IV. THE CRISIS OF THE BOURGEOIS MENTALITY

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1. From Apogee to Crisis

We have seen so far how a new type of mentality takes shape over a long process spanning seven or eight centuries, grounded in certain basic experiences arising from new social and economic situations, which are then rationalized to form a framework of basic ideas and a system of criteria for understanding reality. In the eighteenth century, all these ideas—which were by then already traditional, having first been sketched out, then developed, and at times driven underground—burst forth and constituted that system of ideas which the Enlightenment defined and organized to the point of reducing them to a sort of primer.

This system of ideas received its definitive expression in the *Encyclopédie*, a foundational work of thought published around 1750. That system of ideas—ordered, matured, and by then openly accepted—is the one put into operation by the so-called 'enlightened despots' who, inspired by these ideas, carried out a series of reforms to modernize the institutional system across economic, taxation, educational, and other domains, while leaving the question of sovereignty entirely outside the debate.

All of this was inspired by the law of reason. This formula also serves to explain the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789, with the sole difference that democratic revolutions also incorporate the question of sovereignty, replacing the principle of the so-called legitimate sovereignty of the monarchy with that of popular sovereignty. It is curious to discover how, in every other respect, the similarity of ideas is almost total: what most closely resembles the measures of the French Assembly are those of Maria Theresa of Austria. It is precisely the French Revolution that transforms this entire system of ideas into institutions, and it is subsequently imitated by many governments, including Latin American ones.

With the fall of Napoleon came an era of reaction stemming in part from the horror of Napoleonic autocracy. The previous imposition of a theory, a doctrine, a form of mentality—the bourgeois mentality that had triumphed in France—sparked a resistance expressed through the affirmation of national traditions, some as ancient as those of the Middle Ages itself. It was in this climate that Romanticism took shape, a vast movement that dominated Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was an anti-bourgeois reaction, not progressive but nostalgic. Characteristic of this was the effort to restore the absolute monarchy that had existed prior to the Enlightenment, in an attempt to condemn at once the French Revolution and the eighteenth century—a typically bourgeois century whose expression was progressive enlightened despotism. Thus, for example,

Charles X of France had himself anointed with the holy oils. In the realm of the novel, following *Werther*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and *Tom Jones*, Walter Scott imposed the medieval-setting novel, complete with the requisite chatelaine and the troubadour. In the field of law, Savigny founded the Historical School of Law in Germany, asserting that the true laws of a society are not the result of rational creation, as was the Napoleonic Code, but of a centuries-old tradition in the making, in which customary norm holds greater value than rational process.

All of this constitutes a crisis of the bourgeois mentality, except that in this initial manifestation it is not expressed as a crisis of transcendence but rather as a return to the past, nostalgic in character and with contents we would call right-wing. But these are not the only ones. Alongside them are others whose character is one of outright dissent or nonconformity—whether with respect to the inherited stock of traditional ideas, those of the bourgeois mentality, or with respect to the organization of society—exposing what is unjust or wicked about it.

The most characteristic example of nonconformist attitudes is bohemia: a way of life adopted by certain groups of artists, writers, and students, with the same features as the hippie movement of the 1960s. The movement is characterized by its lack of ideology and concrete purpose, consisting solely of a vital desire to live differently, in defiance of the prevailing system of norms. These attitudes were described—and also popularized—in Murger's *Scenes from Bohemian Life*, and later in the well-known opera *La Bohème*: a work of little literary value but of considerable testimonial importance. The word 'bohemians' invokes the image of nomadic groups—such as Bohemians and Gypsies—living entirely on the margins of conventional society, whose settled way of life is typically bourgeois. To extol such a group in the way Murger does would have been unthinkable in the eighteenth century, when literature and theater that offered a critique of manners—Marivaux or Beaumarchais, for example—always remained respectful of tradition.

Its meaning, in the nineteenth century, becomes even clearer when linked to the literature of social Romanticism—Victor Hugo, Sue—which addresses the theme of society and its wretched sectors, of the underworld traditionally considered wretched and now presented as the victim of the prevailing system. All of this makes Romanticism a key moment in the history of the bourgeois mentality. It would be a mistake to believe that the political triumphs of the late eighteenth century implied the definitive triumph of the bourgeois mentality. On the contrary, for a long time, many people associated the bourgeois mentality with the horrors of Jacobinism, and for that reason, it remained discredited until at least 1830. In that year, the advent of the 'bourgeois king' Louis-Philippe signaled a new appreciation of this conception. The waning of the nostalgic attitude and the nascent revolutionary offensive made the period from 1850 to World War I one of apogee and splendor of the bourgeois mentality. There are contradictory episodes—such as the Paris Commune—significant for reconstructing the genesis of the revolutionary and anti-bourgeois

mentality, but of relative importance to the whole, alongside, for example, the triumph of scientism and positivism as a doctrine fully accepted even by the workers' movements.

Throughout the entire period, all are signs of the triumph of the bourgeois mentality. In the religious sphere, it is the period of laicism, the ultimate expression of deism and profanity, without a break with the idea of God but with a progressive distancing until reaching agnosticism. Also typical are Spencer's scientistic doctrine and Comte's positivist doctrine, which imply a certainty regarding the possibility of knowing sensible nature and an agnostic attitude toward all metaphysics. Sensible reality can be known through the senses or, in the nineteenth century, through instruments that refine and extend the senses. What no one can be certain of is whether there is anything behind sensible reality: that is a matter of faith, and on such matters one does not venture opinions. Also typical is the entire context of forms of life: the predominance of the family, the equating of social prestige with wealth, and the sacrosanct value of work and profit. All of this predominates in this era, endowing it with an extraordinary degree of maturity that reaches its final moment of brilliance in what has been called the belle époque.

2. The Crisis

We must now examine the fate of these ideas after the First World War. Although our study must be situated within the perspective of crisis, it should be noted that these ideas have neither been erased nor banished. The characteristic feature of mentality phenomena is that they unfold infinitely more slowly than all other processes. It is far easier to bring about a social revolution than to change the prejudices of an adult; which is why the education of young generations constitutes a crucial problem for any revolution.

In a certain sense, after World War I, the bourgeois mentality spread as a result of the rise of the masses. The masses joining consumer society adopted the prevailing ideas of the middle classes, since these served as markers of status. Beginning with an attempt to imitate the external aspects of middle-class life—consumption habits, manners, opinions—this process ultimately led to the wholesale adoption of the entire mentality such aspects entail.

Since the First World War, a quantitative expansion of the bourgeois mentality has been underway. By contrast, a qualitative crisis has begun to manifest itself: now more widespread than before, the bourgeois mentality has been challenged at its very foundations, both in Europe and in the United States, and in my opinion also in the countries of the Soviet orbit.

This is an offensive against the bourgeois mentality that does not come from the past but from a new mentality, one that does not know exactly what it wants. It can be said that, as was the case eight centuries ago, Western society is once again undergoing primary experiences. The new mentality probably cannot express or define itself, but it knows that the old forms of thought and expression are unsatisfactory to it, whether it be Newtonian mechanical reality or the aesthetics of perspective. In every field, it is apparent that sensibility intuits the changes: that ultimately they concern the image of man and the image of reality, although neither philosophy nor science has yet managed to articulate them.

Some examples are revealing of the small shifts in situations and attitudes. In the immediate postwar period, what has come to be called women's liberation takes place. A type of woman unprecedented in the bourgeois mentality—for which women are the center of the family and the home, human beings exempt from responsibilities, without civil representation—makes her appearance. Suddenly, in political life, as well as in theater and cinema, a revolutionary feminine ideal appears: the flapper. She is characterized first and foremost by her attire: the crinoline and bustle disappear; the short skirt and garçon-style hair appear, which until then had been typical of prostitutes. This relates to the family, traditionally considered the fundamental unit of society. The bustle and all traditional women's clothing exalted the figure—the bosom and hips—which, regardless of their sensual or erotic value, are those associated with maternity. Suddenly, the woman with an unemphasized silhouette appears, wearing a shift dress, typical of someone suited for functional competition. This is coupled with new habits: women begin to smoke, wear makeup, and, most importantly, drawing on an old tradition of the suffragists, aspire to identify with men in all areas of life. Women's emancipation, manifest in these signs, has altered the structure of society: as workers, they have doubled the available labor force. But on the other hand, this signifies the dissolution of the traditional family—not as the result of a deliberate program but of a sudden and spontaneous process. Perhaps its effects seem more striking because they occur within the context of a formidable technological revolution. It is no coincidence that this transformation of women's condition gives rise to an archetype—the flapper, Greta Garbo—that is popularized by cinema. It is not the novel or the theater; it is this new medium, which itself constitutes a technological revolution. One might reflect on the extent to which these popular archetypes contributed to making the situational changes definitive. In the 1920s, one might have assumed this was a transitory phenomenon, but that was not the case. Consequently, the bourgeois mentality, as the image of social life built upon the family, has undergone a fundamental crisis. If one considers to what extent this was one of the cornerstones of this society and this mentality, it becomes clear how, beginning with the first postwar period, its very foundations have begun to be hollowed out from within.

The Crisis of Systems

This crisis, which after fifty years proves to be very profound, was already perceived in 1919 by sociologists, economists, and philosophers. It was pointed out by Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Ortega y Gasset in *The Revolt of the Masses*, and Paul Valéry in *The Crisis of the Spirit*. Since the end of the war, there has been a kind of reversal in serious intellectual reflection on the situation that had emerged.

A first aspect, perhaps the most evident, is that of the crisis of the industrial world—that is, the world in which the bourgeois mentality had grown and developed. Until 1919, that world constituted a unity: it was England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, the United States, and, to some extent, Japan. It was a compact world, around which a periphery took shape onto which the core projected itself. It was a conflictual world, but fundamentally harmonious: the clashes and adjustments, which unfolded within a certain fair play, were generally redirected toward the periphery.

The first rupture came with the Soviet Revolution and the formation of the socialist world. From that point on, there were two poles within what had previously been the single arena of bourgeois society and bourgeois mentality. It is debatable whether, in the long term, the adoption of the industrial model and certain technical-managerial characteristics might lead to similar forms of life and similar mentalities. This argument has recently been put forward, and in my view it is mistaken, for it rests on superficial similarities that barely conceal profound differences. But in light of our problem—the crisis of the bourgeois mentality—what is decisive is the awareness that society had of the profound and irreversible nature of the split. In the 1930s, Soviet propaganda journals and those of the communist parties alike spoke of the new man, the socialist man; and it is evident that the forms of life generated by industrial development in the communist world had nothing in common with those that the same development was generating in the capitalist world.

Until World War II, the world had been dislocated and presented two poles. Since then, a third has emerged: the so-called Third World. There was initially an idea, soon disproved by reality, that this world constituted a relatively homogeneous political force. After the Bandung Conference, it became apparent that the Third World does not exist as a unity, yet clearly defined areas have been identified—loose political units that speak to a singular political personality.

But perhaps the most singular process, in relation to bourgeois mentality, is that of the Cultural Revolution. In China it has been given that name, but perhaps less explicitly and consciously, it has

taken place everywhere. The phenomenon can be viewed from one camp or the other. Until 1914, the countries on the periphery were regarded as areas that needed to be civilized: such was the 'white man's burden' by Kipling. There was a firm conviction that the obligation of the white, industrialized, technologically advanced world was to convert the entire world to industrial technological and productive methods, and simultaneously to the forms of bourgeois mentality. This is, for example, what figures who were patriarchal and admirable in every respect — such as Dr. Schweitzer — set out to do; his wonderful philanthropic work does not change the fact that today he appears truly objectionable.

Since the end of the World War II, Arab, African, Eastern, and even Latin American peoples have begun to distinguish between the application and incorporation of industrial technological development and the acceptance of the bourgeois mentality, which implied the abandonment of their own traditions. The cultural revolution affirms the right of each people to stand firm in their tradition, on their own mentality: their music, their literature, their ethics, their religion, their history. All of this tends to crystallize in a political thought generically termed 'anti-imperialism,' behind which lie very complex phenomena.

This is certainly a central theme for the study of Third World countries, but it is also central to the study of the bourgeois mentality. Those who had grown accustomed to viewing the history of humanity as one of the continuous expansion of that mentality and the social forms that gave rise to it first discovered that in the industrial world a whole sector was taking a different course and that the periphery was reclaiming its own tradition, without thereby denying itself the benefits of what was beginning to be called 'development.' The idea of the ecumenical reach of this mentality was being called into question.

Second, there is a dislocation of the political past, both in terms of the so-called 'equilibrium' and the ideologies that underpin it. The First World War dissolves a political past that seemed to possess extraordinary strength but was revealed to be extremely weak. The European world had remained without significant alteration since 1850. The war brings an end to some seemingly very solid institutions, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, and replaces them with a multitude of states, following the old criterion of nationalities characteristic of the nineteenth century. The traditional system of great powers, mutually balanced, dissolves, and another is created — a system born with insoluble problems: states balanced according to the old criteria of population and territory, but radically unequal in terms of the new criteria, such as that of industrial power.

To a political world inherently in crisis—one that undermines the very foundations of trust and security in the bourgeois world—is added the crisis of the political ideologies developed by the

bourgeoisie. The bourgeois mentality had developed an entire political system, based on the shifting combination of liberalism, republicanism, and democracy. That entire system was swept away by fascism and communism. Major political revolutions call into question the entirety of the contents of bourgeois mentality. This is evident in the case of communism but also in that of political regimes such as fascism, whose strategic purpose is precisely to safeguard capitalist society. Fascism is an attempt to solve the problems of mass society in such a way as to provide the masses with sufficient satisfaction of their immediate needs, so that the basic principles of society are not compromised. But when certain arguments are wielded or certain terms deployed—even with manipulative intent—the ideological foundations of the system are profoundly affected. It is possible that when Mussolini shouts from a barricade, 'Long live proletarian and fascist Italy', he does not really know what he means, or that he is deliberately creating confusion. But what is certain is that he does not defend the ideas of those who cry 'long live freedom' or 'long live democracy'. Probably, both sides refer, deep in their consciousness, to the bourgeois system; but the words that sustained it—and with them the entire traditional system of ideas that was bound up in those grand words and that constituted the mortar of this society—all of this has at least been called into question.

The Crisis of Attitudes

Beyond the visible signs that the First World War produced in the political or economic order, the crisis manifested itself more profoundly in the realm of mentalities. In the postwar period, a crisis arose for the first time that did not stem from tradition but from new situations, and consequently from new ideologies. These ideologies are not yet fully defined, but there are elements that make it possible to detect the general direction—if not of a replacement mentality, then at least of the fissures that have appeared in the bourgeois mentality.

We had noted that the contents of the bourgeois mentality could be summarized in two fundamental points, referring to the conception of man and that of reality. The bourgeois mentality conceived what in the eighteenth century was called *homo faber* and imagined a conception of reality that became known as realism. It is this that enters into crisis, along with the general structure, as the latter begins to prove increasingly inadequate to absorb the fundamental transformations that began to emerge in the general conditions of life and in the broad orientations of the prevailing mentality.

To identify the lines of criticism arising from new situations and, consequently, from new mentalities, and in a certain sense to gauge their significance over time, one can analyze certain attitudes that are revealing in terms of the object against which they are directed, even if their specific content

cannot be clearly established. The most visible novelty of the first postwar period was the eruption of scepticism and hedonism, followed, thirty years later, by the eruption of the sense of rebelliousness characteristic of the second postwar period. These two aspects must be considered together and systematically, because in the First World War they manifested themselves in the form of a total disregard for responsibilities, and in the Second through positions of denunciation, according to what has become the classic formula.

One must begin by identifying the social sectors in which these attitudes originated. In the European world, where the crisis is most severe and manifests itself most clearly, it becomes apparent that the popular masses did not adopt a skeptical or hedonistic attitude. On the contrary, in the most politicized sectors there was a highly active attitude in pursuit of certain concrete ends, precisely those proposed to them by the new industrial society at its peak, when consumer society made its appearance. As observed by Ortega y Gasset and a multitude of philosophers, essayists, and journalists, the immediate postwar period was characterized by the presence of previously unnoticed masses. A precedent could be found in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when in cities like Manchester industrial concentration attracted an enormous number of people who, from the perspective of the old ruling classes, presented the character of a mass. In a society accustomed to a small number of people who mattered, this new surrounding mass appeared as an invading mass.

After World War I, this phenomenon of the emergence of enormous concentrations of people in large, medium, and small cities attracted considerable attention — not only because of their sheer existence, but because they took on an air that led a keen observer such as Ortega to speak of insurgent masses. Yet these insurgent masses did not act aggressively except under exceptional circumstances, such as during certain strikes and political mobilizations, including those of fascism and National Socialism. Ortega refers to a new attitude toward traditional elites: the masses begin to demonstrate that they regard them as illegitimate and unrepresentative. The air of insurrection stems from the fact that the masses recognize themselves as independent of the elites, who are thereby left without bearings in relation to them. Just as in prewar society a certain respect and consensus conferred an air of legitimacy upon the elites — even among the most revolutionary sectors — in the postwar period the elites are not challenged as exploiters but, simply, their status as elites is denied, their right to privilege is rejected, and the legitimacy of all privilege is ultimately refused.

On the other hand, this aggressive air of the masses stems from the fact that they are beginning to transform into avid consumers. When Ortega explains the presence of the masses, he does not depict them in a square, at a demonstration, or following revolutionary leaders, but rather standing in line at movie theaters or shops, aspiring to goods that had traditionally been the exclusive domain of

the traditional elites and the middle classes. It is a revolution, but its agents are not the masses but the industrial world. The latter has transformed the masses, concentrated in the great cities, into consumers no longer willing to forgo any of the goods traditionally enjoyed by the upper or middle classes. This is what gives them their irritating quality.

Faced with this phenomenon, the elites adopt a skeptical attitude, a fundamental and typical feature of the postwar period, as abundantly documented in the literature. It is an attitude typical and exclusive to the elites. The masses were not skeptical; they were engaged in a process fundamental to their lives: the pursuit of social mobility, of improved living conditions, which for the popular sectors at this time amounted to an entire political ideology. Nor did the masses who mobilized politically behind the communist parties, Mussolini, Hitler, or Béla Kun show themselves to be skeptical. The great postwar political movements were built upon masses who were by no means skeptical.

The scepticism manifested among the elites was the first sign of recognition that something was wrong with the structures, and it was complemented by a hedonistic attitude. This characterizes the most typical expressions of the postwar period, such as the literature of Ultraism or what in the 1920s was known as avant-garde literature. Likewise, certain schools of plastic art, such as Dadaism or Surrealism—aesthetic or aestheticizing tendencies—characterized an elite desperate to shake off every kind of commitment to society. When the masses shake off their commitment to society, the problem is less serious than when the elites do so, as they are the upholders of the structure; in this case, the sceptical attitude manifests as a more or less conscious attempt to abandon the structures to their own fate, and this is what happened. This was already evident during the *belle époque* and in the two or three decades preceding World War I: it is the scepticism that characterized the work of Oscar Wilde, Anatole France, and Eça de Queiroz; almost all the literature of this period is refined, cynical, and sceptical, like that of Proust, which reflects a society that has ceased to believe in anything.

When the war broke out, this scepticism became far more pronounced: as the conflict unfolded, it became clear that all the ideals for which people had enthusiastically rallied in 1914 had entered into crisis. The first was the patriotic ideal; the second, the ideal of national unity, which had mobilized the European nations to war—all of them tendencies that sought to restore to nationalist consciousness the contents of the early-to-mid nineteenth century. In July 1914, Jean Jaurès was assassinated in Paris, accused of telling the working classes that they should not serve the interests of the war, because nationalism was a mask concealing the interests of the high-finance bourgeoisie. Those who assassinated him were trying to save the 'sacred union' (*union sacrée*), the national unity that had been called into question by social struggles. In the course of the war, the crisis of those ideas—which had been presumed to remain in force—became evident. In 1917, a crisis of defeatism

arose in France, which Clemenceau confronted. That year, in the midst of trench warfare, total disillusionment with the war's objectives and the symbolic ends for which millions of lives were being sacrificed surfaced into the open. This demonstrates how the entire system of values that appeared to prevail in 1914 was clearly under challenge by the midpoint of the war, and had collapsed entirely by its end.

The significance, as a symbolic fact, of the emergence of the myth of the unknown soldier has not been sufficiently analyzed, nor has the internal content of the war literature that characterized the entire First postwar period, such as Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* or Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Beneath the Arc de Triomphe, where the victorious generals of the Napoleonic campaigns are commemorated—campaigns in which great numbers of people died but which left behind not a legacy of scepticism, only the memory of the emperor's glory—there is placed simply a flame meant to burn in perpetuity. Compare this with the content of war literature. It is always the drama of the anonymous, forgotten soldier who passes unrecorded by history and whom the author wishes to highlight as a microcosm, as a man—nothing less than a whole man, as Unamuno would say. This exaltation of the individual and anonymous man, a victim of the paraphernalia of war, means affirming that the values in whose honor he has lost his life are held to be inferior to this seemingly negligible thing: the life of an anonymous man.

This is a very clear sign that the elites had begun to lose complete confidence in the set of basic convictions that constituted the bourgeois mentality. It is the first sign that the bourgeois mentality has entered into crisis, since the totality of its fundamental values has entered into crisis. What is saved is man, who is indestructible. But man is a concrete being, and structures are abstract; they are the result of a system of relationships. When it is insistently asserted that what exists is the concrete being of flesh and blood, it is because there is doubt that the system of relationships in which each individual is placed still holds. This is precisely what is happening: the crisis of the system of basic convictions, the system of ideas that until 1914 was considered valid. The system of ideas that appears traditional—and which until that moment had only been opposed because the conception of man it implied was not as subtle and spiritual as that of the Christian-feudal mentality—is now criticized in the name of the anonymous being of flesh and blood, who claims his right to life, who wants to be able to eat, live, work, and have the modest joy of going home every day, of raising his children. It is the exaltation of vulgarity, and this stands in opposition to the exaltation of great values. This tendency is also evident in the other literary genre typical of the era: biography—Maurois, Ludwig. Its purpose is to exalt the individual man, great or small alike. The small man in all his vulgarity and the great man in the smallness of his private life. This exaltation is naturally intentional and is directed at discrediting another assertion, typical of old nationalism and new fascism: 'the man who dies for something is less valuable than that for which he dies'. At this moment it is said that all that has led ten million men to their graves, that has consumed so many

lives and riches, and that has destroyed so many beautiful memories of the past—all of that is not worth the life of one anonymous and vulgar man.

This profound and terrible revolution continues in the postwar period with what became known as denunciation and rebelliousness. What is denounced in the so-called literature of denunciation—in the attitude of the 'Angry Young Men', such as Osborne, and of the beatniks, such as Kerouac? A society in which the individual becomes alienated, estranged, and frustrated. Those are the key words. Who is it that becomes frustrated? This does not refer to the terrible and dramatic frustration of the potential artist that exists in every man, but rather to that of every individual—common and unpolished—whom society compels to sacrifice his life to a handful of obscure gods, which for some amount to nothing more than consumption. One is compelled to alienate oneself in order to purchase consumer goods; one must sacrifice all the possibilities that man has for 'self-realization'—another key word—by devoting every hour of his life to serving a monster—a large corporation, the State—that demands his every effort for no other purpose than to earn the money he needs to live.

It is assumed that the individual has a destiny other than serving society. In a coherent society, in which structures offer the individual a series of paths that he recognizes as legitimate, service to society had always seemed, in the bourgeois mentality, sufficient justification for existence. Service implied transcendence insofar as it was performed for someone considered more valuable than the individual. Whoever says, 'All this alienates me, takes me out of myself, and turns me into an instrument of a monster whose meaning I cannot fathom' is denouncing that he finds no meaning in the structure in which he lives, or at least that he does not share that meaning. He discovers that the one performing this service for society is not himself but a robot, a mask, behind which there is an individual who sees himself becoming alienated and who, in this moment of crisis, wonders about his own destiny. What is that destiny? The question opens up further questions: is it necessary for everyone to have a transcendental message for humanity, only to have society thwart it? Or is it simply being suggested that the ordinary man has nothing else to do but live in a certain way, and that he can find fulfillment insofar as he discovers that the task demanded of him is valuable?

Thus, the attitude that emerged around World War I—whose first visible sign was skepticism—continues in this demand, in this attitude of protest and rebellion, whose fundamental theme is the idea of man. This is the attitude of nonconformism. Whoever assumes this attitude need not know what that other thing is to which they aspire; the only thing they know is that within that structure a part of their self remains unsatisfied. This is exactly the opposite of the *homo faber* of the bourgeois mentality—of the ideal of the individual who performs a service, a useful mission for society, as it appears in the morality of a Franklin or a Samuel Smiles, those typical bourgeois heroes. Now, however, it is possible that whoever serves society feels profoundly unhappy, because they

are sacrificing themselves to a divinity whose meaning they cannot discern; they believe they are alienated because they must sell their labor—no longer out of the conviction of performing a useful task, but in order to obtain the money needed to acquire the consumer goods that have become an essential goal.

This vicious circle was defined by Bernard Shaw, a critic of Victorian society and bourgeois society in general, with a famous phrase: 'A man of our time is a man who spends his life earning a living'. Amid all this sentiment of scepticism, and later of protest and rebellion, lies the conviction that, besides the man who spends his life serving society or earning a living, there is another who expects something different. What is it? That is what no one knows. It is very clear what is not wanted; equally clear is the dramatic certainty that there is a life to be lived, and there are those who say they want to live their lives. Like this one, all the slogans that have become *clichés* are charged with a sense of protest. To live one's life is to develop life in such a way that it is in no way about serving society or exchanging time for money. It is not stated what one wants instead, but it is evident that this critique of the bourgeois conception of man does not stem from a seigneurial conception, as was the case with courtly, Renaissance, Baroque, or Romantic nonconformism—which were mere nostalgias for a time of lords, when a situation of leisure allowed certain elites to lead a life of great dignity, an aesthetic life. This is something else, and it stems from modern conditions created by the industrial world, against which the struggle is waged. All of this constitutes a fundamental crisis—the first of its kind—in which one can perceive the onslaught against the bourgeois mentality by a new ideology, still spontaneous and in gestation, undefined in its positive aspects yet very clear in its negative ones.

What characterizes elites is their identification with political, economic, or ideological structures, and their control over them. In bourgeois society, vast sectors of the middle classes align themselves with the elites, and lacking control over the structures, they support through consensus those who do control them. Both are responsible groups and feel themselves to be responsible, for a structure is defended by the elites and by the sectors that lend it their consent. This is what ceased to occur at that moment of nonconformism, and hence the fundamental crisis of the bourgeois mentality. The elites are dominated by a sense of scepticism and a hedonistic attitude, reminiscent of Horace's *carpe diem*, almost always accompanied by a cynical attitude toward the system of moral values that organizes the community and which, together with all other systems of relations, constitutes the structure. Hence, the immediate postwar period signified a fundamental crisis, for although the elites did not confront the structure by fighting it—as occurred after the Second World War in a radical manner—they inflicted the same damage by withdrawing their consent. The structures proved defenseless, because their natural defenders abandoned their defense. This was the typical attitude of the elites, which was not the same as that of the masses, inflamed with the desire to follow Mussolini. Legitimate elites are those who, in the judgment of a society, enjoy the privileges

necessary to better fulfill their duties. The moment they abandon their duties and retain nothing but their privileges, the masses withdraw their consent and the crisis breaks out. This is what happened in the postwar period, during that process in which the elites—skeptical and cynical—transformed the institutional guarantees attached to their duties as an elite into mere personal privileges and automatically became illegitimate.

3. The Crisis Today: Disconformism

The bourgeois mentality has entered a crisis that, although repeatedly announced, manifested itself forcefully in the aftermath of World War I, in a process that extends to the present. This process of crisis, which is by no means concluded, entails the questioning of nearly all the elements that constitute the content of the bourgeois mentality — and, beyond that, of its very structure. We shall attempt to explain the form this crisis takes today.

The signs of this crisis are varied, some overt and others subtle. In some cases, one observes a total clash between other forms of mentality—which are harbored within certain new social groups—and the traditional forms of the bourgeois mentality. At other times, what is perceived is a simple phenomenon of disconformism, characteristic of certain groups committed to the bourgeois mentality—groups that generally participate in it, belong to the structure in which the bourgeois mentality is lodged, and yet, through this disconformism, manifest a kind of resolve to abandon the defense of this traditional form.

Naturally, not everything is nonconformism in contemporary society, in which vast sectors are developing that adopt a conformist attitude. There are in fact two major groups: those who consent to the prevailing social structure and the forms of mentality it harbors, and nonconformist groups, who not only withhold their consent but express their dissent in a rather categorical manner. One could identify the conformists with consumer society. Every consumer society actually encompasses vast social sectors in which, regardless of class, a strong tendency can be observed to become fully absorbed into the prevailing social structures and the forms of mentality that predominate within them. These conformist sectors are made up of a large part of the old elites, and above all of the sectors undergoing social ascent, both within the middle classes and the popular classes. This rise of the masses, this phenomenon of intense social mobility, which is characteristic of our time, reveals a desire for incorporation into traditional society — a desire through which extensive sectors of the middle and popular classes can benefit from and enjoy goods that were previously consumed only by the elites. Thus, a good way to identify this sector is by grouping all these middle-class, popular, and elite groups under the common denominator of consumer society.

Consumer society expresses the consent given to existing structures and to the forms of mentality inscribed within them—forms that develop alongside those structures. The vast phenomenon of disconformism reveals, beyond the formal or occasional consent that other sectors lend it, the crisis of the bourgeois mentality. Disconformism carries far greater symptomatic value than conformism, for in phenomena of change the sectors that, out of inertia, remain attached to traditional forms are always less representative—by virtue of their passive attitude—than the sectors that adopt an active attitude of dissent. It is the latter that, by introducing a new factor, move history; and here that new factor is called disconformism.

Like conformists, nonconformist sectors are found across all social strata. They are small groups, sometimes subgroups, that have adopted a dissident attitude, either explicitly or tacitly. They are found in urban societies, and particularly in large cities, where there typically exists a secret, underground city in which forms of life develop and forms of mentality flourish that are wholly at odds with the orthodox forms of everyday life. Nonconformism is identified with large cities, although the characteristics of the contemporary megalopolis—New York, London, or Buenos Aires—are replicated, on a smaller scale, in countless cities with populations exceeding one million or one and a half million inhabitants, partly through imitation and partly because beyond that threshold the conditions for the emergence of these dissident groups come into being.

Dissidents are certainly found among the popular classes, in groups with political formation and a strong tendency toward action. In these cases, nonconformism is explicit and has clear awareness of the goals it pursues, which are specified and precisely delimited. But the most intriguing and curious problem is that of the nonconformist sectors of the middle classes and the elite, who have already gained access to consumer goods and in whom the emergence of a nonconformist attitude constitutes the most important and revealing sign of the factual crisis — proper to social structures — and of the mental crisis of ideological structures.

These groups draw primarily from writers, artists, and people in film, or from activities most closely linked to contemporary life: advertising, television, radio, and journalism, and also from a vast mass of students. These are people who, in one way or another, are connected to what we might call creation — as if it were precisely under the impulse of certain creative demands that the incapacity of prevailing structures and prevailing forms of mentality to accommodate new forms is discovered early on.

These groups are characterized by countless outward signs: unisex styles, the aggressive attire of hippies, necklaces, women's trousers, or men's earrings — markers that identify these groups as polemically and aggressively nonconformist. In reality, however, nonconformism encompasses far

broader groups that adopt neither external markers nor a deliberate appearance as dissident groups, yet effectively operate as such. Situated within the middle or upper classes, they reveal above all a deliberate withdrawal from the expected support for the structures in which they are lodged by virtue of their origin — structures they would otherwise sustain simply through a passive attitude. Yet it is precisely this support that they withhold, in order to operate polemically in terms of other forms of mentality, as if they wished to lodge themselves within a system of structures entirely different from the traditional one.

These groups, linked to creation and with theoretical concerns that make them eminently ideological, recognize certain individuals or movements as precursors—figures characterized by their dissent in an era when such dissent could only be strictly individual. Such is the case with the return to William Blake, the English poet and illustrator who, in a certain way, expresses an attitude of disdain for the entire system of his time, and who, even at the crucial point of what we might call the image of reality, manifested a total departure from forms of realistic representation. The same could be said of Edgar Allan Poe, Ezra Pound, Nerval, or the most extreme Romantics characteristic of the first half of the century. Perhaps the clearest example is that of the Marquis de Sade, who has been granted the status of precursor of dissident movements because, alongside his demands for sexual freedom, a kind of appeal to anarchic positions has been discovered in him, as if he were claiming freedom in absolute terms. This vindication of Sade constitutes one of the strangest and most curious phenomena among contemporary dissident groups and expresses how, under the appeal for full freedom, the entire system of norms characteristic of the prevailing structure is called into question. Those who vindicate Sade are rejecting the entire system of traditional norms, typical of bourgeois morality, but they also reject all the foundations of a form of life, which lie in the realm of ideology. The appeal to the American writers of the 'Lost Generation,' or to the English 'Angry Young Men' of the Osborne group, or to Kerouac's beatniks—to all those who have cast overboard traditional forms of life and forms of mentality—reveals that non-conformism rejects not only forms of life but, much more forcefully, the forms of mentality, which today constitute its foundation and which in their time were the fruit of those forms of life.

These dissident groups, whose most evident manifestations are the hippies of the 1960s, the postwar existentialists, and those of Greenwich Village or Saint-Germain-des-Prés, have adopted a series of new convictions that challenge some of the key tenets of the prevailing social and mental structures. The first thing to be questioned is the social structure itself, driven by the discovery of the inalienable rights of marginal groups in contemporary society. This manifests itself in identification with groups such as Jews or Blacks in American society and their counterparts, originating from former colonies, in England or France, as well as with persecuted groups such as the Palestinians.

Secondly, the validity of elites is called into question. A society with an intense capacity for mobility,

in which social groups considered marginal for centuries have been rapidly integrated, and in which the peculiarities of consumer society have introduced a kind of continuous substance both above and below social stratification — such a society naturally calls its elites into question.

Before World War I, elites were legitimate in the eyes of a small segment of the population, below which lay an amorphous, marginal mass with no participation in that game. The traditional elites belonged to a restricted society; their relations were established only with one part of society—the incorporated mass—and did not affect the unincorporated masses. This is what has entered into crisis in the world of consumer society. Society has grown quantitatively, and a process of homologation has also taken place, so that what we call the masses now includes those marginal groups whose consent previously did not count, and whose presence has the effect of undermining the standing of the traditional elites. Thus, the new societies, expanded through the reach of consumer society, have challenged the old elites and are demanding new ones. Some have already emerged: the technological and the intellectual. There are other sectors where it is possible that traditional elites might transmute themselves in certain ways and retain their essential characteristics. But even so, for generational reasons among others, there is an intense process of change underway.

This explains the great indecision our society feels regarding its projective model. Never have these models been so scarce, enjoyed less general acceptance, or been more disputed. This is not due to the new projects themselves, but to the fact that they come from elites that are themselves under dispute. It can be said that we live in a world with elites that are both contested and undergoing change. Large sectors of the middle and upper classes have withdrawn their support from them, and since the elites are being questioned, so too is the world of ideas they represent—which is, precisely, the bourgeois mentality.

The same can be said about the system of norms. The entire system of norms in force until World War I was practically the same, in substance, as it had been since the twelfth or thirteenth century. Naturally, it had changed in innumerable nuances, and a different character had been introduced into the system of traditional norms; yet bourgeois society and bourgeois mentality had, until the end of the last century or the beginning of this one, a compact system of norms that, in substance, had gone essentially unchallenged. Included in this system were the norms that established relationships between persons—within the family, between the sexes, and among the different strata of society.

All of this began to be questioned immediately after the First World War. Following the euphoria of the *belle époque*, the sharp postwar collapse proved definitive. In reality, the system of norms had

not been restored in any way; on the contrary, each of the elements that had sustained it continued to decline, and tentative new systems of norms and values began to emerge. The debates sparked by the contraceptive pill—or, on another level, by literature such as that of Henry Miller or Christiane Rochefort—reveal the questioning of the entire system of norms that had regulated sexual life, which always serves as a subtle index of the mechanisms by which the life of a community is organized. This subject, which had been taboo, was placed on new ground after the First World War, and an extensive debate opened up in which no aspect of the question was left untouched.

In the realm of social norms, the crisis was equally decisive; it affected relations between social strata, and in a particularly marked way those proper to the family unit. Strictly speaking, it affected the entire system of values. In whichever aspect one examines, a uniform pattern of development can be observed from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, followed by a precipitous drop in adherence after the First World War. If everything is being called into question, it is because two fundamental problems are fundamentally at issue, from which all others derive: that of the image of reality and that of the image of man.

The image of reality has been questioned in many ways. Certainly, the theory of relativity dealt a fundamental blow to our image of reality, although this has not yet permeated very widely. Stronger still is the impact of technological development. Consider the case of radio and television. Radio was accepted by society in the 1920s as a normal occurrence. In the image of reality characteristic of the bourgeois mentality, this was first and foremost sensible reality. But suddenly technology opens up a zone that is in a certain sense mysterious and cannot be understood according to traditional criteria—so that the very foundations of the image are shaken.

A counterpart to this change is offered by aesthetic creation, in which the image of reality has been transformed. Who recognizes reality in the paintings that form part of the Knox exhibition? Who recognizes traditional reality in the non-figurative schools? In contrast to the supernaturalist tradition of Platonic Christianity, the bourgeois mentality had imposed an image of reality—that of sensible reality—which for centuries had a kind of orthodox representation: what painters called volumetric painting, with characteristics that remained constant from Cimabue and Giotto onward. Since Cubism—or rather, since Impressionism and Cézanne—in all schools, especially the non-figurative schools, those of abstract painting, and very particularly those of concrete painting, the traditional image of reality has been shattered. Thus, aesthetic creation discovers one day that a certain mode of representing reality—manifesting itself on the canvas in the same way as on the retina—is no longer valid. This is a fact as fundamental as the abandonment of flat painting, in the Byzantine manner, and the adoption of volumetric painting. The invention of perspective was characteristic of the triumph of the bourgeois mentality, or rather of the image of reality that the bourgeois mentality constructed for itself. The breakdown of that system of representation indicates that this image of

reality—the one the bourgeois mentality fashioned for itself—has changed.

Time, too, has been dislocated, as is evident throughout the contemporary novel. When the system of coetaneity, of isochrony, of contemporaneous developments is sketched out, when the attempt is made to penetrate psychological time, the Kantian image of time—that of the bell-tower clock—breaks down. That image collapses after the First World War.

Certainly, these are not symptoms that are easily perceived, but strictly speaking, this has been the way all great historical changes have announced themselves. There have always been these early signs, coming from the sectors most attentive to the possibilities offered by traditional structure and mentality. When they reach the conclusion that these have ceased to be elastic, that they are incapable of accommodating new forms of thought, that they do not admit new forms of expression, they change them. We perceive this change, the symptom, but behind it lies the hardening of traditional forms of mentality, of structures incapable of receiving the impulses floating in the air; those who promote those impulses would like to place them within the traditional forms of structure and mentality, and cannot—so they burst forth with a gesture or a deed that may seem trivial at first glance. It might seem inconsequential that in Proust's novels time is not that of the clock and the calendar but rather the Bergsonian one, of psychological analysis. But an entire line of creation follows this current, and we are beginning to grow accustomed to the coexistence of a traditional image of spatial and temporal reality and of utterly unprecedented images, which appear in the testimony of these new elites, attentive to the perception of new forms. These are perceived and expressed in different ways, even though they refer to a similar phenomenon: the teenager who immerses himself in beat music is perceiving the same crisis as the most serious and refined creator—he perceives and expresses it in his own way, breaking with the traditional melody embedded in a coherent musical conception from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, which is suddenly disrupted by dodecaphonic music or by the Beatles.

It is not simply a matter of introducing a deliberate distortion, such as that introduced by El Greco in his painting; what is beginning to be called into question is the entire system, the whole fabric in which the foundations of social structure and bourgeois mentality are embedded. The characteristic of this period is nonconformism and not the affirmation of a new system, which has by no means been elaborated. None of the aforementioned symptoms is sufficient to assert that a new image of reality is replacing the old one. What appears are merely signs of nonconformism with respect to a traditional image and an enormous uncertainty regarding the future, which manifests itself only in glimpses of a search for new things. One cannot say what image of the universe is taking shape; what is certain, however, is that tradition is in crisis.

Simultaneously, the image of man, elaborated in the twelfth century and operative until the nineteenth, enters a crisis. It is the *homo faber*, man as maker of things, who fulfills himself in society — whose exemplary figure is Defoe's character: Robinson Crusoe's great effort is to constitute on his small desert island a micro-society that stands in relation to the one from which he came. What is entering a crisis is the idea that man fulfills himself in society and for society; and it begins to be asserted that all men — not only the exalted members of the elites, but the most humble as well — all possess an individual destiny. There is no need to explain the role that psychoanalysis has played in this. To generalize Goethe's idea that man is a microcosm, that he contains the totality of the universe within himself, in his mind, in his consciousness; to discover or polemically assert that anyone at all has a destiny: this is a revolution. For centuries, no one — save the most exalted figures, Rembrandt, Novalis — had thought that their ultimate goal was to realize themselves. It was traditionally understood that man fulfilled himself in society. Until the twentieth century, a young person's education was guided by the Franklinian or Goethean idea that man fulfills himself by being useful to society. This lay at the heart of all educational theory, in the minds of Pestalozzi and Comenius: man must be useful to his fellow human beings, and he fulfills himself as a social being by meeting one of the destinies that the structure offered him. The structure offers a series of channels, and man fulfills himself when he enters one of them and becomes what society wants him to be. Society is a kind of divinity, a sacred monster to which each individual is sacrificed. Suddenly, there are people who begin to say that they want to live their own lives — that is, for each person to fulfill his own individual destiny, which is not necessarily the one society proposes but his very own. It is not necessary to be a great painter or poet if what one wants is to paint or write poems; if one feels that this is what one wants to do, it is sufficient for oneself, even if it counts for nothing in society's eyes. This is the great revolution against homo faber.

Having reached this crossroads, the bourgeois mentality finds itself powerless to reconcile its fundamental principles with the way of life first proposed by the Industrial Revolution and then by the technological revolution. Since the postwar period, there have been three major contradictions that the bourgeois mentality has been unable to resolve: the contradiction between technological development and social development; the contradiction between massification and individualization; and the contradiction between participation and marginality.

The first lies in the problem posed by the question of who will administer the new world. The technological and industrial revolution occurs in part due to the requirements of the economic structure, but also due to a singular development of the ideological structure—one that leads to the intensification of certain outcomes that partly coincide with the requirements of the former and partly far exceed them. There is a mismatch between these two developments: the one required by the structure and the one resulting from an intellectual evolution unleashed at great speed and over the long term. At this point a question intrudes, one that transcends the boundaries of the industrial

and the technological and enters the purely social realm: who will manage the new world? The bourgeois mentality has no answer to this.

Nor does it have one for the problem of the relationship between massification and individualization, two antagonistic tendencies in contemporary society. On the one hand, psychoanalysis encourages individualization; so does education: to the extent that every individual is offered a given amount of information, they are invited to be themselves, to become individualized. On the other hand, there is a current in consumer society that tends toward massification, not only of the middle and popular classes but also of the elites. There is a current of forms of life, attitudes, and values that, while manifesting within a fairly stratified society, flows beyond the limits of that stratification and circulates fluidly — in exactly the same way — across all sectors, creating a certain sense of identification among people from every sector. The bourgeois mentality has failed to resolve this dilemma posed by the contradictory tendencies toward massification and individualization. This is one of the most serious and complicated dilemmas of the contemporary world. A society in which everyone becomes individualized incorporates a greater measure of consciousness over spontaneity. Traditionally, it was the elites who introduced a dose of consciousness into spontaneity. Now there is a veritable flood of consciousness. It could be said that strategies have overtaken ideologies; that patterns of behavior have overtaken the system of ends, if one prefers to frame it that way; because actions, increasingly, cease to be spontaneous acts conceived in relation to certain ends. This revolution is evidenced by the growing rate of individualization, a phenomenon that runs parallel to the other, equally striking phenomenon of growing massification.

Third, there is the contradiction between participation and marginality. On the one hand, consumer society encourages participation and tends to transform everyone into a participant, but simultaneously it begins to create new forms of marginality. It would seem that, as forces work to incorporate marginal groups into participation, a whole system of forces simultaneously transforms new groups—sometimes very large, sometimes previously participating groups—into marginal ones. Who are these marginal groups? Traditionally, one would have thought of Black people in the United States or the untouchables of India. But consumer society creates indirect forms of marginality. If this society dilutes the traditional elites, it simultaneously forms new elites, which are not defined social fields but rather waves cutting across the whole of society. They are functional elites, which are not fixed but exist in a state of permanent mobility, and which generate a strictly functional type of marginality, whose nervous and unstable present is laid bare by the lapidary and indefinable terms 'in' and 'out.'

The end of the bourgeois mentality can be glimpsed. The times that follow are not ones of clarity but of confusion, because what stands in opposition to a lucid and highly structured system, such as the bourgeois mentality, is not a set of objectives but simply a set of expressions of nonconformity,

without a clear objective, which gives it that appearance of nonconformity without cause, capable of deceiving many as to the depth of the changes it announces.