. And this has taken place in such a way that it is still the same, except that now that it is reproduced in millions of copies: this assembly line production now only offers its customers the shadow of the spectacle that a few thousand rich travelers were able to enjoy in the past.

But the rites of compulsory observance are still the same: you must see Venice. And, as in the past, Venice in Makeup offers its stage scenery backdrop. When power began to slip from its grasp at the end of the 16$^{\text{th}}$ century, it transformed its appearance and became a stage set of marble and gold constructed on the water that reflected and magnified the water's gleam; not so much a product of history as an extravagant dream, conceived by a kind of super-Hollywood. Actors, pimps, lackeys and merchants, pioneers of tourism for two centuries now, the Venetians, securely defended from the foreigners by their dialect, sell them the shadow of a shadow. Its inhabitants live their entire lives as parasites on this multitude, and as parasites in turn of the old skeleton whose marble bones, polished by the gazes of millions of tourists, they tirelessly gnaw. In this way, the past is perpetuated by destroying it; therefore, this modern flood threatens to drown the city. The wake of the *vaporettos* damages the stairways, and rots the bottoms of the doors of the palaces. But if by chance this multitude were to disappear from the city, the inhabitants of Venice would have no other choice but to abandon that moldy dump and go to live the real life of terra firma, somewhere near Mestre, among the smokestacks of the petrochemical industry. And that old dream would then drown in the mud of the lagoon.

Meanwhile, the increasingly more numerous crowds swarm over the mummy of the past. They fill up the narrow streets, driving away their real inhabitants, who end up imprisoned in their homes. In uniform, brandishing the totems of their respective countries, the tidal wave of invaders inundates the city under the bored or scornful gaze of the natives. Sometimes, in the midst of this stormy sea one may distinguish from afar a monument that looks like the one on the postcard. Venice is a labyrinth, but you need only let yourself drift with the current: you always come ashore at Saint Mark's. Exhausted, drenched in sweat, surrounded by the solicitations of vampirelike street vendors that lie in wait everywhere trying to get a few drops of blood, the flock trudges heavily to fulfill its duties. The Colleoni is still reasonable, but the prices at the Torcello are sky-high. The price of admission faithfully reflects the evolution of the market: you have to admit it, Padua's Giotto at 300 liras was expensive, but 500 for the Doges is money well spent. And it seems that Tiepolo, *risotto*, gondola ... everything is reduced to the same word: liras.

Mass society is a hierarchical society in which money distinguishes the classes: so many stars, so many rooms. Above, the "elite", envied by the many: festival-goers, painters, stars of every kind, the people for whom this theater was built. Below, countless and indistinct: the public. In fact, however, it is the public that counts now: we live in a democracy. We no longer live in the era when the clever Venetians fleeced a handful of naive aristocrats. Venice, which now manufactures millions of copies, has become a complex planned by computers. There are no more surprises: neither bedbugs nor rip-offs. The prices in the restaurants are standardized: 1,000 liras, 1,000 liras, 1,000 liras.... Unconditional, impersonal, colors based on industrial tomatoes, religiously accompanied by a bottle of Fiat Chianti and the inevitable green peaches, the spaghetti awaits the Swiss and the German: lined up one behind the other, it seems that they could extend in single file a hundred times around the world. And tomorrow night, it will start all over again.

There are no surprises, Venice is just the way it looks in the ads. But you have to pay for organization, especially when it is mass organization. It guarantees nothing but the vital minimum, and the vital minimum of the tourist is even more limited than that of the average worker: here a two room apartment is considered a "suite". Someone who rents space in a private house has to make do with 6 square meters to sleep, bathe, and make love. The summer vacationers, exhausted after working for a whole year, pile up one on top of the other; and the walls are so thin that at three in the morning you can be sure to be awakened by the inevitable *lavatorio* of the hygieneobsessed American, who will get up early to wash off all traces of Venetian indecency. We can speak of the proletarianization of tourism; and even, at the margins of the masses of the tourist proletariat, of a lumpenproletariat of young *beatniks* who live by begging. Believing that they are escaping from industrial society, but incapable of imagining themselves living outside of it, a scum of neurotics and mentally unstable persons is lost in their midst. Unlike the other Bohemia, that of the Gritti Hotel, these elements do not have the excuse of the dollar. Every day, the sanitation workers and the police have to make

arrangements to sweep away the battered remnants attracted by the frozen reflections of this lunar cliché: street painters, impoverished Romeos and Juliets; but the methods they use to drive them away are well-practiced. And this marginal proletariat can still preserve its illusion of freedom for a few days, while the masses pay with their freedom for the security that is guaranteed by organization. Soon, when travel agencies corner the monopoly on tourism, only a handful of privileged rich people will be able to escape it. To go wherever you want, something that was once possible at the price of a few sacrifices, is becoming an increasingly more expensive luxury; and the day will come when the State will view all travel that is not organized as vagrancy.

## 3. The trout and the oxygen level

The dissemination among the masses of the need for contact with nature, followed by its frustration, leads to chaos. At the port of Somport, in July, you see piles of withered flowers everywhere that the children of the summer camps have thrown in the gutters: in the vicinity of the highways, the time when certain slopes on the Pyrenees once blazed in blue will soon become a thing of the past. Unless, as in Switzerland, severe regulations are enforced to establish order. If nothing is done in this respect, the current trend will make us face the dilemma of having to choose between disorder and total order. But the total organization of nature is the end of nature, as the case of fishing demonstrates.

To test the purity of the water supplied to Paris, the city administration has found no better means than to use it to fill an aquarium full of trout. At the slightest sign of a lack of oxygen, an infectious microorganism, or too much disinfectant, which might not be noticed by the control monitors, the trout go belly-up. It would appear that the trout is a very sensitive apparatus: it is a living being. But there is an even more sensitive apparatus, and that is man. At least when he does honor to his name, when he is not a mere cog in the machinery of production; when he lives free under the sun—when he is a fisherman. Man, the fisherman, is a particularly noble trout and, consequently, very demanding when it comes to the quality of his environment. He needs an abundant flow: enough space and plenty of time, clean water and unpolluted air, such as nature provides. Above all, however, he needs oxygen: that is, freedom, the opportunity to go where he likes. Every Frenchman worthy of the name is a kind of trout: a fisherman. The Third Republic was a democracy of fishermen, among whom the wisest were often the poorest.

Once our brain has registered the message from our gills, we feel that the water of our watershed, which is becoming smaller and smaller due to the progress of transport, is being polluted. In our vicinity, fishing is undergoing a transformation, or, actually, it is disappearing at an astounding rate. With each passing day, the water gets murkier and the shoals of garbage get thicker; with each passing day, the horde of cars pours into the rivers a new legion of fugitives from the cities, and a new association, or a

new regulation, sets limits on where we can go, or dictates the specific methods by which we may come into contact with our old friend: the fish. And coming very soon, we can see a new development taking shape on the horizon, the culminating point of this process: the day when, the last fish having disappeared from the last river, there will be nothing left but a concentration camp world on the banks of a sewer. And then, since he, too, needs oxygen, the fisherman, like the trout, will croak.

The causes of the decline of the fishery are clear, although not easy to remedy. The cause that is most often denounced, because it is an age-old practice, is illegal fishing. Today, however, this is a secondary cause. According to the old-timers in my town, there used to be forty illegal fishermen in my town and at that time the river was full of trout; now, however, the illegal fishermen have disappeared and the river is full of barbels. A scientific mind might draw the conclusion that the existence of trout here is associated with that of our town's illegal fishermen; and this is true, insofar as the existence of the latter is the sign of a society that tolerates the existence of salmonids. The only illegal fishing that plays a destructive role today is that of the motorized urbanite who uses snorkels and spear guns, or the legal poaching engaged in by the swarming hordes of fishermen who are incapable of abiding by their own rules to complement the shortcomings of the existing regulations. But this legal poaching can be reduced to the cause that I think is ultimately responsible: organized fishing on a massive scale.

Much more important, and undoubtedly decisive for the disappearance of the fish stocks: industrial pollution. The poacher only goes after the individual fish; industry wipes them all out because it attacks the environment: it attacks the river, and one can even say that it attacks the water itself. The Regional Plan for the Loire foresees its extensive use for industrial and agricultural purposes; and there will be a Regional Plan for the Seine, too— whose tributary that ran under Paris no longer exists—and one for the Rhône, and for the Garonne, etc. According to the authors of the Plan, we will have to choose "as rigorously as possible" between the various planned uses. In that case, it will not be just the fish that will have to renounce the use of this little stream of urine that comes from the kidneys of the economy, but also certain irrigation projects and industries.

Fewer and fewer rivers, and very soon, as two or three more Regional Plans are implemented, none. And always more and more fishermen. Their proliferation is, furthermore, like pollution, a byproduct of industrial society. To feed men, industry creates an unlivable world, and it gives them what seems to be a means through which they can flee from that world, the car. And these men, crowded together in their pens, flee from the desert of technology in search of a breath of fresh air or a sip of clean water. Infinitely more rapacious than the pike, the horde of utilitarians goes forth in search of the river and fish. The constantly expanding network of highways makes it possible for them to catch their prey even in the most remote stream, while the airplane and the helicopter allow them to go to the most distant islands and lakes for their catch.

However, we are dealing with a lesser evil if we only take into consideration the proliferation of fishermen, insofar as the average fisherman is a parasite of his car, bound to his machine, incapable of displaying the least patience and imagination needed for fishing. Unfortunately, there is also the organization of fishing, its institutions, its economic foundations and its propaganda. Of course, this organization defends fishing, but by participating in the industrial system, it contributes to its destruction. By making this sport more popular, it spreads the idea of practicing it to a mass of individuals to whom this idea would never otherwise have occurred, and who engage in it because you have to fish to be like everyone else. By popularizing the art of fishing, this organization, if it does its work well, can in four lines give the beginner knowledge that took a veteran fisherman years to acquire.... Fishing used to be the privilege of an aristocracy; not an aristocracy of money, but that of a vocation capable of discovering a river without having been told to go there by an article in a magazine; and capable of obstinately exploring it, far from any road, despite months of coming home empty-handed. Organized mass fishing, however, which justifies itself in the name of democracy, will end up imposing the privilege of money and power on fishing. Today, clean water is not only as transparent as a diamond, but as rare as a diamond, too, and therefore has its price. Since everyone wants to fish at the very moment when the rivers are disappearing, in a capitalist regime they will end up being subjected to the law of the market: trout streams will become luxuries for millionaires. And in a socialist regime, the last rapids that have not been transformed into kilowatts will be sacrificed to the general interest, that is, reserved there as well for the amusement of the big polluters: engineers, politicians, generals. And this will only be true if the State, in need of revenue, does not rent them to foreign capitalists. And the privileged interloper will be able to go on an excursion during his time outside of his air conditioned prison, under the watchful and servile gaze of the uniformed guard.

The reader, if he is an aficionado of fishing, will tell me that I my desperation is exaggerated. As if Cassandra was responsible for the doom of Troy! In fact, there is really only one kind of desperation: capitulation, and capitulation is first of all turning your back on the problem. And if the reader is not a fisherman, which is the case with fishermen when they are not fishing, he will tell me that people need to live, and that they need to lead better lives, and that fishing is superfluous. I will respond to him that the superfluous—fishing—is very often for man—the fisherman—necessary. The fisherman is a trout. See what the trout does when the oxygen level of its river declines: it goes upstream and seeks out the headwaters. And even during a drought, when the watercourse dries up completely, it struggles in vain on the shore, opening its mouth to suck water that no longer exists. The fisherman—man—is a trout, for he wants to live, that is, he wants to fish. And this irresistible instinct has a profound meaning. The fisherman is not a poet, but like the trout of the City of Paris. Endowed with a finer sensitivity, he only has a presentiment, before others get wind of it, of the degradation of the environment: the threat that looms over man. It is clear that if human proliferation, pollution and the corresponding intensification of organization

proceed unabated, it is not only the superfluous—the trout—that will not be able to survive, but also the necessary. The carp, and even the bogue,[2] the least demanding of men,[3] will expire in turn due to a lack of oxygen, that is, a lack of nature and freedom.

We must revise our concepts of the necessary and the superfluous; inverting the terms of the proposition, we can say that in many cases modern organization ensures for us the superfluous by depriving us of the necessary. Fishermen—men—do you want a river or a sewer? Do you want to live breathing fresh air or do you want to live at the bottom of a septic tank? If you choose the former, you must be prepared to come face to face with your kind as equals, overcoming your inferiority complex that you have to first of all defeat in yourselves, at the level of life, investments, rockets and the atomic bomb. Your fight to humanize the technological world will be the fight of all mankind; do not be afraid, if you do not want to perish, sooner or later you will have to fight this battle, and master your own industry just as you mastered nature. If you do not understand the message that the fisherman is sending you, then you, too, will perish. Unless you want to adapt, and swarm like rats in an enormous sewer pipe.

[2] A small, bug-eyed fish, about ten or twelve inches long, native to the Eastern Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Although edible when eaten fresh, it is more often used as bait or for manufacturing fishmeal [American translator's note].

[3] The author is playing here with the double meaning of the word, "*hotu*": "bogue"; but also "man or woman of little value, bad, stupid, someone held in very low esteem", a definition derived, according to the Centre Nationale de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, from the general aversion for the taste of this fish's flesh [Spanish translator's note].

# III Large-scale planning and green spaces

## 1. The Megalopolis of the Sea

In the highly developed countries, insofar as the necessary is theoretically guaranteed, the leisure industries tend to occupy the front ranks, and the great tidal wave of capital breaks on the mountain valleys and the beaches: the Aga Khan establishes a beachhead in Sardinia, while big finance touches down in the meadows of the Alps, where, under that rain of gold, cement grows like mushrooms. And the State intervenes, seemingly in order to control the phenomenon and prevent the destruction of these regions, as happened to the Mediterranean coast; that is why there are so many highways and cable railways. For this "regional planning" is considered primarily from the point of view of production or power; if, incidentally, these regions must be preserved, as an excuse for the tourist market, this takes place in the context of disruption and an increasing population that necessarily lead to their destruction. The production of nature—like other industries, and even more than other industries, since it is today a cutting edge industry—must grow by at least 15% per year. Unfortunately, nature is only a given; anyone who manufactures it, for that very reason destroys it.

Gribouille[1] is seizing the initiative; to save the coast of Languedoc or The

Landes from anarchic colonization on the part of private individuals, he is buying land, building infrastructure and disseminating propaganda that will allow the human masses to spread everywhere. What will remain of the lagoons of Thau, or of the silence of Maguelone, when the Regional Plan for the beaches of Languedoc has installed half a million Europeans there? Nothing, an urban agglomeration with a few *bois de Boulogne* scattered here and there, if they can ever get them to grow on those sand

[1] Gribouille (literally, "total fool") is a character created by Sophia Fyodorovna Rostopchin, Countess of Ségur (1799-1874), who appears in her story, "Gribouille's Sister" (or "Tontín's Sister", according to the only Spanish translation we are aware of, which dates from 1929). He is a person who is full of good intentions, but extremely dullwitted, to such an extent that he ends up doing precisely the opposite of what he should do; thus, for example, to get out of the rain nothing else occurred to him but to jump into the river. Charbonneau is here comparing the policy of the State to Gribouille's attitude, for "to save the coast of Languedoc or The Landes from an anarchic colonization" nothing else occurs to the State than the idea of accelerating the destruction of these territories by speeding up their "planning", which, nevertheless, is presented to public opinion as an attempt to protect these very same territories [Spanish translator's note].

bars parched by the salt breeze and the sun. There will be nothing left but the sea, where the sewers will dump the wastes of that anthill: they put up with it well enough in Marseilles and Genoa. At best, this suburb might become a fashionable suburban vacation destination. As for nature and silence, even when regional planning is not distorted by private interests, in this agglomeration of five hundred thousand souls and a hundred thousand automobiles, they will be nothing but slogans in a tourist brochure.

And they will hardly even have begun to implement the Plan for the beaches of Languedoc, when they will have to do the same for the beaches of The Landes; capital cannot wait, it has to yield a profit; and the technocrats have to plan something, just as machines have to bulldoze the soil. And after The Landes? It is clear, at least in France: after that there is nothing else to be done, except to demolish the Pointe du Raz so it can be converted into a sandy beach, something that, when all is said and done, will create jobs. Everything is ready, therefore, to convert the largest zone of vegetation and peace in France into an urban agglomeration; the only problem is whether it will contain one or two million inhabitants. To get an idea of what this transformation will mean, we have to understand what this region used to be like. The reforestation of The Landes, undertaken at the initiative of Chambrelent,[2] is an example of successful regional planning, surely because it was compulsory. The entire countryside ended up being transformed into an immense forest, above all a State Forest, from the beaches on the Atlantic and the west shore of the lagoons. In 1930, between Cap-Ferret and Soulac, you could walk one hundred and twenty kilometers in the shade of the pines without coming across a single village, and crossing only one road, the one that led to Lacanau-Océan. From the Adur to the Gironde, with a few health resorts, the beach once extended towards infinity in the white foam of the breakers. Behind the beach, the dunes covered by reeds; and behind the dunes, the perfumed open spaces of the *lète*.[3] Next, preceded by a few twisted pines, the green and brown wall of the forest. In this labyrinth of wooded dunes you could wander for days, following the tortuous paths of the sand trails. Suddenly, you emerge on the narrow beach of the lagoons. There was not even a country road to mark their banks. You had to climb over the tree trunks that had fallen from the sand cliffs into the water, and then follow the shorelines of the bays that were thick with reeds and then walk around the points whose shores were battered by the waves. Apart from the foresters' huts, there were only a handful of resin collectors' shacks linked by sandy trails. After 1930, they built narrow cement bicycle paths that wound among the *lètes*; what a pleasure it was to

[2] François Jules Hilaire Chambrelent (1817-1893), a French agronomist. Together with Nicolas Brémontier (1733-1809), the person who was primarily responsible for the large scale planting of pine trees and the conversion of The Landes into the largest forested area in Europe [Spanish translator's note].

[3] *Lète* (also *lette* or *lède*) is a Gascon term for the flat areas that separate the coastal dunes from each other and from the maritime forest, and which harbor a unique marshy ecosystem that hosts an abundance of indigenous species [Spanish translator's note].

ride fast in the shadows of the trees, brushing up against the pine boughs, in search of a clearing that never appeared! The lagoons were empty, except for a few fishing boats; it took many hours of rowing to reach the few villages in that region, set back a short distance from the lower part of the East shore. One could go anywhere, camp and fish at will; Polynesia was one hour from Bordeaux, it belonged to anyone who could get there, a handful of enthusiasts: campers and fishermen from the common people. The bourgeoisie had their own world there, the bay of Arcachon; sailing in Cazaux was not yet a social event, although the lagoon, on the bay side, had the advantage that the sea was always high.

As for the interior of The Landes, it was equally deserted, and even more unknown. Trains and automobiles cut right through it on a straight line against a horizon full of pines, but here, too, The Landes belonged to the hiker who walked far from the highways, and even far from the back roads. Traversing the forest, one would often be surprised to suddenly come across ravines thick with oaks, or springs that flowed from the rocks. Above, the incense of the pines drifted up towards the sun amidst the song of the cicadas, but below there was a clear stream flowing on the golden sand; you could follow its course for hours, letting yourself be led by its windings and turnings, without meeting a single living soul. Then came the war and the big fires; the discovery of oil[4] and the military bases. Finally, the looming implementation of the Regional Plan, which, under the pretext of saving The Landes, might very well end up destroying it.

The Landes was not something that could be created; it existed, that was all, no artist could have invented the largest and most original nature park in Europe. However, with various excuses that were finally reduced to a single excuse—production—they have begun to destroy it. The German military built highways to access their blockhouses, the French military occupied a large part of the forest to build their airports and rocket launching pads, and you constantly hear their *booms*. The green belt constantly shrank, The Landes was in its death throes; therefore, all that is needed now is to finish it off with an all-encompassing Regional Plan promoting tourism; it is essential that the local population should get rich; since, however, there is a shortage of people, people will have to be brought there. I must warn the natives, however: say goodbye to hunting and fishing! And what Landesman would not sell his soul for them?

Everyone basically agrees, The Landes has to be productive: the paper mills that pollute the air and the water are not enough. But with respect to this question there are two opposed views. First, the local representatives who are proud of their country and are ready to sell it to the highest bidder. They foresee at least a million summer vacationers; the more people and the more investment, the nicer The Landes will be, and the world of urbanization has already begun its forward march, with "Greek

[4] In the lagoon of Biscarosse you could once see schools of perch swimming among the seaweed three meters below the surface; according to a report published by the Museum, now this lagoon is designated as a Category Four body of water, the highest level of pollution [Author's note].

villages" in Seignosse-lePenon. But the forestry officials and the administrators are worried. The artificial forest of the coast is fragile, and the mere fact that masses of people will be walking all over it threatens to destroy it and unleash erosion. This is why the State intervened through the creation of a corporation for regional planning for The Landes coast: SOGHREA, which planned for only 362,000 tourists and 7.25 billion francs in investments here by 1985. To prevent the degradation of the vegetation, the new tourist zones will be set back five hundred meters from the beach and between the tourist resorts nature preserves are planned that will be provided with walkways for pedestrians and picnic areas. Should 95% of The Landes park be destroyed for 800,000 tourists, or only 50% for 300,000?[5] That was the bottom line of the whole debate between the local representatives and the technocrats. And, anyway, with 800,000 they will have to post a sign saying "no vacancies". Unless we are to accept the destruction of 100% of the coast of The Landes.

This is why SOGHREA is planning to divert some of the envisioned tourists towards the interior; they will have to go there to wade in the Eyre or take a dip in the swimming pool in Sabres. The Eyre must also be productive, although its possibilities are for now more limited than those of the Atlantic zone. The planning process for the valley of the Eyre has begun with the creation of the theme park at Salles and its floral expositions, as well as with the creation of a network of trails along the Eyre with informational signs. Because it is the wont of this river to wind discreetly between the vegetation, for the motorist who only gets a glimpse of it from the height of one or two bridges, the scenic tour of the valley of the Eyre is more properly a scenic tour of the asphalt. What next! They will construct beaches on the banks of this river with a base of sand, they will create access roads, parking lots; and to do this, the bulldozers will uproot as many trees as necessary and pile them up on one side. "It's all the same, don't worry...." They will construct "second homes in the traditional style".[6] The valley of the Eyre is not the Grand Canyon of Colorado, all of its charm is due to the murmur of water amidst the silence. What will be left of this charm after the bear hug of the planners? Another Bièvre.[7]

For the Europe of Leisure there is one last hope, however: the immense expanse of the French countryside, at least as long as France with its 100 million inhabitants and its widely dispersed industries is not saturated. Almost everywhere you see signs that invite motorists to go there; and even the most insignificant little districts now have their tourism bureaus. There is always something to see: if there are no waterfalls or Romanesque churches, you can see the refineries or the cooperative wineries. After

[5] I am optimistic. I just found out about the plan to create a seaside resort for 5,000 people on the Bombanne Point, on the Hourtin lagoon. That point, the most beautiful location on the lagoon, is nothing but a naked sand bar, where the pine trees look like Japanese Banzai trees; you can imagine what will be left of it after they are through with it. [Author's note.]

[6] Cf. *Sud-Ouest*. [Author's note.]

[7] The tributary of the Seine that once flowed through Paris, but is now entombed beneath cement and forms part of the city's subterranean drainage system [American translator's note].

the tour of the Tursan winery, why not take a tour of Artois, somewhere between Arras and Béthune? The magic signs of the billboards invoke the greed for tourist gold: visit Nowhere-in-the-Void, its monument to the fallen, its beets. There is no local representative who does not aspire to create an "aquatic zone" on a river that will finally end up polluted by the proliferation of factories. There is no peasant who does not dream of turning his native district into a city. Thus, the dream of every Frenchman will come true: to live in the country without leaving Paris.

## 2. The engulfed cathedral

Paris-Lyon-Mediterranean, 1965. Through this corridor opened between two mountain ranges, the industrial North overflows towards the South. Anyone who drove across the plains of the Lower Rhône a few years ago would not recognize them now. On the highway, an endless chain of cars and trucks roars nonstop; on the fabric of stone and gold of the old cities, the gray mold of cement proliferates like mushrooms, and the yellow bite of the construction projects disembowels the scrubland. An enormous canal cuts through the countryside like a cement scar, whose muddy water is diverted to be put to work. Here and there, reefs of rusty cars emerge from the rice fields, while the Mistral causes shreds of plastic to flutter and snap cheerily on their reed staves. The great annual solar festival approaches. Honey.... Honey.... Honey.... Antiques.... Antiques.... Antiques.... All along the whole route of the national highway the road brings us these whining pleas, in which the industrial monster proclaims its nostalgia for nature and escapism.

And all at once everything stops, a few kilometers from the cathedral of M.... I will not provide the exact location; those who love it know, or they will discover it. Between two shacks, right in the middle of the business district—but here we are talking about the pleasure industry—is the nondescript road that leads to it. A discreet sign notes its presence, and it is useless to ask any of the natives if this is the way to M..., they would send us to the other side of the lagoon: visiting M... is not yet a social event. Access to it is guarded not only by the condition of the road but also by the mosquitoes: these fearsome beasts terrorize the horde of motorized pachyderms. You must go carefully, even if you are in a car, because the ruts are deep and there are times when the sand infringes on this trail when it is in very bad shape. How did they let this road get like this? They didn't tell me, maybe because they are planning to build a new road. Thus we proceed, driving between the sky and the sea, headed towards that shadowy blotch that trembles on the horizon. A narrow sand bar extends to the edge of the water between the stillness of the marsh and the rumor of the waves. Not a single dune, or even a bush. The sun, a cloud, a ship at the other end of the horizon. Nothing more than is strictly necessary; just barely what is indispensable to emerge from the chaos. Here and there, a fisherman; but M... is not his destination.

A stone cross marks its entrance, blocked by a chain. The waters spread out around the long slopes of a vineyard that rises slowly to the woods— undoubtedly sacred—in which the sanctuary is concealed. For this high place is barely a few feet above the sea; but it the only one of its kind on this flat.[8] Conquerors of the flood, the black pines ascend with a tragic air towards the light among the uproar of the crows, and in their shadows a tropical garden full of birdsong proliferates. A gust of wind brings an aroma of incense, salt and mold. The lagoon gets darker; beyond the waters, far away, the confused chaos of the shore of the world of work is fading away. And towards the sea, emptiness.

We get out of the car and we enter the shadows, in which we discern some big walls. A cathedral swallowed by the night of time. A silent, locked cathedral, whose key must be requested at an isolated farmhouse whose owner sometimes acts as the cathedral's curator. A shy young girl interrupts her lunch, picks up an enormous key and joins us. And the door is opened, leading to more darkness and more cool air, and even more silence. The stone nave is empty, there is no object to distract your attention, except for one or another funerary slab on which lines carved in the marble display the outline of the old bishops. Walls and pillars uphold a vault, and nothing else. We are told that the church is abandoned, but it is still consecrated and now and then they say Mass in it. Our visit concluded, we leave the shadows and return to the light of the pines and the birds. The world is immense. The car is still there, at the beginning of the trail that leads back to the houses.

Once again on the everyday asphalt, our memory of M... is fading into the past. There are bigger and more opulent monuments; but I don't think there are any that are more in harmony with their surroundings, at least if one has had the luck to see it during the off-season. M... is not a monument, M... is a meteorite, an abandoned ship washed up on the muddy shore of time. For there was a time when this cathedral lost in the marshes was at the center of History, and several Popes had to take refuge in it. Back then it was the seashore, which is now plagued with factories and houses, that was deserted, and in this silent place the challenges of the sentinels and the hustle and bustle of the embassies once resounded. Later, men travelled on other roads; the Popes and the Bishops are gone, and the priests; now all that remains is a reef of stone abandoned to the crows. The gravel of the islet is still good for vines, and a bourgeois built a house so he can come here now and then to hunt ducks. But how can he stand the mosquitoes, and that spell-binding shadow? The bourgeois is gone and the shutters of his mansion are closed. The sea withdraws, and the sea will return.

For there can be no doubt that it is too late to see M... at the point of perfection to which men and time brought it. More than elsewhere, the land here is in a state of transformation. For several years now, the tide of men and their machines has been

[8] The double meaning of all these terms that Charbonneau plays with are lost in translation: "haut lieu" ("holy place", but literally "high place" or "elevated place") as opposed to "platitude" ("banality", "prosaic", but also "flat place") [Spanish translator's note].

breaking on these sun-struck beaches; only the winter storms that lash the sandbar were capable of stopping it a few kilometers from M... Until now the invasion took place haphazardly; and as is the case in other suburbs, the limited imagination of individuals has scattered a few shacks and houses here and there. In this void illuminated by an implacable light, so much mediocrity is comical and poignant. But the epoch of Buogival-in-the-Void[9] is over, forever; where individuals swarm, the masses are not far away, along with their termite mound. The sun has become expensive; big capital allowed itself to be raped by socialism, and it had a child of Lamour.[10] The region of M... is included in a grandiose regional planning scheme for the coast that is intended to turn it into a superMiami. Of course, the trees will take their time to grow in the sand and the salt; but Pechiney-Progil will liquidate the mosquitoes and Vilmorin will provide the vegetation.[11] The petty bourgeois chaos of the chalets will be followed by the cement beehives of the Babel of free time. And the old cathedral will disappear in another flood, this time a flood of tall buildings, cars and crowds. Having stood above the passage of time, it will be submerged in the future.

I don't know whether Culture will save M... from Tourism and Public Works, that is, from the Ministry of the building contractors. This monument only has a meaning due to the immensity of the place and its solitude. If it is not preserved in one way or another, M... will be practically destroyed, it will be turned into a "historic monument", one more station on the *Via Crucis* of motorized excursions in August. Its fate will be a test. If the projects of "regional planning" are inspired by any other reasons besides production and money, M... will be preserved at a distance and automobiles will be prohibited in its vicinity. Otherwise, this zone that is supposedly set aside for beauty and recreation will reveal what it actually is: an enormous theme park.

Meanwhile, for some time yet, M... is still there, for anyone who turns their steps towards that high face that awaits them in the shadows. The thread of incense and of night that rises from the marshes and from oblivion outlines an object so perfect that it seems, more than anything else, literary: an illustration for a page from Gracq or Buzzati. But M... is not literature, a place or an image for a surrealist first communion. You need only abide quietly to perceive that a voice is stubbornly speaking to us from the depths of time. This face that has arisen from the past contemplates the present, the confused disorder that emerges from the water on the other shore and which has

[9] *Bougival-sur-Néant* in the original. Bougival is a municipality on the outskirts of Paris that, at the end of the 19th century, was a fashionable residence for artists and writers. *Bougival-sur-Néant* is therefore a sarcastic allusion to the time when summer vacations and leisurely pursuits were the privileges of Bohemian artists and rich bourgeoisie [Spanish translator's note].

[10] An allusion to Philippe Lamour, a famous regional planner of that era, mainly in Languedoc-Roussillon [Note of the French Editor]. [The phrase also contains a play on words: "enfant de Lamour" is a homynym of "enfant de l'amour", an expression that means "bastard" or "love child"—Spanish translator's note.]

[11] Pechiney-Progil, a French industrial conglomerate with interests in chemicals, as well as other commodities. Vilmorin is a publicly traded corporation that specializes in the production of seeds [Spanish translator's note].

not yet found the meaning with which these heavy stones are endowed. M... does not belong to the past; when the cathedral was new, it was basically nothing but a kind of prefecture or factory. For it to become a sacred symbol, anchored at the center of the sky and the sea, it needed the crowds and the centuries to withdraw, and one day, at a certain moment in the 19th century, the first visitor would come, who was neither a soldier nor a believer, but an individual, attracted by this black fire that flickers over the waters.

And perhaps at this very moment when the chaos of a new flood is seething in the distance, we are now in a position to finally express the meaning of the call that this voiceless face issues. That, at one time or another, it is necessary for a presence to rise up amidst the immensity. That we need the sky and the sea—that they can never be immense enough; that all consciousness needs stillness and silence, the retreat from time and from the lagoons to put some distance between it and the movement in which it is submerged every day. M... is a sign that we must contemplate thoroughly. Because what it surrenders to us is not the secret of a buried world, but the secret of our world.

## 3. Producing nature

In Western society, where the ideal of production is bound to the quest for profit, discourses on the protection of nature, particularly in France, serve only as an alibi for the generalization of a suburb, and sometimes a really nasty one. But we should conceive of a kind of "regional planning" that really tries to find a place for nature. Unfortunately, such a thing cannot be achieved without coercion, which will have to be all the more severe to the extent that such an enterprise will come into conflict with the tendencies of industrial society. A real "regional planning" presupposes the multiplication of regulations and laws, and therefore the multiplication of prohibitions and sanctions. We will have to organize, and therefore, in a certain sense, destroy nature. Or else, in many cases, there will only be one way to preserve it from the pressure of industry and from crowds: isolate the nature preserves from all contact with the public; that is, abolish, in the nature preserves as well, the relation between man and nature. In fact, it is very possible that there is no solution in industrial society as we know it.

Our production plans are becoming increasingly more sophisticated. Until recently, they were content with planning the production of hydrocarbons or rockets. Now, however, they plan not only the necessary, but the superfluous: the air, the water. Cities will have not only factories, but vegetation. The goal of progress is happiness: the seashore and picturesque landscapes. This is why the engines roar and the smokestacks belch their smoke, this is why the river is fouled by industrial waste and trees are uprooted by machines. The goal of the city is the countryside; the goal of anti-nature is nature; the condition of happiness is the industrial form of unhappiness. Industry is only a means at the service of men and men have bodies: they see, they have a sense

of smell—I would not be so bold as to say they think. If industrial society were to completely devote itself to the realization of the conditions of human happiness, the result would be a total industrial suburb, the exact opposite of that happiness.

That is why the new regional planning includes provisions for regional or national natural parks where nature will be preserved for the enjoyment of the masses. But to decide in favor of nature is to go against industry, and for society to take the side of nature is equivalent to questioning its own existence. How can the city, the economy, power, respect nature? How can the State, the law, the police, respect freedom? On the pretext of organizing them, will they not end up destroying what remains of them? When it comes to war or blast furnaces, they only have to follow their own logic; when it comes to people's happiness or even just their lives, then they are caught in a contradiction. It is not an insoluble contradiction, because institutions are composed of people. But only by recognizing their problems first, can they solve them.

The contradictions of the preservation of nature are manifested in all their splendor in the "Conference on Studies on Regional Nature Preserves" held in October of 1966 in Lurs, in the department of Alpes-de-Haute-Provence.[12] Physicians, urban planners, architects and high level civil servants tried to define a kind of "regional park" where "the protection of nature is combined with the protection of man". In 1960, a law was passed that defined the national parks, but these parks were restricted to certain mountainous zones, and in the meantime the urban masses have erupted into the countryside, heading for the forests and rivers. How can we prevent this stampede from leading to the destruction of its destinations? By organizing, between the expanding cities, "regional parks" where human activities are not completely excluded, whether in the form of parks with an "urban appeal" that are close to the cities, or in the form of more extensive areas that might include, for example, a good part of the Massif Central.

What areas should be included in these parks? How can we reconcile the protection of nature with the development of agriculture and tourism? According to some people, as we have seen, we need to create—and nature is nothing but an excuse for an operation oriented towards prestige or profit—an industry like any other. Edgar Faure even takes "profitability" into account, since this capitalist value is now on the verge of becoming a socialist value, too. In that case, it is obvious that one can only choose between the factory and the fair. On the other hand, if the fair becomes too disgusting, some of its customers might go somewhere else. The national or regional nature preserve cannot be reduced to a business. Unfortunately, we still need to recall this obvious fact.

The "planning" frenzy might be inspired by the ambition for power as much as by the ambition for profit: to be the director of a project and to have it bear your name. In any event, no matter how many highways, bars and various other attractions are built, which will give certain people the opportunity to sell their cement and others the

[12] Cf. the article in *Le Monde*, October 5, 1966 [Author's note].

opportunity to sell their sandwiches and even their propaganda, the only thing that the city dweller will find in the regulated and also protected zone is a Coney Island with more or less shade, as was the case with the forest at Bouconne. It might be, however, that, by attracting the multitudes, these pseudo-parks really protect *them*. It would appear that, when the Warsaw park was designed, a plan was considered that would have opened "diversionary bars" near the entrance in order to attract the masses who were not worthy of the rest of the park; in that case, Saint-Tropez is a fabulous diversionary bar that temporarily protects Haute-Provence. Philippe Lamour has proposed that we should "contain the threat"—something that he undoubtedly seeks to achieve by building up the whole coast of Baix Languedoc. According to Dr. Toepffer, director of the park system in the Federal Republic of Germany, while parks should be organized by man, they must be protected from man as well. Between opening them up to the crowds and thus destroying nature, or protecting nature and prohibiting the crowds from entering the parks, there is a very small margin of maneuver. In fact, the parks will combine both disadvantages, since the access that is conceded to the masses must be accompanied by a police force that ensures that the masses are restricted to certain trails and roads. In the public park, the paths crowded with people surround intact, and deserted, fields of grass.

Other participants in the conference at Lurs, like Claudius Petit and Philippe Vianney, were conscious of the fact that parks must not be turned into islands of nature in the middle of our industrial society, that this would be the excuse to extend an artificial life everywhere; the little corner of chemically pure nature that allows one to surrender all the rest of the world to industry without any regrets.[13] In the United States and Canada, national parks are the expression of an immense continent where vast virgin spaces still exist. In Europe, man is everywhere, even on the high peaks of the Alps: to create parks in the wilderness areas that are frequented by the crowds would be an artificial creation. The real European park is the countryside, which, without the labor of man, returns, not to a natural state, but to the condition of a barren wasteland. "The real conservationists of the land are the peasants."[14] But the society that speaks of conserving the land is also the same society that destroys it. "How can we preserve rural values and agriculture in zones that the laws of the economy tend to depopulate?"[15] We must point out that the authority of the "laws of the economy", against which man is helpless, persist in an interventionist regime. That is why the conference at Lurs did not respond to this crucial question, because the countryside is the last park that can stand up to the urbanized France of the future, and the parks of Vanoise and the Pyrenees are nothing but alpine gardens. But if we want to save the French countryside, it will no longer be a matter of only setting aside a little corner

[13] For example, the Pyrenees National Park is surrounded by a "peripheral zone" in which the maximum amount of development will be allowed. The protection of nature ends up becoming a pretext for its destruction. [Author's note.]

[14] Cf. *Le Monde*, October 1966.

[15] *Ibid.*

of the land; we will have to change people's minds, and therefore the economy and politics.

# VI The failure of the back-to-nature revolt

## 1. The failure of individual escapism

The feeling of nature is one of the forces that shape the environment and the customs of industrial societies; beyond ideologies and nations, it is the reaction of the human body and spirit to the impact of progress. Although this force has transformed everyday life and attitudes, it has not succeeded in rising to the level of a systematic theory and organized practice, whether economic or political; there may be a back-to-nature revolt, but there is no back-to-nature revolution, and one of the objectives of this book is to help that revolt rise to the level of a revolution.

But there is no way around it: to take this step, we have to go against nature. The "feeling" of nature is diametrically opposed to consciousness: to critical examination or calculation. Because it arises spontaneously from the depths of being, it is refractory to reflection; because it is an instinctive pleasure, it flees from an analysis that would demoralize it; because it is freedom, it rejects everything that means organization, whether intellectual or social: a doctrine or an association. Therefore, the back-to-nature revolt only causes the chains it wants to break to become stronger. To avoid being deceived by this society that it rejects, it needs to put its methodical virtues into practice a little; by refusing to do so, it becomes an accomplice of this enemy world that is trying to integrate a force that threatens it. The feeling of nature has largely remained in the stage of childhood—that of sensuality or of the dream—and it has allowed itself to be confined to the nursery that society has prepared for it: private life, vacations or literature. Its imaginary Eden is evidently so fragile that it can only be enclosed behind a wall, which protects it from the outside world, but which also protects that world from a generalization of the back-to-nature epidemic. Like everything else today that expresses the vain revolt of man, the laments of the bucolic poet are too shrill, their pretensions too exaggerated, so that they cannot conceal their intention to flee from reality. Because it will not mature, this adolescence is condemned to shatter in contact with the obstacles that it rejects, or worse, to do an about-face and reintegrate in the world that it once denounced.

When it was less socialized, however, the feeling of nature could provoke authentic conversions in some individuals, and change their lives. At the beginning of the industrial age, the big city, a pole of attraction for the rural masses, was a pole of repulsion

for the best of its inhabitants. They fled from it to take refuge in the antipodes of civilization, in the Hoggar Massif or in Polynesia. "Rome or the desert" is the cry of modern anxiety: that of

Rimbaud, and colonel Lawrence, Father Foucauld, Guaguin and Alain Gerbault. Some of them used it as an excuse for an escapism that was not imaginary, but employed for the purpose of converting the heathens or defending the Empire. But after the missionaries and the soldiers, the islands witnessed the coming of a new white man: solitary mariners whose cargo hold was empty and who had no particular destination; or else a kind of madman, hermits whose only religion was Art. Plagued while they were alive by endless disputes with the police or the priest, after they died the governors themselves ended up praising them to the tourists and they earned the right to have a statue in their image erected under the palm trees. Today, work and entertainment—the H Bomb and Club Méditerranée—reign in Polynesia. The industrial hell is victorious in the exotic paradise where those rebels believed they could escape it.

Rimbaud's departure for the South Seas, like his madness, concerned only him, it was a strictly individual act. No matter how suspicious society may have considered it, it was not something that really concerned it. Society contemplated the Gauguin's flight from the point of view of the picturesque and the esthetic; and when he was dead, they brought his paintings back to the city and displayed them in the Louvre. Gauguin's presence did not prevent the islands from realizing their destiny, which was to become nuclear bases or vacation resorts for millionaires; to the contrary, his flight from civilization contributed to the tourist myth of Polynesia. The individual can indulge in the most extreme actions, and endow them with whatever meaning he likes, but if he allows himself to be confined in this way to the individual plane he will be recuperated by society, which will know how to make use of his most corrosive vices. Lawrence of Arabia could allow himself to be led by his dream of the wilds of Hejaz; English imperialism and Arab nationalism would give an objective meaning to his exploits, a meaning that he claimed had nothing to do with his motivations. As for the hermitage of Father Foucauld, it was nothing but a rough draft of Bidon V.[1]

Now, since the vanity of such escapists is obvious, their failure is insignificant. Escapism is today a social reality. Rimbaud, Gauguin and Alain Gerbault are part of the national patrimony and the prototype generates a whole legacy that is now only an increasingly more faded carbon copy. These epigones might very well expose themselves to the same dangers as their great predecessors, but they lack the supreme danger: that of having blazed the trail amidst general silence. They limit themselves to putting on the disguise of a personality that society handed them and they play the role: that is why the correspondence of the "solitary mariner" Lascombes, as it was published in *Paris-Match*, seems to be a bad parody of the Rimbaudian "Le Bateau Ivre". These

[1] The name of a French military outpost in the desert of southern Algeria on the road between the towns of Reggane and Bordj-Badji-Mokhtar [American translator's note]

mariners have little that is solitary about them; their solitude and their efforts are only the distance without which the actor could no longer distinguish himself from his public. And when he returns to being social, this solitude is turned into a commodity, financed by the State, as in the case of Eric Tabarly, or by the big corporations, as was the case with Chichester:[2] every solitary mariner is today assured of a contract or royalties; if the adventure is bloody, it will fetch a higher price. So our contemporary explorers disseminate the maximum propaganda for the last "lost worlds". They show millions of readers or spectators how civilization corrupts the primitives, and some even recognize that they are themselves participating in this corruption. An amateur ethnographer describes in *Paris-Match* the last Polynesian paradise, the Loyalty Islands, telling us that his mere presence endangered it; but he did not have enough integrity to say these things in a more serious newspaper: he needs funds for his next expedition, and he used his article to publicize his fundraising campaign. Degenerating, individual revolt leads precisely to its opposite: to that shadow that every living presence casts on the wall of society.

## 2. The failure of back-to-nature communities

The back-to-nature revolt has occasionally assumed a social form and sought to express itself in doctrines and to create societies: the *boy scouts*, the backto-nature movement, and, above all, the youth movement. However, a victim of the spontaneity that is both its strength and its weakness, it was unable to mature in these forms, either.

Scouting owes its success to a need that torments the young people of the cities: to live in nature and in a natural community. The young *boy scout* discovers the marvels of the forest, the magic of hunting, and tribal festivals; and in the child, unlike the adult, illusion can be reality. However, this game, in order to maintain its seriousness, must not extend beyond the threshold of adolescence. For the young *boy scout* it is, without his knowing it, a revolt against an abstract and inhuman society that represses his need for physical and mythical activity, and in favor of a society of comrades in which the rules of the game will finally be respected. From the children's point of view, scouting is a revolt against the city and the school, a crusade against the injustice of the adult world. But for the English general who founded the *boy scouts*, it was nothing but a means: a pedagogical method devoted to training, not little Indians, but young Englishmen imbued with patriotism and morality.

The ambiguity of scouting. The drums of time have fallen silent. Furtively, the tribal gods have come to populate the night and their eyes penetrate the darkness with thousands of stars. Caught in the magic circle of youthful friendship, the captive

[2] Eric Tabarly (1931-1998), French yachtsman and winner of many prestigious yacht races. Francis Charles Chichester (1901-1972), explorer, pilot, cartographer and yachtsman, knighted by Queen Elizabeth for his exploits.

fire growls gently, while in the darkness all their gazes merge in that center of glowing embers. Without the interruption of a single word, the shadow of a scout passes to feed the flames: a figure of dance that returns to the immobility of the silence. A breeze stirs the pines and from the lips of the scouts the wind of song arises, coming on secret paths from those dark abysses that open in the deepest part of man. The fire is dying, and the power of the choir grows with the darkness, filling with its clarity the sovereign night in which one last flame flickers.

"It's nothing but a see-you-later, it's nothing but a quick good-bye." Everything comes to a stop at this cliché. And you would have to be a child not to know that this "see-you-later" is a good-bye to childhood. Scouting is condemned to not last beyond the age of fifteen; it only engenders childlike old men in shorts who stubbornly, this time contrary to nature, try to prolong a game that others, more serious, will endow with a religious or political meaning. The good *boy scout*, a moralist and an activist, is the perfect prey for totalitarian movements that only demand that he believes, and that he obeys. There is no other remedy than to cease to be a child; there is no other remedy than to get a girlfriend, and to confront economic or political reality. To follow the straight and narrow road, in this haze in which every man is called upon to live, the wisdom of the serpent is worth more than the false purity of the child who never grew up.

The back-to-nature movement tries to take the next step, and it seeks to give a response to the problems of adulthood. It is nudist, vegetarian, pacifist and anarchist. It is the leftist answer to the "back to the land" slogan of the right. The back-to-nature revolt never came closer to becoming a revolution than when it took the form of the youth movement in Wilhelmine Germany. The *Wandervögel*[3] took to the road to escape from the prison of a triumphant society in the midst of a wave of economic and political expansion. An excellent government administration and a strong army left nothing to chance; as for the Revolution, the social democratic bureaucracy would take care of that. The great thinkers of Germany were real geniuses; the technicians, competent; the professors, diligent; and the workers, conscientious. Only one discordant note: Nietzsche—who, however, never found an echo.

In that country, however, the youth had lost hope, and they felt a desperation that was more lucid than the optimism of the colonels and the principals of their high schools. Troubled by the vain passage of their years, abandoned yet at the same time defenseless, the young people of Germany felt that the earth was trembling under their feet and, like a prisoner who feels the narrowness of his cell at the approach of an earthquake, blindly hurled themselves against the walls. Against the school, against the sergeant, against the factory: against all the yokes that bore him down. Without a lot of previous considerations, he yielded to his impulse; he went to the countryside,

[3] "Migrating birds": a youth movement founded in 1896 by Herman Hoffmann Fölkersamb that was very popular in the big cities of Germany during the first decades of the 20th century [Spanish translator's note].

and towards the empty horizon. He sought contact with the cosmos and with men. He detested ideas, which interposed themselves between the spirit and reality, the way courtesy interposed itself between man and man, and politics between man and society. And the youth movement tried to give man a foundation by burning bonfires in sacred places, at which its members fraternized.

But its rebellion was futile because the German youth were incapable of confronting the rigor of their elders and their reasons with an even more severe rigor of thought. It yielded to the greatest temptation that a rebellion can succumb to: it became intoxicated by its own music. How pleasant it was to forget everything, to march along the road, singing! It scorned its elders, but the latter were thinking: childish things, they will grow up. In the meantime, their elders concerned themselves with serious things, economics and politics. When the moment of truth came, it was the elders who decided; and the police went in search of the fugitives to throw them into the fire. The *Wandervögel* were scattered to the four winds by the hurricane of 1914. But the impulse that caused them to take to the road was still alive. Every fallen angel, thrown into the flames, turns into a demon; and the need for mysticism, for contact with the cosmos, repressed by our society, engenders all kinds of individual or collective perversions. We find some elements of the youth movement in Hitlerian paganism: the romanticism of *Blut und Boden*, the rejection of ideas, the flight forward to the rhythm of song. "I had a comrade...." But Hitlerian romanticism could, in turn, set the world on fire. This romantic stage scenery concealed a military enterprise whose necessary basis was heavy industry: the band of comrades is in fact an infantry squadron. Ever since Christ, there is no paganism that is not also nihilism.

Industrial society knows only one monstrous way to get back to nature: war. Physically and morally, war seems to explode the social organization and devolve man back to the primal ooze. It buries him, it dresses him up in all the colors of the earth, he disappears into the underbrush of the woods. He will experience night and day, cold and heat; hunger and, consequently, also great feasts. In war, the modern individual gives free rein in a monstrous orgy to everything that peacetime denies: joy and suffering, love and hate— to finally live on this earth. But very soon he realizes that what he finds is neither love nor nature, but the coldest abstraction of all: the industrial organization of death. Then the only thing the soldier can do is desire peace: to rediscover the value of comfort and reason, and reject nature, thus preparing another, even more hellish explosion.

The adolescent who refuses to grow up can only make the choice between bourgeoisification or madness—when not both at the same time. The youth movement is also the origin of the social democratic *Naturfreund*[4] movement. This movement, more faithful to the Rousseauian tradition, is rationalist and progressive. Integrally pacifist, of an anarchist tendency, it is in favor of birth control and sometimes of "free love". It practices a Puritanical nudism, it is preoccupied with eating a natural diet as well as

[4] "Friends of Nature" [Spanish translator's note].

the protection of fauna and flora. In Central Europe the *Naturfreund* movement was usually responsible for managing the hostels created by the youth movement, and the youth hostel movement was influenced by it. Originally, the youth hostels were not just cheap lodgings for tourists; their purpose was to awaken a new spirit in the youth: respect for nature and devotion to folk culture, and fraternal relations between the youth of all nations. But the "spirit of the youth hostels" was, from the very start, a victim of its own contradictions: the contradictions inseparable from all Rousseauianism. Its leaders were trapped between anarchist-style rebellion and the growing need for efficiency that their times demanded. Integral pacifists or Trotskyists at first, they became orthodox socialists or communists and tried to take control of the movement and place it under the direction of their parties. And instead of pursuing its original vocation, the hostel movement was consumed by endless conflicts between its various political tendencies.

Thus, the "spirit of the youth hostels" of the early days has been lost. However, with the development of free time and the regimentation of the youth, the hostels have ceased to be the responsibility of a minority of volunteers and have become a mass movement managed by full time employees. The small groups of comrades that once wandered about on foot or on bicycles were replaced by the herds of students who rely on motorized transport. And the hostels became merely reasonably priced hotels or refuges for summer colonies.

The failure of all these movements is the failure of a rebellion that never matured; scouting is aborted at the age of fifteen, the youth movement and the hostel movement ended at the age of military enlistment. And the group of friends, free in nature, dissolved when the time came to get married, or to get a job or become involved in politics. As is the case with all lesser forces, these movements are used for other ends. All that remains of scouting is a pedagogical method, equally suitable for either the Hitler Youth or the *Komsomol*[5] or the Army. The boy scout or hostel practice of singing around a campfire, recuperated by the Vichy regime's "Chantiers de Jeunesse" and "Écoles de Cadres", inspires new *music hall*[6] and *cabaret* compositions. The back-to-nature movement only served to create a new technique to exploit free time, for the dissemination of health food and sunbathing.

The back-to-nature revolt could have succeeded only if it had accepted growing up; what it needed was for the dream and the desperate cry of youth to have been strong enough to be turned into reason and words; then the back-to-nature revolt would have been able to be real: it would have made the transition to practice and to society. Today, the solitary hiker can no longer allow himself to be guided by his daydreams; there is no more nature in which he can take refuge, from now on it will only survive by way of the reinforcement of consciousness and decision. The time has come for him

[5] The acronym of "Kommunisticheski Soyuz Molodiozhi" ("Union of Communist Youth"), the youth organization of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [Spanish translator's note].

[6] In English in the original [American translator's note].

to carry out a self-critique and to present to society a list of demands, which is what I have been trying to do here. By trying to give the back-to-nature revolt a methodical and critical expression, I do not believe I have betrayed it, but I think I have been faithful to its deepest impulse. If only this book could express the unity of logic and experience, if only the reader could hear in my arguments the distant murmur of the stream! And if only at the same instant that the analysis hits the target and rises above the surge of anguished outcries, if only a drop of dew is still trembling, intact, in my words! If only in this book, which aspires to awaken consciousness, all the forces of life can resonate despite everything. That this should be, for the reader, flesh:

that it should be made word!

# Conclusion

# 1. Towards a consciousness of nature

Anyone who has followed me to this point might think that I have been prone to exaggeration; and it might very well be that the course of events will prove me wrong on one point or another. But I had to say it all. And I don't see how anyone can impugn what is essential about my description. If nothing changes, the endless growth of the human masses, of their appetites and their means, can only lead to the destruction of nature. A destruction that the increasingly greater need that man has for nature itself will only accelerate.

First of all, we run the risk—a not at all negligible risk—that man will be destroyed by the destruction of his environment; and it would seem that good planning for the future must not overlook the fact that industrial society is only in its beginnings, it was just born recently. And even if scientific knowledge and the technical control over the human environment should advance at the same geometric rate as its destruction, it is certain that to save man from his physical destruction a total organization will have to be set up that would threaten to atrophy that spiritual and material freedom without which "man" is nothing but a word. Beyond the natural equilibrium from which we emerged—if the trend of the data that we have at our disposal now does not change—we have only one future: a completely artificial, strictly social world. On Earth, space and time, saturated by the human masses and their activities, will have disappeared. There will be nothing left but an eternal present; and individuals will thus be spared death and the absurd at the same time as existence. Society—the city—will be everywhere, even behind the semblances of nature. It will be unthinkable to wander through the forests, stalk an animal or go fishing. We will no longer have the time, because society will be overwhelmed by trying to satisfy the countless desires that it will endlessly stimulate. There will be neither plants we may gather nor living creatures that we can catch; only an endless array of products and, above all, an endless array of spectacles. There will be no more Nature, and it might be that Culture, too, will be a thing of the past—if that word will even still be used in the future. Man will live on the substance of man, in a kind of subterranean world. Whether somewhere on this devastated Earth, or under some kind of hermetically sealed dome in the poisonous atmosphere of another planet. Now, since we are still the way we are, who among us is actually prepared to accept such a future? We need the infinity of the sky above our heads; otherwise we will no longer be able to see, and above all we will lose our consciousness. If the human species will plunge that deeply into the darkness, it will

have been to stop, only a little further along, at the same obscure dead end as the insects.

But then the reader will ask me the inevitable question: "If you are referring to man such as he is, you might very well be right. But what should we do?" (This may be understood to mean: his diagnosis is true, but, since he does not provide me with the remedy at the same time, it is false. Because today deeds are the sole criteria of truth.) I will respond that, to the contrary, the only chance that the human spirit has is to look directly at the sun and choose, if necessary, an apparently mortal truth rather than a redemptive lie. Is it true that, the way things are going, we have to consider definitively renouncing nature, that is, ourselves? The only thing that matters is to know whether this judgment is, generally speaking, correct. If it is, the rest depends on us. The only defeat is to refuse to consider the current state of affairs. Apart from that, the future will be what we make of it.

The "feeling of nature" is not vain nostalgia. No one invented it, it was born spontaneously in the very depths of man: a red flag raised for us by our body and our spirit at the same time. It is warning us that the elemental and the essential are in danger. The demand for nature is first of all the demand for a reality that goes beyond the concepts and the forces of man at the same time. The resistance, the opacity that its obstacle opposes to us is not that of death, but that of a night without which there would be no day under the sun; it is the object without which there would be no subject, without which, our environment, reduced to a mere reflection of the human, would be pure fiction: "A painted boat on a painted ocean."

But the feeling of nature is also a demand for freedom: for a spiritual, and therefore physical presence. How can we have a soul if we do not have a body, if we can no longer exercise our muscles and our senses? If we seek the elements—space and time—it is because the life of the spirit is based in them: the mountains and the forests were always the refuges of free men. And this freedom is completely worthy of the name because it is not only an individual freedom; the band of friends, camping and its chores, amidst an increasingly larger organization, express the need for a physical community and project.

Nature ... this name awakens in us the image of a fundamental and sacred reality that lies at the origin of our life, physically and spiritually: the myth of Eden or the Golden Age only means that what lies at the end of our desires is also given at the beginning. It reminds us, at the very moment when we are severing it, of our bond with the cosmos; that we are at the high point of an equilibrium that—while it leads us to death—has also given us life. You would have to be very superficial to reduce nature to a spectacle, or to a deposit of energy and raw materials. The Romantics said: nature is a mother.... They were mistaken, nature is not a mother in the sentimental sense of the term; it is the Mother: the origin of man. The dawn's purple is made of the unspeakable fury of the sun, and these flowers are lightning bolts. Woe is he who puts his hand to them without the delicacy of a god! He will be burned by the explosion of the energy that inhabits their forms.

Man can improve this equilibrium in its details; but he can change nothing essential in it without destroying himself. If he places the meaning of life in pure Becoming—in the pure explosion of energy, in the unending progress of pleasure and power—he can deny that there is a nature that must be respected, and a human nature. But then, the victim of the forces that he will have unleashed, man runs the risk of disappearing in the conflagration of a worldwide disorder: cataclysm or war. Or, after having broken the natural equilibrium that gave it life, humanity will have to reconstruct an artificial replacement for it, even down to its most minor details; only an absolute science that wields absolute powers, a science that would rule the Earth, would be able to prevent the chaos that can be foreseen for the conclusion of the explosive development of human power. Sooner or later it will be necessary for this energy, turning against itself, to forestall this anarchic future. But then man will only have been saved by the destruction of human nature, which is first of all freedom. For—should he succeed in doing so— he will only be capable of manufacturing a robotic world in which the human individual, totally determined, will no longer possess either physical autonomy or, above all, spiritual autonomy. Thus, the personality will have emerged from the cosmic and sacred totality only to disappear most completely in a social totality. Our planet will have thereby avoided becoming another sun, devoured by the flames that gave it life, but only to become another Moon; perfect, yet frozen like a crystal. It is up to us to see to it that, somewhere between these two outcomes, this planet will remain the Earth.

If is true that human freedom is a product of nature, it is no less true that the destruction or the organization of nature is the end of freedom. Man has to perform a balancing act, and this is a difficult task, between these two chasms—the cosmic totality and the social totality—and that same term, "nature", tells him where his narrow road leads, which is to say that nature is no longer a divinity that we must worship, nor is it inert matter that we can use as we like. What is nature? It is the cosmos that becomes present to consciousness, transformed from an object of sacred terror to an object of lucid love. It is therefore of the utmost importance, first of all, to free this term from all the contradictory mythologies that have been cultivated by the right and the left. The former because it declares nature to be wicked, and considers that it must not be meddled with. And the latter, because it decrees that nature is good, it believes it is justified in endlessly tampering with it. The first obligation of a consciousness and defense of nature is therefore to put an end not only to that "back to the land" imagery but also to the Rousseauian idylls that prevent us from loving it for what it really is. Nature is not good; it bears, like us, the mark of the inconclusive and death. But if we love it for itself—and not for being an anthropomorphic projection of our desires—then we will realize that this is how it gives us life. We have to finally realize this about nature, that is, the tension that is creative of freedom: that both the divinization as well as the destruction of our relation with the cosmos will have to disappear. It is always about overcoming this tension, but depending on the epoch, you have to put the accent on freedom or on the bond. At this time it is necessary

to reinvent the bond: human freedom today consists in choosing to guarantee this equilibrium that was given us from the start. Fate is no longer the eternal return of the seasons, but the weight of social nature. An era comes to an end, that of the struggle of man against nature; now he only needs to know himself and fight against himself. From now on, only if he is capable of ruling himself will he be able to rule the Earth.

# 2. For a defense of nature

All thought worthy of the name is a draft outline for action. The first precondition for a defense of nature is knowing what we mean by this word. Now we know that what is at stake is man, more specifically the free person that arose from the Greek and Judeo-Christian tradition. We may therefore invest the "feeling of nature" with all its force by rejecting the mystification that expels it to the domain of the superfluous. We can never insist too much on the fact that it is not about a luxury, but about our present spiritual life in our physical body. Therefore, insofar as the "feeling of nature" is an expression of a concrete threat, it has no reason to deny reason. Without renouncing the physical and concrete side of reality, of which it is the expression, it must put into practice a methodical analysis based on its own critique. It can no longer be content with the ridiculous substitute of a bucolic lyricism; it cannot continue to flee from the present by way of any kind of escape to the past or the Islands, but must look danger right in the face: the city and its machines are today our fate; to reject them, we have to accept them in a certain sense. No more than in literature, the feeling of nature must not allow itself to be confined to leisure: if it is confined to leisure, this implies that the end, for man, is not work, which is nothing but a means, but vacations. How many people think this way, even though they would never openly admit it! But then, for anyone who really feels this way, vacations are an even more serious matter than their job. Only by saying this I am surely disagreeing with all those who flee by way of work or escape by means of free time.

I take responsibility for the fact that by taking this road I am going against the current that promotes the feeling of nature in the sense of its reintegration into the whole. I am separating what our society conflates, and commingling what it separates; I am trying to express lived experience rationally, and trying to instill order into spontaneity. I am trying to give a goal to the wandering of the solitary hiker and, to defend freedom, persuade those individuals to associate together who, by temperament, find any kind of discipline repugnant. On a road like this, which is all uphill, the beginning is not going to start all by itself. But it might be that then the feeling of nature, instead of allowing itself to be used for other ends, will serve its own cause.

If I have insisted so strongly on this conversion of the feeling of nature it is because this first step is at this very moment within our reach and because it has to be taken before all the other steps. And although I am now going to "sketch" a few "positive" solutions, I know perfectly well that when the fundamental conversion has begun, the solutions will be defined on their own terms, depending on the circumstances. It is not

my intention to reply to reality with a utopia. Throughout this book I have sketched solutions; and, above all, my critiques implicitly point to the remedies.

This great transformation might begin in the way we think about and experience the feeling of nature, to the extent that society allows us a certain margin of freedom in our leisure activities. Why can't we promote a certain style of traveling to the category of ethics? Why, instead of relaxation and escape, can't we transform it into a kind of labor, above all one of the imagination? The organization of tourism is the negation of the journey because it is the traveler who should choose his destination and his road. Why not deliberately reject the travel agencies, the advertisements and the chairlifts? Why can't a secret society of solitary individuals arise, whose objective would be to prevent machinery and organization from invading everything?

The journey only has interest thanks to resourcefulness and hard work: organization nullifies these aspects of the journey. The most beautiful countryside is the one that the eye discovers, not the one whose photo is everywhere. Unfortunately, since the tourism industry makes more money than the petrochemical industry, very soon there will be no beautiful place that is not exploited like an oil field. The journey is the creation of the traveler. On a small-scale map he discovers the place of his dreams: a thousand kilometers away, a six hundred meter long cape set back from a bay. The traveler departs and after three days on a train and then a bus he reaches the banks of a body of water, which is no ocean stirred by the winds, but a small lake in the middle of the woods. On the other bank, a dark mountain lost among the clouds. What does he know about it? It appears in no guidebook and from where he stands the aspect of the pass hardly allows him to guess the inclination of the far slope. This is why, in the bars in the town, he talks to the local people, who tell him that the paths end at the crest of the mountain, because that is the edge of a cliff.

With a pack on his back, he departs, full of expectation. He walks along the shore of a bay that he would never even have imagined in his dreams could be so beautiful, because no purpose had yet deflowered the secret that was now being revealed to his eyes. Here, the power of the ocean became grace to insinuate itself further into the depths of the countryside. Elsewhere a chaotic battlefield of sand and rocks separates the land from the sea; here, pacified, it plays at the foot of a tranquil pool. A strip of hedgerows surround the beaches, over which the sour aroma of seaweed reigns; on the other bank, at the foot of one of the hedgerows, a road opens up upon which the wheels of the carts have rolled, century after century, on the pink granite. He ascends in silence under the chestnut trees, then under gigantic gorse bushes whose smooth trunks rise up to a crown of flowers. And later, near the summit, the path disappears on a heath scattered with slabs of rock. Only when he approaches the peak does the traveler get a glimpse of the goal of his journey. Under the leaden sky, the moors look even more flat, and in the saddle of the pass, a shack made of rocks and gorse, as if it was squashed by an invisible current, rises up from the surface of the turf. He only needed to take a few more steps to contemplate the view, which erupts, like a slap in the face, with the void and the buffet of the wind, the blue of the sea and the sky. With

the crisp snapping of waving flags, new continents of vertigo sink in the transparent air; the ledges plunge one after the other over a hypocritically iridescent ocean. On the cape, a smooth fury dissolves in shreds between the dragon's teeth that slash through the foam: infernal spikes of an iron comb. In vain, the seagulls shriek, pullulating in that void into which they will never fall. It was necessary for the solitary traveler to come to this extremity; and only personal choice could have led him to the edge of such abysses.

It is therefore inappropriate to reduce the feeling of nature to an ethic. Freedom is not just an individual duty, but a collective principle. It therefore implies a completely different organization than tourism, an organization that would be based on the eminent rights of those for whom contact with nature is a calling for which they are prepared to pay with the necessary sacrifices. Although the freedom to travel belongs to everyone without distinction of class, it is no less true that mass organized tourism deprives the journey of its reason to exist by accelerating the destruction of cultures and nature. Thus, no more useless investments devoted to the bourgeoisification of free time, when the essential consists in the reduction of individuals' working time, and confers upon them the responsibility for finding a use for this saved time. If the realm of leisure is the realm of freedom, why spend millions to cover the mountains with cable railways that convey the human herd to the summits? Anyone who really wants to go there will find a way to get there on foot. The cable railways will be reserved for a handful of educational centers specializing in teaching skiing. The main thing, however, is: what is the meaning of the propaganda for tourism?

It only serves to deprive the traveler of the main pleasure of the journey: discovery. Why spend enormous sums to convince the masses that they should go to places where they would not be comfortable on their own? Many people do not ask for more than the image of nature and only seek the city behind a rural backdrop. Therefore, why, with the excuse of providing them with a tranquility that they do not want, do we have to impose the dispersal of crowds in space-time? Organizing an escalation of vacations will only serve to convert the whole year into an endless August, ruining the peace of mind of those who are willing to pay for it with solitude and rain. For a lack of any better ideas, instead of transforming all of France into a gigantic Riviera, why not set aside a few "abscesses of obsession" like SaintTropez and Venice? Basically, the more masses of people are piled up in those places, the more the latter will respond to the spontaneous needs of those who find them congenial. Why destroy nature by convincing those who do not want to live in it that they should visit it? Obviously, the interests of those who sell travel packages and their employees would be harmed, but that is another question.

The same considerations apply to hunting and fishing. The only way to save them from the avalanche of the masses starts with eliminating all kinds of superfluous organization. Thus, insofar as fishing is a form of entertainment and a luxury, it must be kept outside of the technical and organized economic and social system, which in other respects totally engulfs our life. Of course, a police force is indispensable in order to

fight against the last vestiges of the old poaching practices and, above all, against the new ones: the kind practiced by the masses of summer vacationers. The law should deprive these practices of their reason for existence; fishing, like hunting, since it is a vital activity for man, has come to be vital in a different sense: now it is a sport. It must therefore remain outside the economic circuit: just like the prey of the hunter, the fish should only be the object of the gift. But, above all, because fishing belongs, subject to the framework of the rules that regulate this sport, to the domain of freedom, it presupposes the personal initiative that is precisely what gives it its charm. Therefore, we must put an end to the propaganda related to fishing. Everything that touches upon it must be in the domain of the individual secret, of word-of-mouth communication. The publication of fishing guides, the fact that this trade is practiced, will be compared to the crime of the massive destruction of fish and considered a violation of the pleasure of the fishermen, which consists primarily in the search for their prey. Since this pleasure also consists in overcoming the obstacles involved in this search, in order to spare it from the presence of the masses who have no such vocation we will also have to make provisions for an organization responsible for demolishing the roads that allow cars to reach the banks of the rivers. No one can say that they are indispensable to prevent the people from starving. Obviously, these measures cannot by themselves save fishing if they are not accompanied by a choice between fishing and industry.

The protection of nature presupposes a minimum of organization, but given that this organization is the antithesis of nature, organizing it is usually equivalent to destroying it. In any case, on this terrain organization can only be practiced with a vigilant awareness of the tension between the end and the means: the best that can be done in such cases is to create preserves where organization cannot penetrate, and regional and national parks must be considered first of all from this point of view, instead of being an excuse to reinforce organization and build more infrastructure. In the best cases, however, the national park can only be a ridiculous excuse for the total city; if we want to prevent these last remaining islands of nature from being invaded, we have to consider the territory as a whole. Between the total dominance of industry and the total elimination of nature, why not imagine another kind of intermediate solution whose goal is to preserve the French countryside? Now is the time to put an end to the pillage that is transforming the countryside into a vacant wasteland, prohibiting the destruction of trees in certain places, particularly along the banks of rivers. And strict adherence to the rules with regard to this point can only mean the preservation of a society. The preservation (which, considering the current state of affairs, no longer means conservation) of the rural French park is a more important and more urgent task than preserving the reefs or the glaciers. Why, with regard to the conservation of regions, to production and a style of quality, should the peasantry not be viewed as profitable? Is it not possible, for a start, to preserve, within the economic system, those rural zones that up until now resisted more successfully than others, such as, for example, the interior of the Basque Country? The diversified agriculture

of the family farm can be preserved if authentic home-grown products are allowed to be sold at a higher price. Anyone who would choose to live in these zones would renounce certain comforts of the city, but, in exchange, they would enjoy certain pleasures of the countryside, as well as rights to hunt and fish. The penetration of tourism should be controlled, reduced to its most discreet manifestations, such as rented accommodations in private homes: to opt for the countryside, the summer vacationer, too, will have to renounce the city. And this is not limited to expelling nature to a reservation; we have to reintegrate it into our lives.

Partial measures like these, which are easy to multiply depending on the circumstances, are only possible if they are accompanied by a change of meaning of the entire society. When you think of the defense of nature, its domain expands endlessly, until it ends up embracing everything. Basically, there is no problem with nature; the only problem is "the Problem": that of man of this epoch facing his destiny. The worst mistake would be to reduce the defense of nature to an ideology of nature [*naturisme*] that would lose sight of the fact that its defense is only one aspect of the "revolution"—the change of course—that contemporary humanity must undertake if it wants to jump off the runaway train that is leading to its doom. Unfortunately, everything must follow the same road: the economy, demography, politics. It is quite evident that no defense of nature is possible if the endless multiplication of people and products remains a desideratum and at the same time an ineluctable fate, and if class and national conflicts distract us from the common problems of the species. There will be no nature in a France of one hundred million people, but only highways that lead from one factory to another—whether chemical factories or tourism factories. And soon enough, the people of France will lack not only trout, but also a liter of water. Under these conditions, to speak of nature is no longer a prelude to action, but so many words: concealing a religion of demographic and economic expansion behind cheap bucolic literature.

The contradiction of a society that destroys nature, among other things for the purpose of honoring it, will unfold towards its ultimate consequences if we do not dare to recognize it. For the moment, we are the beneficiaries of the comforts of the new society and we derive our pleasures from what remains of the old society: from the last farms and from the last fish. But this double game is coming to an end and the more we delay taking action, the more we will be compelled to make a draconian choice between the preconditions for happiness and happiness itself: between industry and nature. If, however, we admit that there is a contradiction between our ends and our means, and that the latter must be subordinated to the former, there will be a chance that they can be useful.

The solution of this problem presupposes first of all a radical inversion of values. It is necessary for the end—nature for men—to take priority over the means—science, industry, the State. This presupposes going against the current of a whole world. The task is endless, like our weaknesses, and if we are ready to begin it is better not to conceal its enormity. But if they tell me that the current state of affairs is a fait accompli, I will respond that its consequences for man are also a fait accompli, and

that the lack of realism consists in not seeing them. The fact is that, for us and for all of our descendants, there will be no other road forward than a real defense of nature. It is clear that by going against the current on this road, the objective is, apparently, beyond our reach, but there have always been men who have been capable of following a course that they know will mean their deaths. And even if the end is at an infinite distance, from now on it is giving a meaning to those who advance towards it: a reason for existence and a motive to unite, something that by itself gives us a reason to live.

Such activity presupposes a plan affecting all domains, economic and social, and, therefore, political. From now on, all enterprises will have to be considered from a biological and human point of view, not only as a

function of production or the nation, but taking into account the totality of the equilibrium that it disturbs. For this examination, all methods will be appropriate, particularly those of the natural sciences and of the sciences of man. But the defense of nature cannot be the monopoly of these sciences; it forms a totality that is too vast, and what is at stake is the subject—the human person. This subject has something to say; science can only provide him with reasons or means concerning which only he can judge. The protection of nature cannot be, as in the conference at Lurs, a monopoly of specialists: men of knowledge or of "action", that is, men of power or of money, but not of happiness.

The men who devote themselves to this revolution will already constitute an institution, independent of the parties and the States, dedicated to the defense of nature, and they will assume responsibility for uniting all the forces that display an interest in this project at the national and international level. It will not consider itself an administrative body, but a kind of order that will impose a certain lifestyle on its members, which will help them to maintain their distance from contemporary society. They will put into practice a kind of conscientious objection with respect to problems that now erroneously unite or divide individuals in order to ensure that one day, the protection of nature will assume a position that is at least equal to that occupied by production or national defense. In this way, they will be the heralds of a different society, in which human problems will be raised to the first priority, and in which this order could play the role of a supreme court with the function of arbitrating between economic or political powers.

The real task of the year 2000 will not be escaping to the Moon, where we would be even more imprisoned in our machinery, but our settlement of the Earth. Now that we are no longer foreigners on this planet, now that we are finally its owners, will we destroy it? The marvel of Babylon is that terrestrial garden that we now have to cultivate and defend against the lethal powers that have always besieged it. Powers that have, temporarily, the face of human forces, but which are always the same: the refusal to think, the fear of action. It is true, this garden of ours is not Eden, but the humble beauty of its flowers reflects the glory of another undying spring. And no human effort that contributes to making the present flourish can do more.

***

# Publisher Details

Original French edition published under the title, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, Gallimard, 1969.

Translated in February-April 2018 from the Spanish edition, *El Jardín de Babilonia*, tr. Emilio Ayllón, Ediciones El Salmón, 2016.

Cuqueron or Parbayse, and it hurt their feelings to be treated as being of no importance (Spanish translator's note).]

All three places were built *ad hoc* at the end of the 19th century to exploit the forest of

The Landes, which was, for its part, an equally artificial creation of the regime of Napoleon III. As for the "Fallières churches" and the "Deschanel dance halls", these are ironic inventions of Charbonneau to illustrate the meager historical and architectural value of the public buildings constructed during that period in The Landes. Armand Fallières was the President of the Republic between 1906 and 1913. A proponent of an anti-clerical ideology, he assumed the presidency just after the separation of Church and State and it would not seem, therefore, that religious structures were a priority among his public works projects. As for Paul Deschanel, he was the President of the Republic for a very short time (from January 17 to September 20, 1920) and had to resign due to health problems. [Spanish translator's note.]

Bernard Charbonneau
The Garden of Babylon
Nature, a Revolutionary Force
Originally published 1969.

<libcom.org/article/garden-babylon-nature-revolutionary-force-bernard-charbonneau>