

THE
GREAT COMMUNICATIONS
BREAKDOWN

BASH STREET
KIDS

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Possible prelude to the Incarnation of Ecstasy

Those who seem to communicate have nothing to say

Those who are unable to communicate have the World to say, but lack as yet the means of appropriating it.

Those who seem to communicate have nothing to say, with the exception of those laying bare the falseness of this world, and they are marked men. The only time passion enters the lives of those who seem to communicate is in reacting against such truth, then their repression becomes manifest.

Those who are unable to communicate now, will appropriate the world with passion, a passion born of truth, their repression will have been broken.

The breakdown in communications arises from the fact that there is no commune, there is only isolation, separation; a separation power must continually reinforce if it is to maintain itself, i.e. maintain itself at the top, kicking our mouths shut. The problem is not new, it is built into any hierarchical society.

Where there is no communication there is no effective opposition to power. A genuine communication now arises in moments of opposition, from rebellion to revolution. In moments of transgression the present suddenly becomes real. (For individuals there may be the unuttered communications of love, (not a love worn bare by repetition), it is communication, but it is not opposition, though the poetry of opposition is there : "When a love relationship is at it's height no room is left for any interest in the surrounding world...." Freud.). In moments of opposition, of transgression, a single word can sing throughout our being, revealing it's true meaning. Lautreamont's dictum - Poetry must be made by all - reveals another facet it is made by the total person. Between re-united persons there is genuine communication, and as such, the 'problem' disappears. As Marx said a revolutionary society draws it's poetry from the future, there can be no revolutionary society that is not integrally poetic.

What passes as communication now is patently absurd, even the dictionaries define communication as intercourse between persons. Can anyone still accept that communication exists in the work-place, in education, in the mass media, the underground press, i.e. in modes that are essentially one-way. When the modes extend as far as possible temporally and spatially there is no room or time left in which to reply; our numbness is the only response power wants. From our work, wherever, whatever that may be, we are expected to move to our allotted place in the leisure scene - an armchair before the T.V., a seat in the stalls, a chair in the precincts of further

education. We are administered unto ceaselessly, there is no time to query the nature of the operation, surplus energy will be sapped by boredom. What is generally termed communication, we would rather call orders to remain passive.

In the realm of ideology, from religion to ecology, economics to high art - i.e. all partial critiques - communication must in principle fail, it will remain fragmentary. One has only to look at the situation among 'experts' e.g. among a group of electro-therapeutic freaked out psychiatrists, here, anywhere, as the specialization increases, the numbers who can exchange information even in a limited field decreases. The law moves inexorably to the one-man authority, isolated his thought reaches the brick wall of established values. Lack of dialectic perpetuates the status quo. Realisation of this kind of situation forced even the specialists themselves to seek an interdisciplinary discipline - Cybernetics, Communication Theory - this appeared to be the answer. (No matter that it was another specialisation). Communication could be rendered abstract and thus handled. All that was needed was a framework : Sender - message - receiver - feedback - etc., diagrams with boxes and arrows. Never did the new specialists worry about what might be communicated. As long as a plan could be established the % of shit could be stepped up arbitrarily. (The idea seems to have died of course.)

Apart from certain moments - those in which we experience liberation - what we seem to communicate seems almost invariably to belong to the past or the future. What is required (by power) is that we ignore the present, a present whose general emptiness would appall us. In reality the emptiness is merely multiplied in the past and future. But it is clear that in any true society memory would be of no account, the future too becomes irrelevant - only the present can matter. Now it is the present of repression, the revolutionary possibility is defined by the present of liberation. 'We want everything and we want it now'.

Yet that there is communication now is undeniable. This is the communication of the real, shaped by our true existence. It is marked by anguish, bitterness and raw acerbity, also by the irreducible hope to have done once and for all with 'a world that scandalises us'. Its task is hardly easy, fighting an entrenched ideology, one that slanders it, refuses to acknowledge its existence, suppresses it or pathetically tries to reintegrate it. Soon however that dominant ideology will have no option but to recognise the forces trampling at its door - and then it will be too late. From its slanders, stupidity etc. (Could anyone believe Nixon's speech when he said the aims of American rebel youth were his own ?) - a new polarization is emerging. The opposition is fragmented as yet, inevitably in any hierarchically

defined society, where the introjection of false values is far from easily overcome by the individual remorselessly conditioned to accept the world as he finds it. In an acceptance culture nothing can be accepted.

If the demand is everything and now, who besides the revolutionaries demand it? Unconsciously anyone who is oppressed. There are also children, those free still from the domination of the reality principle, those whose lives are defined by the present. We can see them communicating effortlessly, inventing the present in their play. In adulthood, play is defined again and again by rules from the past. In fact the game is almost beaten out of us in adolescence, we are forced to submit to rules we have had no hand in forming, rules codified by law, habit and passivity, rules that require we leave our desires back in that golden age of childhood. (There is of course no question of minimising the brutality to which children are subjected, but one has to admit that desires could still rise to the surface and lead to action, and that such freedom had an other-worldly beauty, one that we recognise nostalgically.) But out of childhood we are more systematically subjugated - rendered other. In adolescence however that otherness - (be like others, your elders and betters) - is resisted. The language of adolescence tries to resist that of power - i.e. parental authority and all substitute parents. The situation promotes that all too-familiar 'You talk to her, I can't', that characterises the conflict of the forces of order and individual revolt. It is a revolt born of anguish, an incommunicable feeling, the other side of the coin of love it needs so urgently. Yet even when this is found, it is hemmed in by the repressive agencies of social mores. And what is the fate of love? It is a universe of truth we construct in an untrue world, it is a small model, that it too becomes untrue is accountable to the fact that it is battered to death in the banality of an everyday life where falsehood is the norm.

Love of other things? Love of Rock, the great rallying force of youth culture? Alienation moves into new areas. Rock may seem to unite the individual with himself, but it does so by isolating him from the world, it becomes an escape. Early rock 'n rollers appearances were greeted by riots, (some still are) - for the music creates an energy, demands participation, but it actually produces quasi-participation, expressed in the frustration of the riots. No one would deny that it is big business, a whole new teenage culture has been built around youth's aspirations, aspirations produced by the machine itself. Magazines from the 'underground' cater to the new interest, they are superseded as one grows out of 'that phase' by a new set: Rolling Stone or IT are replaced by Hi-Fi News or New Society. The plethora of administered culture is necessary, we might be bored by New Society or whatever, but there is always the carrot of next week's issue or tomorrow's

viewing. Distanciation via the media is the rule; distanciation without the media is taboo.

Those singled out (isolated) for higher education are likely to find their course dead. But how else can it be in this society ? , do they think the University or College is independent ? . Arguments about investments in Rhodesia, or research for Dow are of small magnitude compared to the University or College function as a bastion of established values. No denial from any Vice-Chancellor can change that; such denial is again one-way communication, and as such has no truth value. Certainly the 'expansion of knowledge' must go on, research continue, no one denies that in some fields this is worthwhile. But the general nature of what is taught can only be along prescribed lines, those decreed by a dominant ideology : : in order to streamline and safeguard it's position. What kind of dialogue can there be with someone whose survival depends on a static order of things 'Take your notes and regurgitate them, I will recognise them as mine (or rather whoever we take as authority), and you can receive your reward.' Those in Modern Philosophy, Fine Art, or Fuel Systems who might attempt a total critique of that discipline are not likely to remain unfingered, they are more likely to be shown the door; in Institutes of Higher Learning - dialectics is banned.

Even those who try to speak a non-dialectical truth as they see it, regarding the situation they are in, is generally impossible in terms of dialogue. At a student meeting people do so, but a similar meeting at which the Staff is present will effectively shut their mouths. Is there any clearer indication of the repressive nature of power. Yet to talk of 'power' is still to invite the naive response 'It's all in your head'. Is the violence of the factory floor, or that inflicted on an office boy or ward orderly in their heads ? To say nothing of the inhabitants of the under-developed countries. But that violence should breed counter-violence should surprise nobody, not even those in power. Power in fact has it's moments of difficulty - strikes, occupations etc. - and in all cases these crises of authority mark a breakdown in communications. 'Talks broke down today.....the strike continues....' is definition and general pattern. The old words, the veils drawn over the truth, become threadbare, their absurdity becomes obvious as they are seen to reflect a decaying (diseased and also virulent) order. But most such moments can be saved, pulled back into the dominant 'order of things (it is not the order of persons that characterises this world). A key word is produced - coined might be a more apposite term - e.g. 'Participation'. But once this is sought in reality, it's poverty as a word becomes obvious, for it is merely a word. Maybe the poverty of the situation is not immediately apparent, but this will surely become evident when it is understood in two different ways : 1) by power; 2) by those who bought it (they were bought). But in the interregnum, power will of course move to preserve itself, will try to perfect it's powers of reification,

moving into new areas, establishing false communication about false needs, trying to remould our passivity. While the U.S. youth movement revealed the limits of consumer culture, blocking one of the escape routes of power, revolution itself soon revealed that it could become another commodity, for how long one wonders.

At the back of the struggle in the factory or lecture room lurks the question of representation, foundation stone of our so-called democratic* system. (* Concise Oxford Dictionary'Government by the people, direct or representative '. What nice ambiguity, one reading for power, another for the masses, one realised, the other awaiting it's day.) The system is built around the notion, it presupposes that someone else can express our wishes, can communicate for us. What shit. What Union Official already removed from the workers' everyday routine can know anything of the reality they face, let alone the desires they hold. Can my local M.P. act on my behalf ? Even if I beleived in Parliamentary democracy, what do I do if his beliefs belong on an opposite wing ? (They always will be). The notion is clearly absurd, only the basic ambiguity, the lack of movement can maintain the edifice. The one-Party State is a world-wide phenomenon. There can be no feedback to the people, because there is no (free) input from the people; there is only the detached mouthpiece of the people of the people issuing instructions to the people, instructions devised by power

On a cultural front we are asked to consider the universal truths of art, a message communicated from the artist to me. Has he not encoded a message for me to decipher ? Without exaggeration we can say that 95% of the messages we might decode are not worth the bother, they are essentially contemplative and elite-oriented. Their message reflects the dominant ideology, be it that of the Romanesque, that of Socialist-Realism with it's picture of the monumental State, or the free form or nihilist reduction served up in the liberal version of the State. The question is quite simple, what kind of art can one expect in a repressive State ? When art can no longer preserve the 'promesse de bonheur', or function as critique, then it is no longer fit for human consumption and can be discarded (this should have happened years ago). The artist who accepts the world as he finds it (opting out does just that) seems to automatically forfeit his potentiality of imaging that promesse, he precludes the possibility of real communication. In opting out because he finds society unable to accept him, or finds society unacceptable - i.e. regards it as bankrupt, he ignores the fact that the cultural is likewise bankrupt, and to the same degree. That society has to be changed at it's root values. Dada intuitively realised this, from the destruction of the language of art and language itself it hoped to move to the destruction of the old world. Aragon wrote the real demands of the age :

'No more artists, no more authors, musicians, sculptors, religions, republicans, royalists, imperialists, anarchists, socialists, bolsheviks, politicians, proletariat, democrats, bourgeois, aristocrats, army, police, nations. Of these follies we want nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.'

Into such a void could only be sucked a new form of life. The limitations of Dada could only create a void into which they themselves were sucked, wearing full artistic regalia - with a few noteworthy exceptions, those who don't figure in the history books. Still one shouldn't minimise what they tried, nor the passion with which they tried. Their negation of a world of accepted values was quite different from the resigned nihilism of today's avant-garde with their meaningless gestures. That they are meaningless means they can happily be taken up by the media machinery, totally devoid of any message they can be pumped out with the rest of the messages that are basically false - false in that they conceal the real potentialities of this world. Unable to communicate the artist communicates with himself, whispers his defeat to his own ears. But he is still spectacularising something: earth, snow, a photograph, you name it he can remove it from its context call it art, or whatever he wants. No one expects a stone to speak to us (or paint) - communication is denied. The media happily pushes this year's new thing - earth, lyric abstraction or whatever. It is neatly labelled, handily made compact for instant assimilation - this void. " This is a new life style. Welcome to the void. Tune in and drop out of the game of living, it isn't worth it. Accept death now, learn to live with it. We can produce it for you. You just have to listen to us. We can keep you on the cultural circuit, we'll keep you informed." And they will, about fuck-all. One has just to look at our cultural history; there it lies, acres of frozen moments, layer upon layer in galleries, libraries and bookshops. (It is precisely the form that freezes it.), the moment of the past frozen solid, and trying to freeze us with it. We are expected to accept this past, because now there is nothing. Freud was right in talking of the terrible price we pay for culture, wrong in thinking we had to pay it.

A note on lies (our lies, not those of power):-

There are two basic kinds of lie : 1) that to cover up the poverty of our lives, 2) that which defies authority.

1) Goes under the name of exaggeration, romanticising, daydreaming. In itself it betrays the lie of the world as it is - as a construct of unfilled and thwarted possibilities. In this world lies of this kind are a natural response.

2) Is the simple lie that cheats power - e.g. No, I did not pinch daddy's wallet / screw the boss's wife / arrive three hours late for work etc.. Neither form of lie will be necessary in any true society - the first would be transformed into a practical critique; the second situation need no longer require that it be shielded in this way.

Conclusion

Power breeds despair; despair breeds an alternative power, this alternative power must unite our individual despairs. unless we are to

accept an ultimate reification, one that puts not only the words of the existing order into our mouths, but will attempt to reify actual desires. Such reification is attempted now, but is also resisted now. However the reification of language - i.e. group-oriented, or class-structured - naturally leads to a situation whereby allies do not recognise each other. Only a lack of dialectic on the part of 99% of left-wing groups can lead to there being 99 sects, only a lack of dialectic can lead to the continual introjection into their own structure of the values and norms they supposedly oppose.

However there is no doubt our allies are everywhere, those rendered inarticulate, isolated but as yet not aware of WHY - these people are the potential force of revolution. Revolution is an act of transgression, transgression is the poetry of this world, it establishes communication of the individual with himself and en masse. Communication is the poetry of the individual reunited with himself, the poetry of lovers no longer isolated in their two-ness, the poetry of a world become sane and whole. It is hardly too much to ask. It is certainly enough to fight for.

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