

Not a book, but a  
*textual virus*

# THEORY OF BLOOM



**TIQQUN**



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Translated by Robert Hurley

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## Letter to the Publisher

Dear Eric,

Enclosed you will find a printout of the new, much enlarged version of *Machine Men, Directions for Use*. Despite appearances, it's not really a book we're referring to, but a *textual virus*. Like the classical figure of "Man," the Book, insofar as it confronted its reader with the same fake completeness, the same smugness as the classical Subject facing his peers, is a dead form.

The end of an institution is always experienced as the end of an illusion. Moreover, it's the truth content by which this thing of the past is shown to be false that then comes to light. The fact that, beyond their closed nature, the great books have always been those that managed to *create* a community—that, in other words, the Book has always had its existence outside itself—is something which was only accepted at a rather recent date, actually. One even hears that somewhere on the left bank of the Seine a certain tribe is camping, a community of the Book, that finds in this doctrine all the ingredients of a heresy.

You're in a good position to observe that the end of the Book does not signify its abrupt disappearance from social circulation, but on the contrary its utter proliferation. The quantitative multiplication of the Book is but one aspect of its drift toward nothingness, along with its seaside consumption and its pulping, to name two others.

So in this phase there are still books, to be sure, but they are only there to host the corrosive action of TEXTUAL VIRUSES. The textual virus *exposes* the principle of incompleteness, the basic deficiency underlying the published object. It lodges itself in the most explicit notices, the plainest practical information—address, contact, etc.—with a view to *precipitating the community that it lacks*, the still virtual community of its genuine readers. It thus places the reader in a position where his/her withdrawal is no longer tenable, or in any case *can no longer be neutral*. That will be our premise as we refine, sharpen, and clarify the *Theory of Bloom*.

Sincere good wishes,  
Junius Frey



*Mr. Bloom watched curiously, kindly, the lithe black form. Clean to see: the gloss of her sleek hide, the white button under the butt of her tail, the green flashing eyes. He bent down to her, his hands on his knees.*

*—Milk for the pussens, he said.*

*—Mrkgnao! The cat cried.*

*They call him stupid. They understand what we say better than we understand them. She understands all she wants to. Vindictive too. Wonder what I look like to her: Height of a tower? No, she can jump me.*

James Joyce, *Ulysses*





# THEORY OF BLOOM

## At this hour of the night

The great watchmen are dead.

THEY must have killed them.

The feeble glow of their solitary persistence bothered the party of sleep too much. At least that is what we surmise—we who come so late—from the discomfort their names still cause at certain moments.

Every living trace of what they did and were has been erased, it would seem, by the maniacal stubbornness of resentment. In the end, this world has preserved only a handful of dead images of them, which it haloes with the crooked satisfaction of having defeated those who were better than it.

So here we are, orphaned from any greatness, delivered over to an icy world where no fire signals the horizon. Our questions must remain unanswered, the elders assure us, before confessing all the same that “Never was there a darker night for the mind.”

## Who are you really?

The lovely snow-covered countryside glides quickly past the window. The distance between V. and R., which was once a week's affair, will be traversed in a short time. For an hour you've been the occupant of an assigned seat in one of the twenty identical cars of this high-speed train, like so many others. The regular, and no doubt optimal, arrangement of the seats replicates itself in the abstract harmony of a toned-down neon. The train follows its rails, and in this coach, so sensibly attuned to the idea of order, it seems that human reality itself follows its invisible rails. A healthy and polite indifference inhabits the space separating you from the woman in the seat nearby. Neither of you will feel the superfluous need to speak to one another during the trip, let alone to engage in conversation. That would disturb your distraction, and your neighbor's concentrated study of the women's press ("How to sleep with a man without his noticing it," "Soft hitting on guys," "Is he a good catch?," "Gifts that make sense," "Who are you REALLY?" and so on). Nor, when her cell phone rings, will the young woman find it necessary to stand up: "Hello?...wait, what do you mean you're not there?!... you're making fun of me or what?...listen, that's three weekends I've been stuck with the kids, I work all week and already I have trouble finding the time to live, so no, no and no, I can't do it...find a way, it's not my problem...everybody has their life, you've already made a mess of mine...how many times do I have to tell you: I'm going away with Jerome this weekend, and that's that...oh sure, and how would that be? with the little one throwing fits all day long, blubbing "Where's papa?"... Jesus, because you're his father! ... out of the question... I don't give a damn, you're taking care of them this weekend... too bad for her, you should've found one that's more accommodating...I warn you, if nobody shows up I'm leaving them with the concierge...not true, I'm quite reasonable... that's it, ciao."

The scene is repeated ad infinitum in all its banality. It's a new fact of life. It's shocking at first, like a slap, but we've had to spend years preparing for it, scrupulously, by becoming perfect strangers to each other: blank existences, indifferent, flat presences. At the same time, no part of this situation could be taken for granted if we were not absolutely intimate within the estrangement. It was necessary, therefore, that the estrangement also become the index of our relationship with ourselves, that we become in every respect—Blooms.

If Bloom is also encountered in books, it's because each of us has already passed him on the street, and seen him subsequently in ourselves. The latter confirms the former.

One fine day, you pay closer attention than usual to the collective silence of a subway train, and allow yourself to be overcome, beneath the shared pretense of

contemporary customs, by a shudder, a primordial dread, open to every suspicion.

The last man, the man of the street, of the crowds, of the masses, mass man—that is how THEY portrayed Bloom to us initially: as the sad product of the time of the multitudes, as the disastrous son of the industrial age and the end of every enchantment. But in these designations as well, there is the same shudder—THEY shudder before the infinite mystery of ordinary man. Behind the theater of his qualities, everyone senses a pure potentiality lurking there; a pure potentiality that we're all expected to ignore.

There remains the necessary anxiety that we believe we can alleviate by demanding from one another a strict absence from oneself, a disregard of that common potential that has become unspeakable for being anonymous. Bloom is the name of that particular anonymity.

## KAIROS

In spite of the extreme confusion that reigns at its surface, and perhaps because of it, our time is messianic in nature.

It should be understood by this that some very ancient distinctions are fading out, and some divisions lasting several millenia are divided in turn.

The era is easily reducible to one essential reality, and to the distraction value of that reality. More and more visibly, present-day non-societies, those imperative fictions, are divided without remainder into pariahs and parvenus, but the parvenus are themselves only pariahs who have betrayed their condition, who would like more than anything to put it behind them, but it always catches up with them in the end. One could just as well say, looking at another division, that these days there are only idlers and frenetics, the latter being, finally, nothing more than idlers trying to cheat their essential idleness. One wonders if the pursuit of “strong sensations,” of “real intensity,” which seems to be the ultimate reason for their living so desperately, ever succeeds in distracting them from the basic affective tonality that fills them: boredom.

The reigning confusion is the global deployment of all these false antinomies, beneath which our central truth nonetheless emerges. And this truth is that we are the tenants of an existence that is exiled in a desert world, that we have been thrown into that world without any mission to accomplish, without any designated place or recognizable filiation, in a state of abandonment. That we are at the same time so little and already too much.

Real politics, ecstatic politics, begins there. With a savage, encompassing peal of laughter. A laughter that vaporizes the unctuous pathos of the so-called problems of “unemployment,” “immigration,” “precariousness,” and “marginalization.”

There is no social problem of unemployment, but only the metaphysical fact of our idleness.

There is no social problem of immigration, but only the metaphysical fact of our estrangement.

There is no social question of precariousness or of marginalization, but rather the inexorable existential reality that all of us are alone, dreadfully solitary in the face of death, that we are all, from all eternity, finite beings.

It's for each one to decide whether they're dealing here with serious matters or social distraction.

The epoch that opens in 1914 sees the ontological extrude into history in a pure state and at every level, when the illusion of "modern times" finishes falling apart while metaphysics on the other hand makes a reality breakthrough. Such tectonic upwellings of truth occur at those rare moments when the untruth of civilizations crumbles. Our time has joined a strange constellation with, for example, the decline of the Middle Ages and the first, Gnostic, centuries of our age. The same *Stimmung* expressed itself with the same radicality: finitude, perdition, separation. "Modern times" and the Christian West were previously born of similar upwellings, out of reaction.

This commonality keeps one from regarding the affective tonality that would dominate the twentieth century as simply a "malaise in civilization." There is no question here of any subjective tendency, any capricious propensity to despair or lament: on the contrary, this tonality is the most evident datum of our era, that which **THEY** work relentlessly to repress, with every surge that occurs.

It's not that men somehow, negatively, have "lost their bearings"; it's that they have positively become Blooms.

#### BLOOM IS THE FINAL EMERGENCE OF THE ORIGINARY

Henceforth there will only be Bloom everywhere, and the escape from Bloom.

### STIMMUNG

*Kafka's men are in an originary sense the same thing as Kafka's world.*

Understanding the figure of Bloom doesn't require simply giving up the idea of the classical subject, which is a minor thing, it also requires abandoning the modern concept of objectivity.

The term "Bloom" doesn't just exotically fill the absence of a word in the common lexicon for a human type which has recently appeared on the surface of the

*He no longer saw a future before him, and the past, however hard he tried to find some clarity in it, seemed a thing incomprehensible. The justifications crumbled away and desires seemed to vanish forever. Travels and wanderings, once his secret joy, had become strangely repugnant; he was scared to take a single step, and at every change of address he trembled, as if something monstrous confronted him. He was neither honorably homeless nor honestly and naturally at home anywhere in the world. He'd have liked so much to be a hurdy-gurdy man or a beggar or a cripple, then he'd have cause to ask people sympathy or alms, but even more fervently he wished for death. He was not dead, yet dead he was, not beggarly poor, but such a beggar yet he didn't beg, he still carried himself with elegance even now, like a tedious machine he still made his bows and spoke empty words, and was dismayed and horrified to be doing so. How tormenting his own life appeared to him, how false his soul, how dead his miserable body, how alien the world, how vacant the motions, things, and events that surrounded him.*

Robert Walser, *Brentano*

planet and which we would best be wary of.

“Bloom” refers to a *Stimmung*, to a fundamental tonality of being.

The *Stimmung* belongs neither on the side of the subject, as a sort of mood in which perception would bathe, nor on the side of the object, as a liquefied version of the World Spirit; it is rather the ground on which, in the classical world, the subject and the object, the self and the world, were able to exist as such, that is, as clearly distinct.

Because it is the “how” whereby every being is how it is, the tonality in question is not the unstable, the fleeting, the merely subjective, but indeed what gives every being fundamental consistency and possibility. Bloom is the *Stimmung* through which and on the basis of which, in the present moment, we understand ourselves, that without which these words would be nothing but a succession of stupid phenomena.

In epochal terms, Bloom names an uncommon *Stimmung*: the one that corresponds to the subject’s withdrawal from the world and vice versa, to the moment when the self and the real find themselves abruptly suspended, and as if abolished. For this reason, Bloom is the general *Stimmung* in which *Stimmungen* become all that appears, in which the primacy of the *Stimmung* over every other reality is manifested as such.

Inasmuch as it always-already permeates the conceptual tools by which *THEY* might claim to grasp it, the *Stimmung*, though perceptible, cannot be “objectively” captured, circumscribed, or analyzed. What we can picture of it, at best, is the Figure that corresponds to it, the Figure as a human capacity for configuring worlds. So what this “theory” focuses on is indeed a *Stimmung*, but apprehended through a Figure.

Bloom thus also names a spectral, distracted, supremely vacant humanity that no longer accesses any other content than the *Stimmung* in which it ex-ists, the twilight being for whom there is no longer any real or any self but only *Stimmungen*.

## **Mundus est fabula**

Because Bloom is one who can no longer extract himself distinctly from the immediate context that contains him, his gaze is that of a man *who fails to recognize*. Everything slips away under its effect and gets lost in the inconsequential flux of objective relations where life is experienced negatively, indifferently, impersonally, as something without quality.

*Bloom lives inside Bloom.*

All around us a petrified world spreads forth, a world of *things* where we our-

selves figure, with our egos, our gestures, and perhaps even our feelings, as things. Nothing of such a death-filled landscape can properly belong to us. We are more and more like the exile who's never completely sure of understanding what is going on around him.

Despite the enormous relinquishment, the inexplicable suspension that now strikes all that is, the universal mechanism continues to *function* as though nothing were amiss, continues to collect its due from our isolation.

In this empire of ruins in perpetual renovation, there is no refuge to be had anywhere, and we no longer even have the recourse of an interior desertion, within ourselves. We find ourselves handed over, without any say in it, to a boundless finitude, as if exposed over the entire surface of our being.

Thus Bloom is that man whom nothing can defend from the world's triviality. A reasonable mind concluded one day: "*Actually, Bloom is alienated man.*" Not true: Bloom is the man who has become so thoroughly conjoined with his alienation that it would be absurd to try and separate them.

Empty angels, creatures without a creator, mediums without a message, we walk among the chasms. Our road, which could just as well have ended yesterday, or years ago, does not have its reason in itself, and knows nothing of any necessity apart from that of its contingency. It is a wandering that transports us from the same to the same on the paths of the Identical: wherever we go, we carry inside us the desert whose hermit we are. And if on certain days we can swear that we are "the whole universe," like Agrippa von Nettesheim, or more ingenuously "all the things, all the men, and all the animals," like Cravan, it's because we see in everything only the Nothing that we ourselves so fully are.

But that Nothingness is the absolutely real before which all that exists becomes ghostly.

## ὥς μὴ

Nothing is more inscrutable to Bloom than those *men of the Ancien Régime* who seem to participate in life fully and immediately, and who in every situation exhibit a firm sense of their embodiment, their existence and the latter's continuity. For us, wherever we look, we never find that massive self, that personal substance which THEY attribute to us so generously, as soon as we claim to exist.

Just as every harmonious ethicality that might give consistency to the illusion of an "authentic" self is now lacking, likewise everything that might make one believe in the univocity of life, or the formal positivity of the world, has vanished. In actual fact, though, our "sense of reality" remains only a limited modality of that "sense of possibility that is the capacity to think how everything could 'just

as easily' be, and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not" (Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*). Under the commodity occupation, the *most concrete* truth about everything is that of its infinite substitutability.

All the situations in which we're involved bear, in their equivalence, the endlessly repeated stamp of an irrevocable "as if." We collaborate in maintaining a "society" *as if* we weren't part of it; we think of the world *as if* we ourselves didn't hold a definite position within it, and continue to age *as if* we were destined to stay young. In a word: we live *as if* we were already dead.

And this is surely the most painful paradox of Bloom's existence: he no longer knows how to listen to his living body, to his speaking physiology. Just when THEY would like at every moment to make those things signify, sexually.

Whether it's a woman's body or a man's or even bodies of indiscernible form, Bloom's flesh is still a prisoner of the non-sensual sexuation that traverses it. But this omnipresent *yet never assumed* sexuation is but the source of a dull, persistent pain, like the pain felt by amputees for a member that no longer exists. Whence the essentially spectral character, the sinister aura of contemporary mass pornography: it's never anything but the presence of an absence. In the thoroughly semiotized world of Bloom, a phallus and a vagina are merely signs that refer to something else, to a referent that no one encounters in a reality that does not cease to melt away. Bloom's flesh is sad and devoid of mystery.

It's not sex that we need to reinvent: we're already living amid the wreckage of sexuality, and our body itself is a remnant of it. As for the sexual roles that Bloom has inherited *by default* from traditional societies, he cannot transform them, arrested as he is in an inexorable prepubescent stage. Bloom males and Bloom females thus pursue the same weary dance, to the rhythm of the old tunes of classical sexuations. But their moves break off, their dance is labored, they stumble... It's painful to watch.

A thing among things, Bloom stands outside of everything in an abandonment identical to the abandonment of his universe. He is alone in every company, and naked in all circumstances. There he remains, in exhausted ignorance of himself, his desires, and the world, where, day after day, life says the rosary of his absence. For him all of life's experiences are interchangeable, and undergone according to a kind of existential tourism.

We have unlearned joy just as we have unlearned suffering; we've become emotional illiterates, no longer perceiving anything but the diffracted echoes of emotions. Everything is timeworn, to our late-arriving eyes, even unhappiness. And perhaps that is where the disaster lies: nowhere finding the support either of doubt or of certainty.

For the being who no longer feels attached to life except by a slender thread,



*All that I do and think is merely a Sample of my possibility. Man is more general than his life and his acts. He is designed, as it were, for more eventualities than he can experience. Monsieur Teste says: my possibility never leaves me.*

Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*

freedom assumes such a defective and ultimate meaning that it cannot be taken away from him: it's the freedom to display with regard to the future a certain sense of the theatrical pointlessness of everything, a terminal way of being a spectator of the world, himself included. During the eternal Sunday of his existence, Bloom's interest thus remains constantly empty of any object, and that is why he himself is *the man without any interest*.

Here *disinterestedness*, in the sense that we do not manage to have any importance in our own eyes, but also in the sense that the bourgeois category of interest can no longer account for any of our acts, is not an expression of individual idealism, but a mass phenomenon.

*Man is assuredly something that has seen its day. All those who loved their virtues have perished—by them.*

### **“Everyone is a stranger to himself most of all”**

Bloom's basic experience is that of his own self-transcendence, but this experience, however smooth it sounds, is primarily that of an impotence, that of an absolute suffering.

Whatever self-esteem we wished to preserve, we *are not* subjects, that is, autarkic and sovereign completenesses, down to our allegiance.

We move in a space that is completely controlled, entirely *occupied*, by the Spectacle on the one hand and Biopower on the other. And what is awful about this control, about this occupation, is that the submission they demand of us is nothing against which we might rebel with a definitive gesture of rupture, but something that we can only *deal with strategically*.

The power regime under which we live bears no resemblance to the one that existed under the administrative monarchies, whose outdated concept remained operative up to a recent date, that is, within the biopolitical democracies, being the only enemy *recognized* by revolutionary movements, characterized by a mechanism of blockage, of purely repressive coercion.

On the contrary, the contemporary form of domination is essentially *productive*. On the one hand, it governs all the manifestations of our existence—the Spectacle; on the other, it manages the conditions of our existence—Biopower.

The Spectacle is the power that insists you speak, that insists you be *someone*.

Biopower is benevolent power, full of a shepherd's concern for his sheep, the power that desires the salvation of its subjects, the power that *wants you to live*. Caught in the vise of a control that is both totalizing and individualizing, squeezed by a dual constraint that destroys us in the same movement by which it keeps us alive, most of us adopt a kind of disappearance policy: feigning interior

death and, like the Captive before the Grand Inquisitor, maintaining silence. By removing, and removing *oneself* from, every positivity, these specters rob a productive power of the material upon which it could be exercised. Their desire not to live is all they're able to muster against a force determined to make them live. In this way, they remain in Bloom, often burying themselves there.

So this is what Bloom means: that we don't belong to ourselves, that *this* world is not *our* world. That it confronts us not only in its alien totality, but also in its smallest, alien details. This foreignness might be charming if it implied a possible externality between it and us. But there is no question of that. Our estrangement from the world consists in the fact that the stranger *is inside us*, that in the world of the authoritarian commodity, we regularly become strangers to ourselves. Increasingly, the circle of situations in which we are forced to watch ourselves act, to contemplate the action of an ego in which we do not recognize ourselves, closes in and besieges us even in what bourgeois society still called our "innermost being." The Other *possesses us*; it is this dissociated body, a simple peripheral artifact in the hands of Biopower, it is our raw desire to survive in the intolerable network of miniscule subjections, of granular pressures that corset us tightly, it is the ensemble of calculations, of humiliations, of petty acts, the set of tactics that we *are obliged* to deploy. It is the whole objective mechanics to which we inwardly sacrifice.

THE OTHER IS *THE ECONOMY* WITHIN US.

Bloom signifies this as well: everyone knows in his heart that he *is not* himself. Even if momentarily, in the company of this one or that one, and more often in anonymity, we may have the contrary impression, we still harbor the deep feeling of an inauthentic existence, an artificial life. The interior presence of the Other asserts itself at every stage of our consciousness: it's a slight but constant loss of being, a gradual draining, a little death dispensed non-stop. In spite of this, we go on assuming the exterior hypothesis of our self-identity, we *play* at being a subject. A shame attaches to this rift, which grows along with it. So we attempt evasion, we project ourselves ever more forcefully to the outside, as far as possible from that awful internal tension. Nothing must turn up there that would stick to our social "identity," remaining foreign to our foreignness: MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION, while gazing on a field of ruins.

*There is that falseness in each of our gestures.*

That's the essential point.

It's no longer time to make literature out of the disaster's different combinations.

Thus far, too much has been written and not enough  
has been thought, on the subject of Bloom.

## Ens realissimum

Looking within himself, *The Ptolemaen* found only “two phenomena: sociology and emptiness.” We must start from there, not from what we think we are—sociology—but from what we intimately experience as a *lack*, because this is the thing that’s most real, the *ens realissimum*. Bloom does not signify that we are somehow weakened subjects compared to the classical subject and his superb conceit; rather, it *reveals* that at the basis of human existence there is a principle of incompleteness, a radical inadequacy. What we are is precisely *this weakness*, which *can*, if it pleases, choose for itself the *mask* of the subject.

We are nothing indeed, nothing but the nothingness around which the movement of our ideas, our experiences, our miseries and our sensations revolves. Indeed, we are the empty axis of this unwalled well, an axis that doesn’t exist on its own account, but because every circle has a center. Yet this irremediable deficiency can itself be understood as the ultimate positivity, expressed as follows:

I AM THE INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN  
WHAT I AM AND WHAT I’M NOT.

Bloom is such an intermediary, but a *passive* intermediary, the *witness* of his own desubjectivation, of his interminable becoming-other. He recovers the originary difference, that of knowing we are not what we are, that no predicate can exhaust our potentiality.

Incompleteness is the mode of being of everything that remains in contact with this potentiality, the form of existence of everything that’s destined for *becoming*.

## The most disturbing guest

Because he lacks any substantial determination, Bloom is the most disturbing guest, the one who has graduated from simple visitor to master of the house.

Since he has lodged himself within us, we find ourselves clothed in a purely vestmental being. Whenever we undertake to reclaim some substantiality for ourselves, the latter always remains something incidental and inessential, in regard to ourselves. Hence, Bloom names the new, ageless nakedness, the properly human nakedness that disappears beneath, and yet bears, each attribute, that precedes every form and makes it possible.

*Bloom is masked Nothingness.* That is why it would be absurd to celebrate his emergence in history as the advent of a particular human type: the man without

qualities *is not* a certain quality of man, but on the contrary *man as man*, the final realization of the generic human essence, which is precisely the deprivation of any essence, is pure exposure and pure availability: *worm*.

The bourgeois republic can pride itself on having furnished the first historical expression of any importance, and in the last analysis the model, of this controlled ecstasy. In it, in a novel way, man's existence as a singular being is *categorically* separated from his existence as a member of the community. Thus, in the bourgeois republic, where man is a true, recognized subject, he is cut off from any quality of his own, he is a figure without reality, a "citizen", and there where, in his own eyes and in those of others, he passes for a real subject in his everyday existence, he is a figure without truth, an "individual." The classical age thus established the principles whose application made man into the entity we're familiar with: the aggregation of a dual nothingness, that of the "consumer," that *untouchable*, and that of the "citizen," that pitiful abstraction derived from impotence.

But the more the Spectacle and Biopower are perfected, the more the appearance and the elementary conditions of our existence gain autonomy, the more their world detaches from men and becomes alien to them, the more Bloom withdraws into himself, deepens and recognizes his inner sovereignty in relation to objectivity. He detaches himself more and more painlessly from his social determinations, from his "identity," and toughens, without regard to any effectiveness, into a pure force of negation.

The condition of men and of their common world as *exiles* in the unrepresentable coincides with the situation of *existential clandestinity* that befalls them in the Spectacle. It manifests the absolute singularity of each social atom as the absolute *whatever*, and its pure difference as a pure nothingness.

Assuredly, Bloom is *positively nothing*, as the Spectacle tirelessly repeats. The interpretations diverge only as to the meaning of this "nothing."

*The 'I' has a content which it differentiates from itself; for it is pure negativity or the dividing of itself, it is consciousness. This content is, in its difference, itself the 'I,' for it is the movement of superseding itself, or the same pure negativity that the 'I' is.*

Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

—Having reached this point, every sane mind will have concluded that no “theory of Bloom” is constitutively possible, and will, of course, turn its attention elsewhere. The more clever ones will chuckle over a false syllogism of the sort “Bloom is nothing. Now, there is nothing to say about nothing; therefore, there is nothing to say about Bloom. Q.E.D.,” and will no doubt regret having put aside their captivating “scientific analysis of the French intellectual field.” Those who will read further, despite the obvious absurdity of our topic, must not lose sight of the necessarily indecisive character of any discourse about Bloom. Addressing the human positivity as a pure nothingness leaves no other option but to evoke as a quality the most definitive lack of quality, as a substance the most radical insubstantiality, at the risk of giving a face to the invisible before one is through. If it is not to betray its object, such a discourse will have to coax it into view, only to let it disappear again the moment after, *et sic in infinitum*.—

## A little chronicle of the disaster

Even though he is the fundamental possibility which man never ceases to *contain*, the *real* possibility of possibility, and for this reason he has been described, experienced and practiced many times over the centuries—by the Gnostics of the first centuries of our era as well as the heretics of the end of the Middle Ages (Frères du Libre-Esprit, kabbalists or Rhenish mystics), by Buddhists as well as Coquilards—Bloom doesn't appear as a dominant figure in the historical process until the completion of metaphysics, in the Spectacle.

The generation that glimpsed the face of the Gorgon through its steel thunderbolts, the generation of expressionism, of futurism, of Dada then surrealism, was the first to take on this terrible secret *en bloc*. It was then that *something* was attempted whose radicality, whose white calcination did not find its *satisfactory* expression even in the vertiginous years of the Twenties. The century's entire history can be interpreted as a series of *reactions* against what was glimpsed at that point, something *in which* we are still engaged. For since 1914, it's not, as THEY have explained it, a matter of "civilizations" knowing that "they are mortal": it is *commodity civilization*, as it has spread from the West to the rest of the world, which knows that *it is moribund*.

In reality, for more than a century—roughly since the symbolist radiation—Bloom has been almost the sole "hero" of all literature, from Jarry's Sengle to Michaux's *Plume*, from Pessoa himself to *The Man Without Qualities*, from Bartleby to Kafka, not to mention of course *The Stranger*-by-Camus and the New Novel, which we leave to *baccalauréat* students. Although he was given an earlier look by the young Lukács, it was not till 1927, with the treatise *Being and Time*, that he became, properly speaking, under the threadbare frock of *Dasein*, the central non-subject of philosophy. (It's worth adding that ordinary French existentialism, which established itself later and more deeply than its brief vogue suggested, can be seen as the first body of thought designed exclusively for Blooms.)

THEY have long been able to ignore, as a *merely literary* phenomenon, as a *purely philosophical* exaggeration, the massive evidence of Bloom in all its manifestations. For that matter, THEY still work at this assiduously: it relaxes the atmosphere. Because, in passing, THEY would like very much to forget something THEY are *politically* contemporaneous with, forget that Bloom emerges in literature at the very moment when literature falls apart, and in philosophy when, *as a regime of truth*, it crumbles. In other words, when Valéry writes: "*I experienced the simplicity of our statistical condition with a strange and bitter pleasure. The quantity of individuals was absorbing all my singularity, and I was becoming indistinct and indiscernible to myself;*" he's not providing a supplementary object for the vener-



able contemplation of Aesthetics: he's expressing *politically* what it means to be one more body in the aggregate of a *population* managed by Biopower.

## Uprooting

Every development of commodity society requires the destruction of a certain form of immediacy, the lucrative partition into a *relationship* of what was once unified. It is this scission that the commodity form subsequently invests, that it mediatizes and exploits, day after day shaping the utopia of a world in which every person, in every domain, would be exposed only to the market. Marx was able to describe the first phases of this process admirably, although only from the tendentious viewpoint of the economy. "*The dissolution of all products and activities into exchange values,*" he writes in the *Grundrisse*, "*presupposes the dissolution of all fixed personal (historic) relations of dependence in production, as well as the all-sided dependence of the producers on one another. [...] The reciprocal and all-sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection. This social bond is expressed in exchange value.*"

It is perfectly absurd to regard the persistent destruction of every historical attachment and every organic community as a conjunctural vice of commodity society, which the reformist good will of the citizenry would be called upon to mitigate. The uprooting of all things, the separation of every vital totality into sterile fragments, and the autonomization of these within the circuit of value are the very essence of the commodity, the alpha and omega of its movement. For humanity, the highly contagious character of this abstract logic takes the form of a veritable "uprooting disease" that compels the uprooted to throw themselves into an activity tending always to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted or only so in part; *whoever is uprooted uproots*. Our epoch enjoys the dubious prestige of having carried the proliferating and multitudinous feverishness of this "destructive character" to its ultimate degree.

## Somewhere out of the world

*"You must be passers-by!"*

Gospel of Thomas

Bloom appears as the inseparable product and cause of the liquidation of any substantial *ethos*, under the impact of the commodity's invasion of all human relationships. He is thus himself *a man without any substantiality*, a man who's become *truly* abstract, cut off from any milieu, dispossessed of any belonging,

then cast into aimlessness. We also know him as that undifferentiated being “who does not feel at home anywhere”, as that monad who is not from any community, in a world “that only engenders atoms” (Hegel). Naturally, to accept the universal condition of pariah, of *our* pariah condition, would be to relinquish too many convenient lies—convenient, that is, for those who mean to assimilate into this “society,” and for those who do so while claiming to criticize it. The well-known doctrine of “the-new-middle-classes”, or alternatively “the-vast-middle-class”, has corresponded for a half-century to the denial of our Bloomitude, to its misrepresentation. In this way, THEY would recuperate in terms of social class *the complete dissolution of all social classes*. For Bloom is also today’s neo-bourgeois, who so pathetically lacks the assurance of his bourgeoisness, like the proletariat who no longer even has the vestiges of a proletariat behind him. More to the point, he is the global petty bourgeois, the orphan of a class that’s never existed.

In fact, just as the individual resulted from the decomposition of the community, Bloom results from the decomposition of the individual, or rather, of the *fiction* of the individual—the bourgeois individual has never existed except on the freeways, where accidents do happen. But one would be mistaken about the *human radicality* that Bloom represents if one placed him in the traditional category of the “uprooted”. The pain to which every genuine attachment exposes one nowadays has assumed such excessive proportions that one can no longer even allow oneself to feel *nostalgia* for an origin. That, too, had to be killed inside oneself if one wanted to go on living. Thus Bloom is rather *the rootless man*, the man who has adopted the feeling of being at home in exile, who has rooted himself in placelessness, and for whom uprooting no longer evokes banishment, but on the contrary an ordinary situation. It’s not that he has lost the world, but that he has had to leave the *world’s savor* behind.

## The loss of experience

As an observable *Stimmung*, as a specific affective tonality, Bloom results from the extreme abstraction of the conditions of existence of the Spectacle. On the global scale, the most insane and at the same time the most characteristic concretion of the Spectacle’s *ethos* remains the metropolis. That Bloom is essentially the metropolis man in no way implies the possibility, through birth or by choice, of escaping this condition, for the metropolis itself has *no outside*: the territories that its metastatic spread does not occupy are still polarized by it; that is, they are determined *in all their aspects* by its absence.

The dominant trait of the spectacular-metropolitan *ethos* is *the loss of experience*, of which the forming of the very category of “experience,” in the limited

*With this tremendous development of technology, a completely new poverty has descended on mankind [...]. For what is the value of all our culture if it is divorced from experience? Where it all leads when that experience is simulated or obtained by underhanded means is something that has become clear to us from the horrific mishmash of styles and ideologies produced during the last century—too clear for us not to think it a matter of honesty to declare our bankruptcy. Indeed (let's admit it), our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on the personal level, but poverty of human experience in general. Hence, a new kind of barbarism. Barbarism? Yes, indeed. We say this in order to introduce a new, positive concept of barbarism. For what does poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further, looking neither left nor right [...] We have become impoverished. We have given up one portion of the human heritage after another, and have often left it at the pawnbroker's for a hundredth of its true value, in exchange for the small change of "the contemporary" [...] Mankind is preparing to outlive culture, if need be. And the main thing is that it does so with a laugh. This laughter may occasionally sound barbaric. Well and good. Let us hope that from time to time the individual will give a little humanity to the masses, who one day will repay him with compound interest.*

Walter Benjamin, *Experience and Poverty*

sense of *having "experiences"* (sexual, athletic, professional, artistic, emotional, ludic, etc.), is surely the most eloquent symptom. In Bloom, everything stems from this loss, or is synonymous with it. Within the Spectacle and within the metropolis, people never experience concrete events, but only conventions, rules, and a completely symbolized, completely constructed second nature. What prevails there is a radical split between the insignificance of everyday, so-called private, life, where nothing happens, and the transcendence of a congealed history in a so-called public sphere to which no one has access.

But all this belongs more and more clearly to past history. The separation between the lifeless forms of the Spectacle and the "formless life" of Bloom, with its monochrome and silent thirst for nothingness, yields at many points to indistinction. The loss of experience has finally reached the degree of generality where it can be interpreted in turn as an originary experience, an *experience of experience as such*, as a clear openness to Critical Metaphysics.

## The metropolises of separation

The metropolises can be distinguished from all other great human formations by the fact that in them the closest proximity, and often the greatest promiscuity, coincides with the greatest estrangement. People have never been brought together in such large numbers, but neither have they been separated to this degree.

In the metropolis, man undergoes the ordeal of his purely negative condition. Finitude, solitude, and exposure, which are the three basic components of that condition, weave the backdrop of everyone's existence in the big city. Not the fixed backdrop, but the moving backdrop, the combinatory backdrop of the city, the reason why everyone endures the icy stench of these non-places.

The metropolitan *hipster*, in his intensity as well as in the numerical extent of his legions, forms a rather remarkable type of Bloom: its imperialist faction. The *hipster* is the Bloom who presents himself to the world as a viable form of life, and thus constrains himself to a strict discipline of mendacity.

As the ultimate consumer of existence, the *hipster* lives within the confines of an endless experimentation *on himself*. Afflicted with a definitive lack of belief in humanity or in language, he has measured the volume of his being and decided never to go outside it, unless it's to ensure the self-promotion of his sterility. In this way, he has replaced the emptiness of experience with the experience of emptiness, while expecting an adventure for which he stays prepared but which never happens: all the possible scenarios have already been written. From ecstasy to disappointment, the solitary mass of *hipsters*—always-already disappeared, always-already *forgotten*—continues drifting, like a raft full of suicidal dudes, lost

*Determining the possibilities that our era contains depends crucially on our consideration of the figure of Bloom. His historical emergence necessitates, as far as "our party" is concerned, a completely new foundation, for theory as well as for practice. Every analysis and every action that did not take it seriously into account would condemn itself to perpetuating the present exile. For, not being an individuality, Bloom does not let himself be characterized by anything that he says, does, or manifests. Each moment is for him a moment of decision. He does not possess any stable attribute. No habit, however repetitive it may be, is capable of bestowing any being on him. Nothing adheres to him and he does not adhere to anything that appears to be his, not even the "society" that would call on him for support. To gain some insight into this epoch, one must consider that on the one hand there is the mass of Blooms and on the other, the mass of acts. Every truth follows from this.*

on a depressionist ocean made of images and abstractions. They have nothing to transmit, nothing but the stock phrases about failed enjoyments and an aimless life in a furnished void.

The metropolis appears, moreover, as the chosen ground for mimetic rivalry, for the desolate but continuous celebration of the “fetishism of the slight difference.” THEY stage, on a yearly basis, the tragic-comedy of separation: the more isolated people are, the more they resemble each other; the more they resemble each other, the more they detest themselves; the more they detest themselves, the more they isolate themselves. And where people can no longer recognize one another as participants in building a common world, a chain reaction ensues, a collective fission that everything combines to catalyze.

The loss of experience and the loss of community are one and the same thing, seen from different angles. This is the lesson of the metropolises, clearly. Yet one must bear in mind, against the nostalgia that a certain romanticism enjoys cultivating even in its adversaries, that before our era there were never any communities. And these are not two contradictory affirmations. Prior to Bloom, prior to “the absolute separation,” prior to the total abandonment that is ours, prior, then, to the utter destruction of every substantial *ethos*, all “community” could only be a heap of falsehoods—the falsehood of belonging to a class, a nation, a milieu—and a source of limitation; *without which, moreover, the community would not have been annihilated*. Only a radical alienation of the Common was able to hypostatize the originary Common in such a way that solitude, finitude, and exposure, that is, the only *actual* connection between men, also appears as the only *possible* connection between them. What THEY call “community” today, looking back on the past, obviously draws from that originary Common, but in a way that’s reversible because it is derivative. Hence it falls to us to experience real community for the first time, a community that rests *on our assumption of separation, exposure, and finitude*.

In the manner of Bloom, the metropolis materializes not only the integral loss of community, but at the same time the infinite *possibility* of its recovery.

## A genealogy of Bloom’s consciousness

Bartleby is an office employee.

The large-scale dissemination, inherent in the Spectacle, of a mental labor in which the mastery of a body of conventional knowledge serves as a special competence has an obvious bearing on Bloom’s form of consciousness. This is especially clear seeing that, outside of situations in which abstract knowledge prevails over all the vital milieus, and apart from the organized slumber of a world

that is entirely produced as a sign, Bloom's experience never attains the form of a lived continuum that he might claim, but is characterized instead by a series of unabsorbable *shocks*. He has thus had to create an organ of protection for himself against the uprooting with which he is threatened by the currents and clashes of his external milieu: instead of reacting to this uprooting with his sensibility, Bloom reacts essentially with his intellect, to which the intensification of consciousness that is produced by the same cause guarantees the mental primacy. In this way the reaction to these phenomena is located in the least sensitive mental faculty, in the one that most distances itself from the depths of one's being. His pure consciousness is therefore the only thing that Bloom manages to recognize as belonging to him, but it's a consciousness become independent of life, that no longer nourishes him, but merely observes him and, in its apartness, dries up.

Bloom cannot take part in the world as an inner experience. He never enters it except as an exception to himself. This is why he presents such a peculiar leaning to distraction, to the commonplace, the cliché, and above all an atrophy of memory that confines him in an eternal present; and this is why he is so exclusively sensitive to music, which alone can offer him *abstract sensations*. (Here one should mention speed and "glide" as well, being Bloomesque enjoyments likewise, but in this instance it is *abstraction itself* that is offered him as a *sensation*.)

All that Bloom lives through, does, and feels remains something external to him. And when he dies, he dies as a child, as someone who hasn't learned anything. With Bloom, the consumer relation has extended to the totality of existence, or nearly so. In his case, the commodity propaganda has so radically triumphed that he actually conceives of his world not as the fruit of a long history, but in the same way as the primitive conceives of the forest: as his natural milieu. Many things about him become clear when he's considered from this angle. For Bloom is indeed a primitive, but an *abstract primitive*. We can sum up the provisional state of the question with a formula: *Bloom is the eternal adolescence of humanity*.

## The worker type supplanted by the Bloom figure

The recent mutations of production modes in late capitalism have done much to promote universal Bloomification. The period of *classic wage earners*, which comes to a close at start of the seventies, had itself already made a proud contribution to the phenomenon. Statutory and hierarchical wage labor was in fact slowly replacing all the other forms of social belonging—in particular, all the traditional organic ways of living. It was in this period, too, that the breakup of singular man and his sociality began: all his power already being merely *functional*, that

is, delegated from the anonymity, every “I” that attempted to affirm itself never affirmed anything but its anonymity. But even though in the classic corps of wage earners there was no power that was not subjectless and no subject that was not powerless, the possibility remained, owing to a relative employment stability and a certain hierarchical rigidity, of mobilizing the subjective totality of a large number of people.

Starting in the seventies, the relative guarantee of job stability, which had enabled commodity society to impose itself on a social formation, the traditional order, whose main virtue was constituted by this guarantee, lost any necessity once the adversary was eliminated. So there began a process of “flexible specialization” of production, a precarization of the exploited which we’re still experiencing and which has not yet reached its limits. For three decades the industrialized world has been engaged in a phase of self-amputating involution in which, step by step, it is dismantling the classic corps of wage earners, *and using this dismantling to propel itself forward*. In this period we have been witnessing *the abolition of wage-earning society on the very terrain of that society*, that is, through the relations of domination that it commands. “Here labor ceases to function as a powerful substitute for an objective ethical fabric; it no longer stands in for the traditional forms of ethicality, which, moreover, were eviscerated and dissolved a long time ago” (Paolo Virno, *Opportunisme, cynisme et terreur*). All the intermediary shields between the “atomized individual”, the owner of nothing but his “labor power,” and the market in which he must sell it have been liquidated to the point that everyone stands, finally, in perfect isolation before the crushing autonomous social totality. In this situation nothing can prevent the so-called “post-Fordist” forms of production from generalizing themselves along with the aforementioned flexibility, “just-in-time” scheduling, mobility, “management by product,” and “enriched tasks” for “polyvalent agents.” Now, this sort of organization of labor, whose effectiveness rests on the inconstancy, “autonomy,” and opportunism of the producers, has the merit of making impossible any identification of man with his social function, or, in other words, the merit of being a wonderful generator of Blooms.

Born of a recognition of the general hostility toward wage labor that was manifested after ’68 in all the industrialized countries, the current organization of production chose *this very hostility* as a basis for itself. Thus, while its flagship commodities—cultural commodities—originate from an activity that is outside the limited scope of the wage worker, its total optimality depends on every man’s cunning, that is, on the indifference, not to say repulsion, that people feel toward their activity. Capital’s present utopia is that of a society in which all surplus value results from a phenomenon of generalized “making do.” As one can see, it’s the



alienation of labor that has itself *been put to work*. In this context, a *mass marginality* takes form, where “exclusion” is not, as THEY would have it understood, the conjunctural *déclassement* of a certain fraction of the population, *but the fundamental relationship that everyone maintains with his own participation in social life*, and firstly the producer with his production. Here labor has ceased to be associated with man as a determination within a particularity; it is no longer perceived by Bloom other than as a contingent form of the general social oppression. Unemployment is but the visible concretion of everyone’s estrangement from his own existence in the world of the authoritarian commodity.

Bloom also appears, therefore, as a product of the quantitative and qualitative decomposition of wage-earning society. He is the humanity that corresponds to the production modalities of a society that has become *definitively asocial*, and to which none of its members connect any longer in any way. The lot that has fallen to him of having to adapt endlessly to an environment in constant upheaval is also the apprenticeship of his exile in this world, a world in which he must nevertheless *pretend* to participate, although no one is truly able to do so.

But, beyond all his forced lies, he discovers himself little by little as *the man of non-participation*, as *the creature of non-belonging*.

As the crisis of industrial society consumes itself, the pallid figure of Bloom pierces through the titanic bulk of the Worker.

## The world of the authoritarian commodity

*“It’s with strokes of the whip that one drives livestock to the pasture”*

Heraclitus

For domination—and by this term one cannot reasonably understand anything but the relation of symbolically mediated *complicity* between dominators and dominated—there is the strategic necessity of new exactions, of new *subjugations*, in response to the autonomy that Blooms gain vis-à-vis their social allotment.

Maintaining the central mediation of everything by the commodity form thus demands supervisory control over larger and larger pieces of the human being. From this perspective, one must note the extreme care with which the Spectacle has relieved Bloom of the burdensome obligation to be. Note, too, the prompt solicitude with which it has taken charge of his education as well as the business of defining the complete set of suitable personalities. And finally, how it was able to extend its hold to the totality of the sayable, the visible, and the codes by which all relations and identities are constructed. The development of Biopower since the 18th century, a development whose qualitative leap is marked by the Total

Mobilization of 1914, is understandable only in close connection with that. Taking control of man as a living being, the application of integrative social force *to the body itself*, and the careful management of the *conditions* of our existence form domination's response to the *disintegration of individuality*, to the erasure of the subject in Bloom. To the fact that domination was *losing its grip*.

The productive character of the power that circulates in the world of the authoritarian commodity is illustrated, for example, by the way in which behavioral controls *function* in it: more often than not, it will be enough to oversee the layout of the public space, the design of the decor, and the material organization of the facilities to ensure the maintenance of order, which results from the simple coercive power exerted by the anonymous mass *over each one of its elements*, causing it to respect the abstract norms that prevail. As applied to a downtown street, a subway corridor or a team of *collaborators*, the perfection of the monitoring apparatus resides precisely *in the absence of a monitor*.

The panoptic control is all the more effective for being faceless. In the end, it doesn't care in the least whether its subjects reject it or assent to it, so long as they submit to it *externally*.

## **Militarization of the disaster, concentration of the domination**

Since 1914, commodity domination has been able to respond to the enormity of its disaster only through repeated applications of Total Mobilization. It hopes to contain the overflowing accumulation of its incongruities by appealing to a state of exception, sometimes manifest, other times latent, but in any case *permanent*. The first of these incongruities is in the fact that its development requires both the production of increasing possibilities and a general denial of their realization. The commodity domination must therefore produce, at the same time as an overabundance of means, an overabundance of *terror* necessary to ensure that no one uses them. Bloom is the man for this terror, the one who spreads it and the one who undergoes it: the *collaborator*.

The recent period, during which brutal crises of control have tried to bring whole sectors of what exists into step with a categorical imperative of transparency and traceability, is marked by a rapid push to concentrate the domination.

Only a minority of ready-and-willing subjectivities, of which THEY require a new fusion of life and labor, personality and function, find themselves co-opted into vital positions that have meanwhile become few in number. The formation of such a praetorian guard for capital, whose elements are not interchangeable, unlike the great mass of wage-earners, contributes to this concentration of domination that is inseparably a militarization of the disaster. As for the supernumer-

aries, they basically work at occupying themselves, at mutually depriving themselves of their idleness, which, it's true, demands a real effort.

In a time of general restructuring of domination, Bloom finds himself hounded everywhere and by everyone, being both the idler and the stranger or pariah. This is why he has to camouflage himself under so much artificiality, for *Bloom is the figure of the civilian in the midst of the universal militarization of the disaster.*

## Bad substantiality

*"All that you are, you are through me; all that I am, I am only through you."*

Hitler

Bloom lives in dread, and above all in the dread of being recognized as Bloom.

It's as if the mimetic hell that is stifling us were unanimously judged preferable to the encounter with oneself.

Biopower is shaping, more and more visibly, into a planned economy of subjectivations and resubjectivations. There is an inevitability, therefore, in the feverish excitement associated with the industrial production of prepackaged personalities, throwaway identities, and other hysterical natures. Rather than considering their central void, the majority of people recoil from the complete, dizzying absence of *properties*, from a radical indetermination, and thus, at bottom, from the abyss of their freedom. They still prefer to sink into the bad substantiality, toward which no doubt everything pushes them. So it will be no surprise when they discover, via a detour into an unevenly concealed depression, this or that buried root, this or that spontaneous adherence, this or that incombustible quality. French, excluded minority, woman, artist, homosexual, Ph.D., citizen, fireman, Muslim, Buddhist, or unemployed, everything is good that enables them to give voice, in one mode or another, their eyes blinking into the infinite, to the miraculous "I AM..."

Thus, no matter what empty and consumable particularity, no matter what social role, will fit the bill, since it's solely a matter of holding one's nothingness at bay. And since all organic life is missing from these pre-masticated forms, they never take long to quietly re-enter the general commodity system of exchange and equivalence, which reflects them and pilots them.

Bad substantiality thus signifies that ONE has consigned all his substance to the Spectacle, and that the latter acts as a universal *ethos* for the celestial community of spectators. But a cruel ruse determines that finally this only accelerates the process of deterioration of the substantial forms of existence. The game of musi-

cal chairs featuring dead identities, which the man of bad substantiality takes on one after the other, is played to the steady drone of his basic indecisiveness. What is meant to mask a lack of individuality not only fails to do so, but increases the instability of whatever individuality might remain.

Bloomism triumphs first of all in those who flee from it.

## **Bloom is the positive reality toward which the empire of the simulacrum beckons**

It's useless to aspire to substantiality within the Spectacle. In the last analysis, nothing is more inauthentic or more suspect than "authenticity." Nothing that boasts a *proper name* or claims to adhere to itself can be anything but an instance of usurpation or foolishness.

By compelling every singularity to regard itself as something particular, that is, from a viewpoint that is formal and external to itself, the Spectacle splits it apart from within, introducing a disparity, a difference, in it. It forces the self to take itself as an object, to reify itself, to apprehend itself *as another*. Consciousness is thus led into a never-ending flight, into a perpetual scission, goaded by the necessity, for those refusing the attraction of a mortal peace, of detaching itself from any substance. By applying its tireless labor of denomination, and thus of anxious reflexivity, to all of life's manifestations, the Spectacle continuously tears the world away from its immediacy. In other words, it produces Bloom and reproduces him: the *riffraff* [*caillera*] who knows he is riffraff is already no longer riffraff, he is a Bloom that *plays the part* of riffraff.

Many things that we refer to with age-old names ceased to exist long ago. We have no need of neologisms to replace the ancient terms: it's uniformly "Bloom" that we should replace them with. For instance, there no longer exists that allegedly substantial reality that was called "the family"; there are no longer even fathers, mothers, sons or sisters; now there are only Blooms who act the part of family, father, mother, son or sister. One will find, these days, the same paucity of philosophers, artists, or writers: in these acting roles, there is scarcely anyone but Blooms, producing cultural commodities and assuming the referential poses that suit their positions. Topping it all, even the farmers have resigned themselves to playing the role of farmers. It seems that this is more profitable.

Under the present regime of *things*, we cannot allow ourselves to identify for long with any particular content, but only with the movement of pulling free from all of them.

*Man is the indestructible  
that can be infinitely destroyed.*

Blanchot

*The indestructible is one: it is every man  
entirely and all have it in common. It is the permanent  
cement that joins men forever.*

Kafka

*This night of the world,  
this empty nothingness that contains everything  
in its abstract simplicity,  
this form of pure anxiety...*

Hegel

## Sua cuique persona

In the present reality, the question of determining what is a mask and what is not is pointless. It is simply grotesque to try and occupy a place exterior to the Spectacle, outside a mode of unveiling in which everything is manifested in such a way that its appearance within it has become autonomous, that is, manifested as a *mask*. Its disguise as a *disguise* is the truth concerning Bloom, which is to say that *there is nothing behind it*, or rather, opening our minds to far more cheerful thoughts, that behind it lies *the Nothing*, which is a potentiality.

That the mask constitutes the general form of appearing in the universal comedy which only fools still believe they can escape does not mean that there is no longer any truth, but that the latter has become something subtle and pungent.

The figure of Bloom finds its highest and at the same time most contemptible expression in the “language of flattery” (Hegel), and in that ambiguous domain, there is no reason to moan or to celebrate, but a very good reason to lash out:

*Here the self sees its self-certainty as such to be completely without essence, sees that its pure personality is absolutely not a personality. The spirit of its gratitude is, therefore, the feeling of the most profound dejection as well as of extreme rebellion. When the pure 'I' beholds itself outside of itself and rent asunder, then everything that has continuity and universality, everything that is called law, good, and right, is at the same time rent asunder and is destroyed. (Phenomenology of Spirit)*

The reign of disguises always comes shortly before the end of a reign. It would be a mistake to abandon the mask to the side of domination, because the latter has always seen a threat in the dark, savage, and actively impersonal presence which the intrusion of masks introduces. What is *bad* in the Spectacle is rather that the faces are so petrified that they themselves become like masks, and that a central authority has set itself up as *the master of metamorphoses*.

The living are those who can understand the importance of the words of that madman who proclaimed, trembling: “*Happy is the man who is so disgusted with the empty, satisfied faces that he covers his own with a mask: he will be the first to rediscover the wild exhilaration of everything that dances to death on the cataract of time.*”

**“Alienation is also the alienation of alienation itself.”**

(Hegel)

Historically, it is in the figure of Bloom that the alienation of the Common attains its maximum intensity. It's not so easy to imagine the point to which man's existence as a singular being and his existence as a social being have *apparently* had to become foreign to each other for him to be able to speak of a “social bond”, that is, to grasp his being-in-common as something objective, external to him and as if facing him.

It's a veritable front line that passes through the middle of Bloom, determining his schizoid neutrality. The militarization of the disaster extends to him like a final notice to choose his camp: he will have to assume unconditionally *whatever* social role, *whatever* servitude, or die of hunger.

We are confronted here with the kind of emergency measure that is ordinarily adopted by regimes with their back to the wall, one by which Bloom can be hidden from view but not eliminated.

For the present, that is sufficient. The important thing is that the viewer surveying the world in the external manner of the Spectacle can assure us that ONE has never seen anything of the sort on this side of the Pyrenees—“What did you say? A what? A Bloom???”—that it's only a metaphysicist's fantasy, and a critical one at that. It only matters that bad faith arranges to have a good conscience, that it can offer up its certified implausibilities by way of objection. Besides, how could one whom THEY have essentially robbed of any appearance ever appear *as such* in the Spectacle?

It is part of Bloom's destiny to be *visible* only insofar as he partakes in the bad substantiality, that is, only insofar as he disowns himself as Bloom.

All the radicality of the Bloom figure boils down to the fact that the alternative before which he is constantly placed presents the best on the one hand and the worst on the other, without the transition zone between them being accessible to him. He is the neutral core that brings out the analogy between the highest point and the lowest. His lack of interest may constitute a remarkable opening to the *agapè*, or the desire to merely function, as a cogwheel, in a technocratic project of extermination, for example. Similarly, the absence of a personality may prefigure a transcending of the classic petrified personality, as much as the terminal incoherence of the metropolitan *hipster*.

There is the “*me ne frego*” of fascism, and there is the “*me ne frego*” of the insurgent. There is the banality of evil, and there is *the banality of good*. But under the circumstances of domination, Bloom's banality is always manifested as a banality of evil. Thus, for the 20th century Bloom was much more Eichmann than Elser<sup>1</sup>;

Eichmann about whom Hannah Arendt reports that “it was obvious to everyone that he was not a ‘monster’” and “one could not help but think that he was a clown.” Let it be said in passing, that there is no difference of nature between Eichmann, who *completely* identified with his criminal function, and the *hipster* who, being unable to assume his fundamental non-belonging to this world, or the consequences of a situation of exile, devotes himself to the *signs* of belonging which this world sells at such a high price. But more generally, the banality of evil prospers wherever THEY speak of “economy.” And the same banality shows through the various kinds of allegiance that people pledge to “necessity,” from “We’re getting by” to “That’s just the way it is,” with a nod to “There’s no such thing as a stupid job.”

This is where wretchedness begins, when all the attachments are replaced by that of surviving. Attachment appears in its bare state, with no other object than oneself. Living hell.

## Interior Man

The pure exteriority of the conditions of existence also forms the illusion of pure interiority.

Bloom is that being who has taken the emptiness around him back into himself.

Excluded from any place of his own, he has become a place unto himself.

Banished from the world, he has made himself into a world.

It’s not without reason that Paul, the Gnostics, and later the Christian mystics distinguished between the interior man and the exterior man, for in Bloom this separation is *historically* realized.

The marginal condition of those who, like Rusbrock l’Admirable, feel “more inclined to the inside than the outside,” living “wherever, and in the midst of whomever, in the depths of solitude [...] sheltered from the multiplicity, sheltered from places and from men,” has since become the *common* condition.

Rare are those, however, who have experienced it *positively*, who have had the strength to *desire* it. Pessoa:

*To create myself, I’ve destroyed myself; I’ve so externalized myself on the inside that I don’t exist on the inside except externally. I’m the living stage where various actors act out various plays.*

But for the present, if Bloom resembles this interior man, it’s usually in a negative way. His personality’s inessential abode scarcely holds anything but the feeling of



CLOWN

*Someday,  
maybe soon.  
Someday, I'll haul up the anchor  
that keeps my ship far from the seas.  
With the kind of courage  
that's needed if one is to be nothing and nothing else.  
I'll let go of everything that seemed to be  
indissolubly close.  
I'll slice it off, I'll overturn it,  
I'll break it, bring it crashing down.  
At a single stroke, draining away my miserable  
propriety, my miserable schemes  
and sequences ("one thing leading to another").  
Emptied of the abcess of being someone, I'll drink  
once again the nutritive space  
Through taunts, degradations  
(what is degradation?), shattering, emptiness, a total  
dissipation-derision-purgation,  
I will rid myself of the form that was  
thought to be so firmly attached, composed,  
coordinated, adapted to my surroundings  
and to my associates, so worthy, so worthy  
my associates...*

being endlessly pulled down into a dark and enveloping nether space, as if he were always sinking into himself while coming apart. Drop by drop, in a steady pulse, his being drips out and runs, flowing around itself. His interiority is less and less a space or a substance, and more and more a *threshold* and its crossing.

So it follows that Bloom is a free *spirit*, for he is an empty one.

**“Whoever shall leave himself in this manner  
shall truly be restored to himself.”**

(Meister Eckhart)

Bloom’s ecstatic “essence” can be stated in this way:

IN ALL THAT HE IS, BLOOM  
IS OUTSIDE OF HIMSELF

Under the empire of Biopower and autonomous Publicity—the tyranny of THEY—the ecstatic structure of human existence becomes manifest in the form of a generalized schizoid state. Everyone now distinguishes between his “true self,” pure and detached from any objectifiable manifestation, and the system of his “false self,” which is social, role-played, constrained, inauthentic.

In each of these determinations—in his body, in his “qualities,” in his gestures, in his language—Bloom realizes that he is leaving, that he *has left himself*. And he *contemplates* this fact. And he *is* a wandering among these attributes, in this contemplation. His becoming is a becoming-stranger.

In his day, Léon Bloy had likened the capitalist to the mystic. *Le Sang des pauvres* devotes several pages to a rather free interpretation of the “fetish character of the commodity”: “*this money is just the visible figure of the blood of Christ circulating in all His members,*” and “*far from adoring Him for the material pleasures he refuses Himself, (the miser) adores Him in spirit and in truth, as the Saints adore the God who binds them to a duty of penance and promises them a martyr’s glory. He adores Him on behalf of those who don’t adore Him, he suffers in the place of those who don’t wish to suffer for money. Misers are mystics! Everything they do is to please an invisible God whose visible semblance, so laboriously sought after, heaps torments and ignominy upon them.*”

If the capitalist takes after the mystic through his activity, Bloom takes after him through his *passivity*. And in fact nothing more resembles Bloom’s existential situation than the *detachment* of the mystics. His reified consciousness gives him a definite propensity to contemplation, while his indifference corresponds to that “measured detachment (which) is nothing but the fact that the spirit remains un-

*...Brought down to a humility born of catastrophe,  
to an utter leveling like after an intense fright.  
Lifted back up above any measure  
of my real standing, to the miniscule rank  
which some idea-ambition or other  
had made me abandon.  
Shrunk tiny in terms of stature, in terms  
of esteem  
Lost in a faraway place  
(or not even), nameless, without identity.  
A CLOWN, amid the mockery,  
amid the guffaws, inside the grotesque,  
Flattening the sense of self-importance  
I had fabricated while defying every light,  
I will make a plunge.  
Pockets empty in the underlying  
Mind-infinite open to all  
myself open to a new and incredible rosé  
since I am nil  
and short...  
and funny...*

Henri Michaux, *Peintures*

moved in the face of every vicissitude of love and suffering, of honor, shame and outrage.” To the point of paralysis.

In the end, Bloom makes one think of Meister Eckhart’s God, who is defined as “the one who has no name, who is the negation of all the names and who never did have a name,” as the pure nothingness for whom all things are nothing.

In its perfect state, Bloom’s alienation recovers the originary alienation.

### **Let’s share the poverty, not the misery!**

For Meister Eckhart, the poor man is he who “wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing.”

Utterly dispossessed, fallen in every sense, mutely estranged from his world, ignorant of himself and of what’s around him, Bloom is the perfect embodiment, at the heart of the historical process, of the fully developed, properly metaphysical concept of *poverty*.

Doubtless it had taken the whole thick vulgarity of an age in which the economy acted as a metaphysics to turn poverty into an economic notion (now that the age is drawing to a close, it’s becoming obvious again that the opposite of poverty is not wealth but misery, and of the three, only poverty has the sense of a perfection. Poverty designates the state of someone *who can use everything*, having nothing of his own, and misery the state of someone *who cannot use anything*, either because he has too much, or he lacks the *time*, or he is without a community.)

Thus, all that the idea of wealth was able to convey, across history, in terms of bourgeois tranquility, *domestic* fulfillment, and intimate familiarity with the sensuous here-below is something that Bloom can appreciate, through nostalgia or simulation, but cannot experience. For him happiness has become a very old idea, and not just in Europe. Along with all interest, and all *ethos*, what has been lost is the very possibility of a use *value*. Bloom only understands the supernatural language of exchange value. He looks at the world with eyes that don’t see anything there, apart from the nothingness of value. His desires themselves are directed only at absences, at abstractions, among which the Young-Girl’s ass<sup>2</sup> is not the least. Even when Bloom apparently wants, he continues not wanting, because he wants in a void, he wants the void.

That is why, in the world of authoritarian commodities, wealth has become a grotesque and incomprehensible thing, a loaded form of misery.

Wealth is now nothing other than what possesses *you*, what THEY hold you with.

*Have a look, you have turned him into this rotten, yellowish creature. You have succeeded in making him what you think he is by nature: waste, offal. Well, we can tell you this, which by all rights would flatten you for good if "error" could kill: you have enabled him to make of himself the strongest, the most complete of men, the surest of his powers, of the resources of his conscience, of the scope of his actions. [...] You get your rocks off looking at this wasted wreck that stands before you; but you're the one who's been had, fucked all the way up and down. We show you nothing but boils, sores, gray heads, leprosy; and that's what you believe in, the leprosy. You sink deeper and deeper. "Jawohl!," we were right "ja wohl. Alles schiesse!" Your conscience is at rest. "We were right. Just look at them." No one is so deluded as you, and you're deluded by us, who are leading you to the end of your error. Calm yourself, we won't undecieve you; we'll bring you to the end of your enormity. We'll let ourselves be taken the whole way to death, and you'll only see the vermin who are dying.*

*For it to be shown that we are in the right we no more count on our bodies' liberation than on their resurrection. It's now, alive and wasted as we are, that our righteousness triumphs. True, this can't be seen; but the less it is visible, the greater our righteousness is; the less your chances of seeing anything at all, the more in the right we are. Not only are right and reason on our side, but we are the very righteousness that you have banished to a clandestine existence. And so less than ever can we bow before seeming triumphs. Let this be well understood: owing to what you have done, right-thinking transforms itself into consciousness. You have restored the unity of man; you have made conscience irreducible. No longer can you ever hope that we be at once in your place and in your own skin, condemning ourselves. Never will anyone here become to himself his own SS.*

Robert Antelme, *The Human Race*

## Agapê

Bloom is a man in whom everything has been socialized, but socialized *as private*. Nothing is more exclusively common than what he calls his “individual happiness.” Bloom is whatever even in the desire to singularize himself. In him every substantial difference from others has been *effectively* abolished. All that remains is a pure difference without any content. And everything aims, in the world of authoritarian commodities, to maintain that pure difference, which is a pure separation. Thus, Bloom still answers to a name, but this name no longer signifies anything.

All the misunderstandings in regard to Bloom stem from the shallowness of the gaze that is brought to bear on him. In any case, the prize for blindness should go to *sociologists*, such as Castoriadis, who speak of a “fallback to the private sphere” without making it clear that this sphere itself has been *completely socialized*. At the other extreme are those who let themselves fall into Bloom. The accounts they bring back are all similar in one way or another to the experience of the *Monsieur Teste* narrator discovering his character’s “*chez-soi*,” his place: “*I have never had a stronger impression of the ordinary. This was any room, like ‘any point’ in geometry—and perhaps as useful. My host existed in lodgings of the most usual sort.*” Bloom is in fact that being who exists “inside the most general interior.”

It’s only in the places and circumstances where the effect of the Spectacle is temporarily suspended that Bloom’s most intimate truth is revealed: that he is basically living within *agapê*. A suspension of this sort is produced in an exemplary way in an uprising, but also when we address a stranger on the streets of the metropolis, wherever, finally, persons must recognize one another, beyond any specification, as persons, as separate, finite, and exposed beings. At such moments it is not rare to see perfect strangers manifest their shared humanity, by protecting us from a danger, offering their entire pack of cigarettes to us instead of the single one we had asked for, or by taking us to an address we were looking for, thereby losing fifteen minutes of the time they apportion so stingily, it must be said. Such phenomena are not at all susceptible to an ethnological interpretation in the classic terms of gift and counter-gift, as a certain barroom sociality may be. No rank is at stake here. No praise is sought. Such behavior can be accounted for only by that ethic of the *infinite gift* that is designated in the Christian, and notably Franciscan, tradition by the noun *agapê*.

*Agapê* forms part of the existential situation of a humanity that has been *informed* by commodity society in its final period. And that is the state to which it has inclined man by making him such a stranger to himself and his desires.

Despite all the signs to the contrary, and as disturbing as it may seem, this society is cultivating a serious infection of do-gooding.

**“Be different, be yourselves!” (underwear advertisement)**

In many respects, Bloom is indispensable to commodity society. The practical effectuation of spectacular representations that is called “consumption” is completely conditioned by the mimetic rivalry to which Bloom is driven by his inner nothingness. The tyrannical judgment of the THEY would remain an article of universal mockery if, in the Spectacle, “being” did not mean “being different,” or at least trying to be. So it’s not so much that “the person is accentuated by means of a certain impersonality trait,” as dear old Simmel put it, but rather that the accentuation of impersonality would not be possible without there being a certain amount of *work* done by the person. Naturally, what is reinforced along with the originality THEY attribute to Bloom is never the latter’s singularity, but the THEY itself—in other words, bad substantiality. All recognition *within* the Spectacle is only recognition of the Spectacle.

Without Bloom, therefore, the commodity would be nothing more than a purely formal principle, having no involvement with any becoming.

**I would prefer not to.**

At the same time, it’s certain that Bloom bears the potential for bringing down commodity society. In him we find that quality of ambivalence which marks all the realities by which *the transcendence of commodity society on its own terrain* is manifested.

In this dissolution it’s not the great edifices of the superstructure that are attacked first, but rather the long deserted foundations. The invisible precedes the visible, and imperceptibly the world gives itself a new basis.

Bloom doesn’t declare the abolition of that society whose end he carries within him; he just empties it of significance, reducing it to the condition of a mere residual form, waiting for demolition. In this sense we may affirm that the metaphysical upheaval he is synonymous with is already behind us, but that the bulk of its consequences are still to come.

With Bloom, who isn’t blessed with the self-intimacy on which private property was based, the latter has lost all substance: what remains of the *proper?* and a fortiori of the properly private? Private property survives only in an empirical way, as a dead abstraction floating above a reality that eludes it ever more visibly.

As for legal right, Bloom does not contest it, he *deposes* it. And indeed how

would law avoid losing all relevance for this being who is not a subject, whose acts are unconnected with any personality, and whose behaviors do not depend on the bourgeois categories of self-interest and motivation, any more than they do on passion or responsibility?

As concerns Bloom, therefore, law forfeits any competence to dispense justice—what might justice signify for an indifferent being?—And THEY have difficulty even appealing to straight police terror. For in the world of the always-similar, one rots scarcely more in prison than at the Club Med: life is identically absent wherever.

This is why it's so important, for domination, that prisons become places of extended torture, and notoriously so.

But above all, it's the economy itself, and with it any notion of utility, credit, or instrumental rationality, that Bloom has made obsolete. There's no need to look elsewhere for the reason behind the planned and public reconstitution of a *lumpenproletariat* in all the countries of late capitalism: it comes down finally to a means of dissuading Bloom from surrendering to his essential detachment, by waving the abrupt but fearsome threat of hunger. For, from the economic standpoint, this "impractical man" (Musil) is a disastrously clumsy producer, and a totally irresponsible consumer. His egoism itself is defective: an *egoism without an ego*.

If Bloom could not help but make a shambles of classical politics at its core, this was partly by default: it's no easier to imagine an equivalence being established within the universal than to imagine a senatorial election among rats—each rat is equally and inalienably a representative of its species, *primus inter pares*—, but also partly through excess, because Bloom moves of his own accord within the unrepresentable, which he himself is.

What is one to think, finally, of the trouble which this ungrateful son causes the Spectacle, this figure that repels every characterization and every role with a mutter that says *I would prefer not to?*

## Tiqqun

*"For those who are awake, there is one world in common, whereas among the sleepers, everyone turns away from this world toward his own."*

Heraclitus

The *tiqqun* goes to the depths of things. It's still only passing through purgatory. It proceeds methodically. The *tiqqun* is the only adequate conception of revolution. Not the revolution that *must be* waited for, and even less the one that *can*



*I was a foreigner in their midst, but no one realized it. I lived among them as a spy and no one, not even I, suspected it. They all took me for a relative; no one knew I'd been swapped at birth. I was just like the rest without anything in common—a brother to all without belonging to the family.*

*I'd come from wondrous lands, from landscapes better than life, but only to myself did I ever mention these lands, and of the landscapes—seen in my dreams—I never said a word. My feet stepped like theirs over the floorboards and the flagstones, but my heart was far away, even if it beat close by, false master of an estranged and exiled body. No one knew me under my mask of equality, nor knew that I had a mask, because no one knew that there are masked people in the world. No one imagined that at my side there was always another, who was in fact I. They always supposed I was identical to myself.*

Bernardo Soares, *The Book of Disquietude*

be prepared for, but the one that *develops* to its own imperceptible beat within a temporality that's internal to history.

The *tiqqun* is not a point that's assignable to a near or distant future, though it may be that, too, but rather the "real movement which destroys the present state of things."

The *tiqqun* is *always-already there*, which is to say, it's only the *process of manifestation of what is*, which also includes the *nullification* of what is not.

The fragile positivity of this world is due precisely to its being nothing, nothing but the *deferral* of the *tiqqun*. This epochal deferral can now be sensed everywhere. Indeed, it is all that can still be truly sensed.

Bloom forms part of the *tiqqun*. Precisely because he's the man of complete nihilism, his lot is to open the way out of nihilism or perish. Marx's intuition concerning the proletariat aims in that direction but swerves wide of the target. Thus one reads in *The German Ideology*: "*Standing over against these productive forces, we have the majority of the individuals from whom these forces have been wrested away, and who, robbed thus of all real life-content, have become abstract individuals, but who are, however, only by this fact put into a position to enter into relation with one another as individuals.*" But it's exactly insofar as he *is not* an individual that Bloom is in a position to enter into relationships with others of his kind. In its deceptive integrity, the individual conveys, in atavistic fashion, the suppression of communication, or the necessity of its artificiality. The ecstatic opening of man, and of Bloom in particular, the I that is an Anyone, the Anyone that is an I, is the very thing against which the fiction of the individual was invented.

Bloom doesn't experience a particular finitude or a determinate separation, but *the* ontological finitude and separation that are common to all human beings. Moreover, Bloom is alone only *in appearance*, for he is not alone in his aloneness, since all humans have that solitude *in common*. He lives like a foreigner in his own country, non-existent and marginal to everything, but all Blooms inhabit the land of Exile *together*. All Blooms belong indistinctly to the same world, which is the world's oblivion. Thus the Common is estranged, but only *in appearance*, for it is still estranged as a Common; the estrangement of the Common only refers to the fact that what is common to men appears to them as something particular, proprietary, private.

And this Common resulting from the estrangement of the Common, and formed by it, is nothing other than the true Common, unique to men, their original alienation: finitude, solitude, exposure. There, the most intimate merges with the most general, and the most "private" is the most widely shared.

## Did you look at yourself when you were drunk?

*“They say he is dead to the world, because he has no more taste for anything earthly.”*  
Meister Eckhart

As THEY can easily imagine, this raises a *catastrophic* possibility for commodity domination, one whose actualization must be prevented by every means: that Bloom might *affirm* what he is, that he might reappropriate his impropriety.

This “society”, that is, the set of situations it authorizes, doesn’t fear anything as much as Bloom, that “accursed man who has no business, no feelings, no ties, no property, not even a name that belongs to him.” (Netchaiev). It has to be considered, down to its most wretched details, as a formidable apparatus designed solely to perpetuate Bloom’s condition, which is that of *suffering*. Entertainment is essentially nothing but the *politics* devised for that purpose: perpetuating Bloom’s condition begins by distracting him from it. A kind of cascade of entailments follows, starting with the necessity of containing every manifestation of general suffering, which requires a tighter and tighter control of appearance, demanding a concealment of the all-too visible effects of the suffering, which leads to a runaway inflation of Biopower. For given the degree of confusion that things have reached, *bodies* represent, at the generic level, the final interpreter of the human irreducibility to alienation. It is owing to their sicknesses and malfunctions, and only to them, that knowing oneself remains a pressing matter for everyone. This “society” would not have declared such an all-out war on Bloom’s suffering if the latter did not in itself constitute, in all its aspects, an intolerable challenge to the empire of positivity, if that suffering did not threaten to dispel any further illusion of participating in its flowery immanence.

Maintaining the routine employment of representations and categories that have long been inoperative, periodically imposing short-lived but madeover versions of the most asinine chestnuts of bourgeois morality, to keep alive the sad illusions of “modernity” despite the glaring evidence of their falseness and archaism—these are so many items in the tiresome labor it takes to perpetuate the separation between human beings.

The THEY decides beforehand between what is comprehensible and what, being incomprehensible, is to be rejected. Bloom and his ecstasy are incomprehensible; they have to be rejected. His poverty is also said to be unacceptable, in the alienated Publicity—and it’s quite true that capitalism seems to have done all it could to make poverty basically identical to misery, ownership of a thing in capitalism being always essentially *the right to deprive others of its use*. In order for Bloom to remain *ashamed* of his poverty, THEY are even willing to let him sub-

jectivate himself inside that shame. The failed white-collar employee will thus be able to find in the list of writers in vogue something to identify with, to reassure himself with: yes, object man is well on his way to becoming an honorable form of life. Alternatively, he can turn to Buddhism, that sickening milkshake of spirituality for despondent salary-earners, which considers it already too ambitious to teach its foolish, wonderstruck followers the perilous art of splashing about in their own uselessness. It's imperative, from the viewpoint of domination, that we never recognize ourselves in Bloom's traits, that we appear to ourselves and to each other as opaque and frightening objects. Just in case, THEY attribute ideas, desires, and a subjectivity to Bloom. THEY endow him with everything he needs in order to remain that mute man in whose mouth the Spectacle places the words it wants to hear. THEY don't even hesitate to manipulate Bloom against himself, to turn his own impersonality back against him, precisely by personifying him, as "society," "people," or "the average citizen."

All this converges into an ever more exorbitant social demand to "be oneself," that is, into a strict assignment of residence in one of the identities recognized by the autonomous Publicity. At the same time, the processes of subjectivation and desubjectivation become more and more brutal and their control more finely calibrated. And as this control can function only in a strict time economy, a synchrony, Bloom now finds himself regularly urged to be "proud" of this or that, proud of being homo or techno, *beur* [Arab], black, or *caillera* [riffraff]. In any event, Bloom must be something, and better anything than nothing.

## Mene, Tekel, Phares

Adorno speculated, in *Prisms*, that "A man who existed only for the sake of others, an absolute *zōon politikón*, would, to be sure, have lost his individual self; but he would also have escaped the cycle of self-preservation which maintains the Brave New World as well as the old one. Pure interchangeability would destroy the core of domination and promise freedom."

In the intervening time, the Spectacle has had ample opportunity to test the soundness of these conjectures, but it has also done a successful job of deflating that extravagant promise of freedom. Of course this couldn't be accomplished without harsh measures, and the commodity world has had to be more and more relentless in the exercise of its dictatorship.

Since 1914, from "crises" to "recoveries" and from "recoveries" to depressions, life in the Spectacle has become steadily more suffocating. A look of dread attaches to every face these days, even in the so-called popular celebrations. The global watchword "transparency" tells us something about this climate of per-

manent war directed against Bloom's opaqueness and the provisional existence it implies.

As a first response to this situation on the part of Blooms, one observes not only an increasing taste for anonymity and a certain distrust of visibility, but a hatred of *things*. A suppressed metaphysical hostility to what exists threatens to break out at any moment and in every circumstance.

There is a disorder underlying this instability, a disorder that comes from latent force, from a negativity that cannot forever remain unexpressed, lest it *physically* destroy the one who lives with it. More often than not, this negativity stays silent, although its containment is commonly manifested by a hysterical formalization of all human relations. But we're already reaching the critical zone where the repressed makes its return, and does so with a vengeance. A more and more compact mass of crimes, of *strange acts* consisting in "violent outbreaks" and destruction "with no apparent motive" plague the normal routine of biopolitical democracies. In a general way, the Spectacle calls "violence" anything it means to treat with force, anything against which it wants to be able to manifest all its arbitrary power. This category has validity only within the commodity mode of unveiling, itself lacking any validity, which always hypostatizes the means relative to the end, in this case the act itself to the detriment of its immanent significance.

Incapable of preventing them, let alone understanding them, commodity domination tells itself it will not stand for any attacks on the social control of behaviors. So it broadcasts its habitual vanities about video surveillance and "zero tolerance," the suppression of "incivilities" and the "feeling of insecurity;" as if the surveillant didn't need to be monitored himself, and the "feeling of insecurity" was not *ontologically* assigned to Bloom!

When a highly placed Socialist hack in the bureaucracy of some Japanese teacher's union or other turned his attention to the little Blooms, he worried thus: "*The phenomenon is all the more troubling seeing that the authors of these violent acts are often "children without any prior history." Before, one spotted a problem child. Nowadays, most don't rebel, but they have a tendency to run away from school. And if they're reprimanded, the reaction is out of all proportion: they explode.*" (*Le Monde*, Thursday, April 16, 1998). An infernal dialectic is at work here, according to which "explosions" of this sort become ever more frequent, more fortuitous and more ferocious as the massive and systematic character of the measures necessary for their prevention is accentuated. It's a rarely disputed empirical fact: the violence of the combustion increases with pressure of the confinement.

Domination, which deemed it good, centuries ago, to impose the economy as a *moral code* on the grounds that commerce made men gentle, predictable, and inoffensive, sees its project flipped by Bloom into its opposite: it turns out that

“*Homo economicus*” in his perfected state is also the being that invalidates the economy, and invalidates it as something which, having deprived him of any substance, has made him *perfectly unpredictable*.

All in all, contentless man seems to have the greatest difficulty containing himself.

## The unavowable enemy

*How every Bloom, as Bloom, is an agent of the Imaginary Party.*

Before this unknown enemy—in the sense that one speaks of an Unknown Soldier, that is, a soldier known by all as an unknown, singularized as whatever—having no name or face or saga, like nothing on earth, but staying camouflaged everywhere in the order of possibility, domination’s anxiety veers more and more plainly toward paranoia. Moreover, for the detached gaze it’s rather comical to observe this habit it has of decimating its own ranks, just in case.

There is something *objectively terrifying* about the sad forty-year-old who, up to the moment of the carnage, will remain the most normal, the dullest, the most insignificant of average men. No one will have ever heard him voice any hatred of the family, work, or his petty bourgeois suburb, before that early morning when he gets up, washes himself, and eats his breakfast while his wife, his daughter and his son still sleep, then loads his hunting rifle and discreetly blows their brains out. Before his judges, and faced with torture, Bloom will keep silent about the reasons for his crime. In part because sovereignty is irrational, but also because he senses that in reality the worst atrocity he can make this “society” undergo is to leave the crime unexplained.

Thus Bloom has managed to insinuate in every mind the poisoned certainty that in every man and woman an enemy of civilization lies dormant. Evidently he has no other purpose than to devastate this world, but he will never say this. For his strategy is to produce the disaster, and around it *silence*.

## “For crime and madness are objectifications of transcendental homelessness”

(Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*)

As the bleak forms in which we’re meant to be contained tighten their tyrannical hold, some very curious manifestations capture our attention.

A state of amok settles into the heart of the most advanced societies, assuming unexpected forms that are meaningful in a new way.

In the territories administered by autonomous Publicity, such phenomena of

disintegration are among those rare things that expose the real state of the world, *the pure scandal of things*.

At the same time as they reveal the lines of force in the prevailing inertia, they show us the range within the possibility we inhabit. And that is why they're so familiar to us in their very distance.

The bloody tracks he leaves behind him mark the last steps of a man who made the mistake of attempting to escape *alone* from the gray terror in which he was trapped at such a heavy cost. Our readiness to imagine such a move is a measure of how much life remains inside us.

The living are those who understand *for themselves* that when fear and submission attain, in Bloom, their final figure of *absolute* fear and submission—absolute because without an object—the overcoming of this fear and this submission announce the overcoming, absolute as well, of *all* fear and *all* submission. Past this point, one who feared everything without distinction can no longer fear *anything*. Beyond the most extreme regions of alienation, there is a clear and quiet zone where man becomes incapable of feeling any *concern* for his *own* life, or even the slightest attachment to it.

All present or future freedom that, in one way or another, would hold itself exempt from that detachment, from that equanimity, could scarcely keep from expressing the principles of a more *modern* serfdom.

## Those consumed by nothingness

*I'm sorry. Like Shakespeare says, Good wombs hath borne bad sons."*

Eric Harris, *Littleton*, April 20, 1999

Under the crushing weight of everything, there are few ways out.

We extend an arm but it doesn't make contact with anything. **THEY** have placed the world out of reach, beyond our grasp. Not many Blooms manage to resist this extreme pressure.

The omnipresence of the commodity's occupation troops and the rigor of its state of emergency doom most escape plans to early abandonment. Thus, wherever order appears firmly established, negativity prefers to turn back against itself, becoming illness, suffering, or fanatical servitude. Yet there are invaluable cases where isolated beings take the initiative, without hope or strategy, to punch an opening in the regulated course of the disaster.

The Bloom in them shakes free of the *patience* in which **THEY** would like them to languish forever. And because the only instinct informing such a screaming presence of nothing is that of destruction, the taste for the Totally Different as-

sumes the appearance of crime, and is evidenced in the impassioned indifference its author manages to maintain in relation to it.

This is manifested in the most spectacular way by the growing number of Blooms, young and old, who, lacking anything better, covet the enthrallment of the simplest Surrealist act. (Let us recall: “The simplest Surrealist act consists in descending into the street, a pistol in each hand, and firing randomly into the crowd, as fast as one can. Anyone who has not felt the desire, at least once, to have done in this way with the petty system of debasement and moronization that reigns has a place reserved for him in that crowd, with his belly at barrel level.”[Breton] Let us recall, too, that this inclination remained, like many other things with the Surrealists, a theory without a practice, just as its contemporary practice for the most part has no theory.)

For those who haven't yet surrendered to the cybernetic sleep, these individual eruptions, which are bound to multiply, constitute so many calls for desertion and fraternity. The freedom they affirm is not that of a particular human being, focused on a specific goal, but that of everyone, that of our kind: a single man suffices to attest that freedom has not vanished.

The Spectacle cannot metabolize traits that carry so many poisons. It can report on them, but can never entirely rid them of their inexplicable, ineffable, and frightful nucleus. They are the *Beau Gestes* of these times, a disillusioned form of propaganda by deed. Their ideological silence only increases their disturbing, darkly metaphysical character.

## Paradoxes of sovereignty

In the Spectacle, power is everywhere, which is to say that *all* relations are in the last analysis relations of domination. For this reason, moreover, no one within it is sovereign. It's an objective world where everyone is obliged to submit if they are to be agents of submission in turn.

To live according to man's basic yearning for sovereignty is not possible in the Spectacle, save for a moment, save for a *gesture*.

Anyone who isn't just playing with life needs the gesture for his life to become more real than a game that can face in every direction. In the commodity world, which is the world of generalized reversibility, where all things blend together and morph into each other, where there's nothing but ambiguity, transition, ephemerality, and mixture, only the gesture *cuts through*. With the brilliance of its necessary brutality, it divides things into the insoluble “after” and its “before,” which THEY will reluctantly have to recognize as *definitive*.

The gesture is an *event*. It opens a wound in the world's chaos, and lodges its



*“I am NOTHING” : this parody of affirmation is the last word of sovereign subjectivity, freed from the dominion it wanted, or needed, to give itself over things...for I know that I am fundamentally this subjective and contentless existence.*

Georges Bataille, *La Souveraineté*

unequivocal shard in the center of the wound. It wants to make certain that the things judged different are so emphatically different that what has separated them can't possibly be erased, ever.

If there's something about Bloom that bothers domination, it's seeing that, even dispossessed of everything, man in his bare being still has an irrepressible metaphysical option of repudiation: the option of killing, be it others or oneself. Every time it happens, death tears a shameful hole in the biopolitical fabric. Accomplished nihilism, which has accomplished nothing itself, unless it's the dissolving of every alterity into a boundless circulatory immanence, always suffers a defeat here: upon contact with death, life suddenly ceases to go without saying. The *duty of decision* that sanctions every properly human existence has always been connected with the approach of that abyss.

On the eve of the day in March, 1998, when he massacred four Bloom-schoolchildren and a Bloom-teacher, young Mitchell Johnson declared to his incredulous classmates: "*Tomorrow I'll decide who will live and who will die.*" Here we are just as far from the erostratism of Pierre Rivière as we are from fascist hysteria. Nothing is more striking in the accounts of a Kipland Kinkel or an Alain Oreiller than their state of cold self-control, of vertical detachment from the world. "*I don't do emotions,*" says Alain Oreiller, after executing his mother. There is something calmly suicidal in this kind of all-points assertion of non-participation, indifference, and refusal to suffer.

Often, the Spectacle uses this as an excuse to speak of "gratuitous" acts—a generic qualifier with which it glosses over purposes it does not wish to understand, while profiting from the fine occasion to breathe new life into one of the favorite false antinomies of bourgeois utilitarianism—when these gestures are not lacking in hatred or reasons. To convince oneself of this, one only has to view the five video cassettes which "the monsters of Littleton" filmed in anticipation of their operation. Their program appears there plain as day: "*We're going to set off a revolution, a revolution of the dispossessed.*"

Here the very hatred is undifferentiated, free of any personality. Death enters the universal just like it leaves the universal, and it carries no anger.

We're not interested in attributing any revolutionary significance to such acts, or even in attaching an exemplary character to them, really. It's more a matter of understanding what inevitability they express, and to use that to sound the depths of Bloom. Anyone following this path will see that Bloom is NOTHING, but that this NOTHING is the nothing of sovereignty, the void of pure potentiality.

The contradiction between Bloom's isolation, powerlessness, and insensitivity on the one hand, and on the other his abrupt need of sovereignty cannot fail to trigger more of these absurd, murderous, but necessary and true, gestures. The

whole point is to be able to greet them in correct terms in the future. Those of *Igitur*, for example: “*There one of the acts of the universe was just committed. Nothing else, the breath remained, the end of word and gesture united—blow out the candle of being, by which all has been. Proof.*”

## The era of complete guilt

The choice of not fighting is not given to men, but only the choice of camps. Neutrality is nothing neutral; indeed, it’s undoubtedly the bloodiest camp of all.

Of course, Bloom, the one who fires the bullets as well as the one who’s struck down by them, is innocent. Is it not true, after all, that he’s only a dependent of the central farce? Did he choose to live in this world, whose perpetuation is the business of an autonomous social totality, which looks more extraterrestrial to him each passing day? How could he do otherwise, that bewildered Lilliputian confronting the Leviathan of commodities, than to speak the language of the spectacular occupier, eat from the hand of Biopower, and participate, the way he does, in producing and reproducing the horror?

This is how Bloom would like to understand himself: as foreign, as external to himself. But in this defense, he only admits that *he is himself that part of the self that oversees the alienation of the rest of his being.*

What does it matter if Bloom cannot be held responsible for any of his acts: he remains nonetheless responsible for his irresponsibility, which he can forswear *at any time*. Because he has consented, at least negatively, to be nothing more than the predicate of his own existence, he is *objectively* a part of domination, and his innocence is itself a complete culpability.

The man of utter nihilism, the man of “What’s the use?” that leans on the arm of “What can I do?” is quite mistaken to think he is free of any blame on the grounds that *he hasn’t done anything* and many others are in the same situation as he.

That the men of these times participate equally in the crime they clearly constitute is suggested by the Spectacle, which so regularly grants that the killer was “an ordinary man,” “a student like the others.” But it refuses to recognize him as a *metaphysical fact*; as the case of the gas chamber operators at Auschwitz has taught us, the fear of responsibility is not only stronger than conscience, in certain circumstances it is stronger than the fear of death.

In a world of slaves without masters, in a world of *collaborators*, in a world dominated by a veritable tyranny of servitude, the simplest surrealist act is governed by nothing less than the ancient duty of tyrannicide.

## Homo sacer

*“Sooner or later, the bombs come crashing down, so that one is finally convinced of the thing one refused to admit, namely that words have a metaphysical meaning.”*  
Brice Parain, *L'Embarras du choix*

Those consumed by nothingness *begin* by drawing the consequences of their Bloom condition. In this way they expose the vertiginous reality: Bloom is *sacer*, in the sense meant by Giorgio Agamben, that is, in the sense of a creature that has no place in any system of law [*droit*], that cannot be judged or condemned by men, but that anyone can kill without however committing a crime. Bloom is *sacer* exactly insofar as he knows himself to be possessed by bare life, insofar as, like the ‘Muslim’ in the death camp, he is the mere witness of his own becoming-inhuman.

Insignificance and anonymity, separation and foreignness are not poetic circumstances which the melancholy bent of certain subjectivities tend to exaggerate: the scope of the existential situation characterized here, as Bloom, is *total*, and above all *political*.

*Whoever is without a community is sacer.* To be nothing, to remain without any recognition, or to present oneself as a pure non-political individuality suffice to make of any man whatsoever a being whose disappearance is unworthy of notice. However lengthy the litanies of misericord—eternal regrets, etc.—a death of this sort occurs in an atmosphere of derision, of indifference; ultimately, it concerns only the one who disappears, that is, logically speaking, no one. Analogous to his entirely private life, Bloom’s death is such a non-event that everyone can blank it out. This is why the protestations of those who complained sorrowfully that Kipland Kinkel’s victims “didn’t deserve to die” are unacceptable, for they didn’t *deserve* to live either; *they were beneath the sphere of merit.* Being where they were, in the hands of Biopower, they were living dead at the mercy of any sovereign decision, that of the State or that of the killer. Hannah Arendt: *“Becoming some specimen of an animal species, called man. Much the same thing happens to those who have lost all distinctive political qualities and have become human beings and nothing else...The paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general—without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself—and different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance.”* (*Imperialism*)

Bloom’s exile has a metaphysical status, meaning that it applies in every do-

main. It expresses his *real* situation, with regard to which his *legal* situation has no bearing. That he can be cut down like a dog by a stranger without the slightest justification, or conversely that he is capable of murdering “innocents” without the least remorse is not a reality that any jurisdiction is capable of addressing. Only weak and superstitious minds can allow themselves to believe that a proper trial or a sentence of life without parole are enough to relegate such facts to the limbo of the null and void. At the most, domination has the option of certifying Bloom’s condition, for example by declaring a thinly disguised state of exception, as the United States was able to do in 1996 by passing a so-called “anti-terrorist” law that permits “suspects” to be detained without charges indefinitely, based on secret information. There is a certain physical risk in being metaphysically null. It was doubtless with a view to the glorious possibilities enabled by such a nullity that the momentous Universal Declaration of Animal Rights was adopted at the Maison de l’Unesco on October 15, 1978. Article 3 stipulates: “1. Animals must not be subjected to bad treatments or to cruel acts. 2. If it is necessary to kill an animal, it must be instantaneous, painless and cause no apprehension. 3. A dead animal must be treated with decency.”

**“*Tu non sei morta, ma se’ismarrita  
Anima nostra che si ti lamenti*”**

(Dante, *Convivio*)

That Bloom’s goodness must still be expressed by murder here and there is a sign that the line is close but has still not been crossed.

In the zones governed by a nihilism in decline, where the ends are still lacking whereas the means already abound, goodness is a mystical possession. There, the desire for an unconditional freedom inclines one to odd formulations and lends words a paradoxical value. Lukács: “*Goodness is wild and terrifying, blind and adventurous. The soul of a good man is devoid of all ethical content, of causes and consequences. His soul is a pure white slate, upon which fate writes its absurd command. This command is carried out blindly, daringly, and mercilessly. The fact that what is impossible turns into deed, blindness into enlightenment, and evil into goodness—that is the miracle, that is the grace.*” (*On Poverty of Spirit*)

But at the same time as they testify to an impossibility, these eruptions, by their increasing frequency, announce a rise in the current of time. The universal anxiety, which tends to absorb larger and larger quantities of increasingly minor facts, carries the necessity of *decision* to the point of incandescence in every man and woman. Already, those for whom this necessity signifies annihilation are speaking of an apocalypse, while the majority are content to live beneath every-

thing in the murky pleasures of the last days.

Only those who know the meaning they will give the catastrophe stay calm and precise in their movements.

One recognizes a mind's quality by the kind and scope of the panic it indulges in. It is a mark that distinguishes not just ethically and metaphysically, but also in praxis, and in time.

etcetera.

*But the world we're awakening to is a world at war whose brilliance radiates entirely from the trenchant truth of its division into friends and enemies. Designating the front is preliminary to crossing the line, but only combat can accomplish the crossing. Not so much because it calls one to greatness, but because it is the deepest experience of community, the kind of community that constantly skirts annihilation and takes its measure only from the close proximity of the risk. Living together in the heart of the desert with the same resolve not to make peace with it—this is the test, this is where the light shines.*

etcetera.

.....

Theory is not

produced thought,

a certain coagulated, manufactured,

quantity

of thought.

Theory

is a *state*

a state of *entrancement*.

Theory of Bloom

where Bloom is not the *object* of theory

where theory is only the most familiar activity, the *spontaneous* inclination of an essentially *theoretical* creature,

of a Bloom.

Theory is ENDLESS.

Hence

the necessity

of ENDING it,

*decisively.*

Weariness of speech.

What is the way out of Bloom?

The *assumption* of Bloom,  
for example.

—One truly frees oneself from something only by reappropriating that from which one is breaking free.—

What is the assumption of Bloom? A *use* of the metaphysical situation we've defined, a practice of the self as *trickster*.

Not struggling against the dominant schizoid state, against *our* schizoid state, but *setting out from there*, employing it as a pure faculty of subjectivation and desubjectivation, as a capacity for experimentation. Breaking with the old anxiety of "Who am I, really?" in favor of knowledge of my situation and of the *use* of it that's possible.

Not surviving in the imminence of a miraculous *departure*, not forcing oneself to believe in the job one does, in the lies one tells, but *setting out from there*, making contact with other agents of the Invisible Committee—through *Tiqqun*, for example—and silently coordinating a sabotage in the grand style.

Detaching oneself from one's detachment through a conscious, strategic practice of opening out.

MAKING A BREAK , INNER AT FIRST,  
WITH THE WORLD

The Invisible Committee:

an *overtly secret* society

a public conspiracy

an agency of anonymous subjectivation, whose name is everywhere and headquarters nowhere,

the revolutionary-experimental polarity of the Imaginary Party.

The Invisible Committee: not a revolutionary *organization*, but a higher stage of reality,

a meta-physical territory of secession that takes on the dimensions of a world, the *space for play* whose positive creation *alone* can bring about the great migration out of the world of economy.

IT'S A FICTION THAT HAS  
MADE REALITY REAL.

All the elsewhere's toward which we might flee have been obliterated,  
so we can only desert *within* the situation,  
by converting our fundamental non-belonging to the biopolitical fabric into a  
participation

on a more intimate, hence  
more unassignable, plane

in the strategic community of the Invisible Committee,  
where an infiltration of society at all levels is under way.

This desertion is

*a transfiguration.*

The Invisible Committee—the *concrete* space of circulation for our attacks, our  
writings, our gestures, our speech, our gatherings, our events, that is,

our desertion—

transfigures all we had written off as compromises,  
all we used to endure as “alienations”,  
into a *strategy of infiltration*.

The Other ceases to possess us;

indeed,  
the possession is reversed,

and becomes sweet.

We will recover the act,

in an unprescribed relationship

with our power.

A SECOND-DEGREE ACCESS  
TO EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation:

a *practice* of freedom,

a *practice* of inoperativity,

as opposed to the idea of a distinct process

of human emancipation,

sending all the studiously laid *plans* for liberation

back to their respective podiums.

**The contestation,  
its authority,  
and its method  
are indistinguishable  
from the experiment.**



*Fully exploring the possibility that  
my situation contains.*

Revolutionary experimentation

*Collective-revolutionary experimentation*

The *experimental-revolutionary* collectivity enacts the assumption of finitude, separation, and exposure as ecstatic coordinates of existence.

The life of one who knows that his appearance and his essence are mutually identical, but not identical to *him*,

cannot be *in* the world without remembering

he is not *of* the world,

cannot abide a community

that would be just a distraction from one's solitude in the face of death.

—dancing, precisely, *to death*  
with the time that's killing him—

IS EXPERIMENTATION.

Language,

word and gesture,

is the common dwelling

of those without a place.

The bond of those who can't accept the untruth of a belonging, a soil, a birth.

Dwelling in dispersal and exile.

Communication

that is *sensitive*

to our essential separation.

“Once we've spoken, sticking as closely as possible to what we've said, so everything is not effectively in the air, the words on one side, we on the other, with the regret of separations.”

This text is a pact.

The protocol of an experimentation that

begins

among deserters.

**Without being obvious about it,  
leave the ranks.**

**Now**

## Postscript to the Italian edition of Theory of Bloom

March 2004

Our only business is communism.

There is no *preliminary* to communism.

In pursuit of the end, those who believed the contrary only succeeded in burying themselves in the accumulation of means.

Communism is not another way of distributing wealth, of organizing production, of managing society; communism is an ethical disposition. A disposition to let ourselves be affected, in the contact of beings, by what is common to us. A disposition *to share what is common*. Musil's "other state" comes closer to this than Krushchev's USSR did.

One can say that the capitalist valorization process frees humans from the fetters of tradition—from the web of habits, familiarities, places, and ties that give each one of them their consistency. Or that it tears them away from their world to put them to work, and tears those worlds apart in order to sell them a piece at time. In any case, it's Bloom that results and in Bloom there is a promise of communism. For, with him, what is plainly revealed is nothing less than the ecstatic structure of human presence, the pure readiness to let oneself be affected.

This promise is the very thing which **THEY** make every effort to deny. The maneuver consists, through the concerted action of the Spectacle and of Biopower, in *reducing the common to the vulgar*. Basically, **THEY** would like to convert Bloom into a stabilized form-of-life. All the imperial apparatuses contribute to this project in one way or another. It's a matter of maintaining the Bloom in Bloom. Of making the very loss of vital contact, of all attachment, into something delightful. Of seeing to the atrophy of any ethical sensibility.

When we use the term "ethical" we're never referring to a set of precepts capable of formulation, of rules to observe, of codes to establish. Coming from us, the word "ethical" designates *everything having to do with forms-of-life*. All sorts of speculations are proposed as impotent alternatives to the reign of pure police force, proclaiming themselves to be "ethics:" ethics of the future or of fragility, bioethics or ethical trade. This makes no sense. No formal ethics is possible. There is only the interplay of forms-of-life among themselves, and the protocols of experimentation that guide them locally.

The Italian public, which cannot have held either *Tiqqun 1* or *Tiqqun 2* in their hands, will rightly wonder about "Tiqqun" appearing in the place where **THEY** would have expected the name of an author. To start with, *Tiqqun* is not an author, singular or collective. The insistence with which **THEY** have moderated every review of the *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille* by men-

tioning that it was the work of that folkloric but fortunately extinct species called “a group of Parisian intellectuals” tells us something about the harmful effects intrinsic to the author-fiction: neutralizing every truth as to its consequences *for me*, by assigning it an owner.

Tiqun is definitely not a group; Tiqqun is a *means*, a means in the collective formation of a *position*. This position defines itself in our period as a twofold secession: first, a secession from the process of social valorization, from what was still called in *Tiqqun 1*, “the world of the authoritarian commodity,” and can just as well be named “Empire”; and further, a secession *from the left*, given the sterility that a mere *opposition* to Empire imposes, even an extra-parliamentary opposition. It being understood that here “secession” means not so much a practical refusal to communicate as an inclination to forms of communication so intense that where they establish themselves they rob the enemy of most of its force.

For the moment, there is scarcely more than the ravages of the “Black Bloc” and the material cooperation of a few communized farms to *publicly* express such a position. And they do so in the same manner that *Tiqqun* appears: anonymously. For it’s in the nature of every real position to be anonymous.

What’s at stake in what we write, in what we do, is the attempt to shift the plane of political phenomenality, of what is collectively registered as a *fact* on the basis of which something decisive can occur, on the basis of which, for example, friendships and enmities can be determined. We say that “the elementary human unit is not the *body*, the individual, but the form-of-life”<sup>3</sup>. So the political question *par excellence* is not that of forming a social body from a multitude of individual bodies but of elaborating, refining, and complexifying the interplay between a multiplicity of forms-of-life. Every form-of-life sustains the existence of a certain modality of being. While everything presents itself to the Young-Girl *as* an accessory, the worker grasps everything *as* a tool, and the warrior *as* a weapon. And it follows, of course, that in this movement the Young-Girl herself becomes an accessory, the worker a tool, and the warrior a mere weapon. Bloom, for his part, experiences everything *as a nothingness*. It seems that in the past there were debates about whether nothingness is a modality of being or not.

We say that politics is a certain degree of intensity in the interplay of forms-of-life, and that communism resides in the elaboration of that interplay. An elaboration that develops whenever clearly distinct worlds start communicating between themselves, even confrontationally. One sees how empire is the exact opposite of this, where the crushing of worlds, one after another, or one *against* another, their continuous disintegration, makes each one’s conservation depend on its self-enclosure.

From *Theory of Bloom* to *How is to be done?*, most of our theoretical efforts aim

to bring out the evidence of forms-of-life. One of the main weaknesses of revolutionary thought has been its inability to grasp forms-of-life. A certain Marxism has even made this incomprehension a point of honor. And yet it's only by placing oneself on ethical ground, where the different perceptible worlds are constituted, that their constitution can become a material force. The whole strange political stagnation which has consumed Italy for a decade results from this impasse. THEY wear themselves out denouncing the power grab of a new kind of dictator, by a man named Berlusconi, when what's actually involved instead is a *takeover of the social by a form-of-life*: the manager. There's nothing less personal than Berlusconi. Nothing more corrupting than that uninhibited pragmatism, that easy-going vulgarity,<sup>4</sup> that infantile authoritarianism, that anesthetizing of the sense of history. Nothing more corrupting than that opportunism, than that cynicism, than that fear. "Opportunism, cynicism, fear" is how Paolo Virno characterizes the *Stimmung* of the "multitudes." In doing so, however, it's more the affective tonality of *the Negrists themselves* that he singles out, since their historical dissociation at least. And that is why the Disobedients are so amazingly incapable of mustering anything against Berlusconi, owing to their equal immersion in the ethical continuum of *management*, the problem of running the country, or managing the "movement of movements." There's some Berlusconi everywhere you look, really, even in that Casarini guy.

THEY will tell us it's only in reactionary thought that one sees the likes of Nietzsche, Jünger, Evola, Dumézil, Lasch, Spengler, and Guénon dealt with *politically*. As it happens, however, all these authors, among others, have offered a diagnosis of Bloom. But what marks reactionary thought is that it can't describe a reality without omitting the *potentiality* that works upon the real. It will see Bloom clearly enough, but not his ambivalence. It will see his destiny, but not the aura of potentiality that wreathes him. It will see the breakdown, but not what it lays bare. Due to its own realism, finally, it will always miss the *reality* of Bloom.

We caution everyone against any use of the term "Bloom" as an epithet of contempt.

THEY manage to get eight million persons to march "for democracy and against terrorism." THEY manage to capture a country's attention with the latest marriage drama of a few stars. But we don't manage to block the proliferation of hostile pieces of architecture in the metropolis where our days are spent. We don't manage to rebel against the insidious everyday suffering to which they habituate us by means of tiny gestures, feigned complicities, and impalpable hierarchies. We don't manage to formulate the first phrase of the bitter litanies that pass through us. It's as if the surface were lacking where all that could be inscribed. As if the ground on which we might do battle were constantly giving way beneath our feet.

Most of the grievances we have concerning the current conditions of existence THEY manage to dismiss with a wave of the hand: it's a "psychological," a "subjective," an "existential" problem. It's metaphysics.

By this THEY mean to say above all that it's not *political* and hence capable of a collective resolution. We maintain that everything having to do with the interaction of forms-of-life is open to a collective elaboration. And that where this interaction is experienced in suffering there is an intensity that makes it *immediately* political. We're working toward the formation of a collective force such that the slogan "Death to Bloom!" or "Down with the Young-Girl!" would be enough to justify several days of rioting. After all, certain individuals go so far as to blow up laboratories on the grounds that animals are mistreated in them or crash into the World Trade center because Americans are evildoers. In *Tiqqun 1* we spoke of an Imaginary Party, of a grey terror, of a sacerization of Bloom, of a militarization of the disaster, of a world of authoritarian commodities. Today it's easier to see, in light of the latest episodes of the global civil war, what we meant by those things. Our position, which even now can seem minoritarian, or delirious, or just otherworldly, is not likely to remain exotic. When even sociologists start talking about the meaning of life and when one of them, Trotskyist to boot, can write: "The I and the We appear to be caught up in a storm which may eventually result in the individual and society being torn to shreds, leaving the field open to Barbarism" (it should be added that the man speaking is a Trotskyist *who claims to have read Benjamin*)—it's an indication that such a position is about to come into play, historically. The West has to fear an insurrection that's developing at its center in the same way that Kafka's voice opened a crack in the classical novel.

Someone said that "the movement beyond always comes from elsewhere." The exit from Bloom will not be social. Society can no longer be presupposed. Everything needs to be posited. Revisited. We place ourselves at the start of a process of revolutionary recomposition that may take a generation, but it will be richer than everything preceding it, because it includes all the problems left hanging for such a long time which now *demand* to be faced.

On that subject, we can only recommend that the Italian public read a certain *Call* that will soon be offered to its attention, we're told.

## Notes

- 1 Elser, an “exemplary” Bloom in many respects, carried out a bomb attack against Hitler on November 8, 1939, on the sufficient grounds that he considered Hitler to be “a bad man.” This assassination attempt failed only due to a surprising stroke of bad luck. A second stroke of bad luck, just as unlikely, resulted in his arrest at the Swiss border while fleeing. He was never judged for the crime, but was kept in detention in various camps, with the singular status of *Führerssonderhäftling* (exceptional prisoner of the Führer). The trial of Eichmann, that of a Bloom who splits himself into a legal subject and a real, interior, genuine man and in this way claims not to have been responsible for his acts, shows rather clearly the impossibility of judging Bloom, that is, of grasping him in legal terms and according to legal principles.
- 2 One finds *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille* in the first issue of *Tiqqun*. [translated as *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*]
- 3 “Introduction à la guerre civile” [*Introduction to Civil War*] in *Tiqqun 2*.
- 4 It’s again this triumph of vulgarity that is shown by the typical reception given in Italy to the publication of *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille* – divided between knowing winks and polite indulgence. THEY carefully refrained, on the other hand, from reviewing the collection of ‘masperized’ texts published by the managers-in-training of *Derive Approdi* with the frivolous title *La comunità terribile* [*The Terrible Community*]. It’s true that we deal in that text with matters that are less accessible to sensualist nihilism, such as building the Party.

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**Robert Hurley** has translated the work of several leading French philosophers into English, including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Georges Bataille, as well as several works of Tiqqun and the Invisible Committee.









Bloom [blum] n.m. – circa 1914; origin unknown, perhaps from the Russian *Oblomov*, the German *Anna Blume* or the English *Ulysses* – 1♦ Final Stimmung of a civilization nailed to its own bedside, which only manages to distract itself from its wreckage by alternating short phrases of technophilic hysteria and long periods of contemplative asthenia. *It was as if the bloodless mass of employees were living in the Bloom.* “Death to Bloom!” (J. Frey) 2♦ fig. A twilight, vacant form-of-life commonly affecting humans in the world of authoritarian commodity: *bloomesque*, *bloomitude*, *bloomification* 3♦ by ext. Feeling of being posthumous. *Feeling bloom* 4♦ Death certificate of classical politics 5♦ birth certificate of ecstatic politics 6♦ Hist. The assumption of which determined the formation of the various foci of the Invisible Committee, an anonymous conspiracy that, through sabotage and uprisings, ended up liquidating the commodity domination in the first quarter of the 21st century. “When the train passes, the spectators are petrified.” (K.)

“The book is terrifying in its simplicity, nearly overwhelming in its descriptions of modern culture. The fact that it was written over a decade ago is a testament to the resonance it still carries within it. There are dozens of passages describing familiar scenes which still hold true today and are no less potent because of their age... It holds everything which was to come later, and contains to seeds of what is still to be sown. This book should be read and read again.”  
- The Anvil Review.

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