

The Little Game of the Man of the Old Regime - With Construction Kit -



“First and foremost what we abhor on the *whole* is not just the image of some ultimate substance, some indivisible density; it is also and above all (at least for me) *bad form*.”
Roland Barthes, *Digressions*

1. INITIATION

Little subversions make for big conformities.

2. PROVISIONAL DEFINITION

The man of the Old Regime is the figure of bourgeois subjectivity at the moment of its liquidation and hollowing out by cybernetic domination, which historically was issued from that bourgeoisie itself. Defunct, bourgeois subjectivity survives itself indefinitely in

the myth of the free, autonomous, strong individual, self-assured and sure of his world, a world that contains in its fenced-in yard a set of values and established experiences that our “individual” *wholly* inhabits, as well as the consumption of a certain number of cultural commodities that serve him as a system of references. From being the *object* of social critique during the whole of the 19th century, and a good part of the 20th, the man of the Old Regime has now become the *subject* of such critique, in a reconstitution process internal to commodity domination which now requires the maintenance of the man of the Old Regime as a false alternative to the *American way of life*. What we’re talking about here is a *form of life*, and not an attributable class of individuals: hence we are inferring him from our singular inclinations, no less than from the empirical summary of character traits, cultural practices, sediments of habit, and institutional skeletons that justify him. The man of the Old Regime functions as a womb for socially produced, possible habituses; for us this isn’t about critiquing a “way of life,” but about putting ourselves on a plane of consistency that would allow reality to be read in terms of an ensemble of ethical and political confrontations between forms-of-life. We are not going to dissect nor judge them, but merely take a material measurement of their lines of flight and the playing area they offer. The man of the Old Regime is a special kind of Bloom whose guarded escape from the world is his sole and unique line of flight.

3. METHOD.

The walk-on role relationship that Bloom has with his own life, has no reason for it; that means that we can’t undo the tangle of “psychological” and social forces that constitute the essence of Old Regime humanity. It would be as illusory as it would be useless to claim to be able to say what the Old Regime man “is,” so we’ll just content ourselves with describing what happens to him everyday. A sociological analysis and criticism of the ideology there, one founded in a comprehension of the real interests and strategies pursued by individuals and in a will to dissipate the social effects of the interference with and travesty of these interests, in spite of the occasional clarifications it might offer, is just part of a struggle to outline this domain of *habitus-incorporation*, one that can’t be justified, not even subtly, as something taken up out of social self-interest. The man of the Old Regime can only be handled with a formal description that would update both the defense mechanisms of his individual *art of living* while also updating our evaluation of the political institutions prerequisite for his persistence, namely the monopoly on public violence by what’s called the “state” authorities, and by their corollary, bourgeois publicity, which interrupts all the real consequences of thought. The Old Regime *posture* can only ever exist as a particular internal modality of the New Cybernetic Regime, as a *liberalness* granted by the latter, and must be understood, in bureaucratic sociological terms, as a strategy for the distinction and affirmation of a non-bloomized habitus in an era when Bloom is a transcendental aspect of all critical theory on social being. More than just a particular vision or theory of the world, the “discourse” of the Old Regime is an epistemological apparatus that decrypts reality by means of a system of classic and general categories (man, the passions, interest, history, action, negativity, difference, Spectacle, etc.), which always permits a warding off and neutralizing of all events by bringing them down to the safety of “been there done that.” Moreover, it permits those Blooms that play more or less masterfully the Old-Regime-man role to silence their own *singular* implication in what’s happening to them; by thus splitting hairs about everything

that happens, the man of the Old Regime pardons himself from ever thinking about his own real situation. The passion for critique that animates him thus often expresses itself in a simple reflex of distancing: he doesn't need to fabricate new concepts in order to think about any given event; he needs to do so in order to actively deny any and all events, by fitting them in with some already-known essence.

4. AN APPARATUS INCARNATE.

The man of the Old Regime is a responsive type; he's perhaps the first in history to live in a state of *total* resentment, since he can't resign himself to completing the inevitable labor of finally interring the habitus culturally associated with the bourgeois ethic on pain of indicting himself. A real experience of the contemporary situation is forbidden to him, because – and in this sense he's profoundly autistic – he speaks, or rather, he *discourses* about the present advances of the involutorial process of capitalist subsumption and on the morals that sketch themselves out therein from above -- from a *bird's eye view*, carefully secured by safety tape of both the police and linguistic kinds. In no circumstances can he let himself fully go into experience and be contaminated by such contemptible realities; rather he lays a blanket rejection on anything *unheard-of*, whatever is not validated by the *classical* forms of existence. This is a question of his survival, pure and simple. In effect, in the more or less long term, this attenuated form-of-life is doomed to disappearance, undermined by the evaporation of its conditions of existence and the unavoidable shrinkage of peaceful space for its expression. Politically, this decline manifests itself in the terror this strange, frightened citizen lives in, nostalgically longing for the good old days of submission to the limited sovereignty of a Nation-State, a submission which he could plainly and fully fathom on sight, and from which he could always escape and take refuge in his *inner conscience*, a liberated zone, the homeland of the Self where self-ignorance could easily pass itself off as moral conscience. Dispossessed of his little stock of anecdotes and violently removed from his natural *milieu* by the growing onrush of the Empire's acephalous, non-contractual, inordinate sovereignty, the man of the Old Regime has been swindled by History, and, world-weary, has sent in his invoice; thus in France a few years ago we saw an Old Regime politico-intellectual party and movement crop up which attempted to bail out the water from a few good old myths like Republic, School, or Authority, in the shadow of which they hoped to be able to go on living. But their coin has no more currency, and Sirius' perspective doesn't bring home the bacon anymore. The man of the Old Regime, thus, is reduced by all this to bringing his theoretical neutralization and interference apparatus into existence biographically, an apparatus of “change-for-its-own-sake-ism” [*bougisme*], modernity, the dominant ideology of party-down youth-ism, progress, mobility, flexibility and clean slates; in brief, the ever-so pleasant globalization so dear to the “liberal-libertarians,” versus a certain number of properly valorized postures and concepts like critique, reflection, authority, slowness, conservatism, “tory anarchism,” the Republic so dear to the “Bolshevik-bonapartists,” respect for the past, traditionalism, literature, discursive masterfulness, etc. But the part he pretends to play so passionately has in fact already been played out. The assertions, positions, theses, and analyses that comprise the feigned confrontations he has in his world are always already known to all, and in no way serve to clarify reality but act as symbols of recognition, gauges of belonging, rhetorical guide-rails. These are *gimmicks*; it's the stuff of carnival fortune-

tellers. The static here comes from an eternal playing out, over and over again, of the old false opposition between conservatism/progressivism, terms that are never more than two *variants* of the same anthropological thesis – a thesis of pacification that postulates man as a living-social-being-in-society. And the point of it all is to naturalize an apparatus that comprises one of the major controlled burns to hide the fact of human reality as civil war.



Who could still believe this world to be worthy of love? What good does it do to love what itself is devoted to hatred? Even God can't do it, and resigns himself to allowing Hell to go on existing.

Bernanos

5. GIMMICK

One of the favorite gimmicks of the man of the Old Regime is the declamatory affirmation of his militant exteriority to “this” world, his irreducibility relative to the so-called “mass” culture, the dominant bloc of alienation, perceived as the impassable horizon of all human positions; this reflex at bottom only expresses the fetishism of a

chimerical foreignness to the world that seeks itself out for example in the practice of perpetual, pathetic, misanthropic – or even schismatic hygienic measures. Owing to the heavy historical tendency to centralist pacification which has marked the French State for such a long while, and has produced the citizenist psychology we know so well – the psychology of subjects believing they can find freedom in the proper operation of a State that takes charge of all the “political” aspects of their lives – the Old Regime posture is reminiscent, in a preferential way, of a certain tradition very much our own, one that can be traced back to the “anti-monarchist” libertines, and has continued all the way down to the right-wing/royalist [*Maurrasian* – from Charles Maurras] and dietary situationism of today, by way of reactionary catholics, heideggerians of all obediences, anarcho-capitalists, “Hussars,” and other Sollerso-Celinians. [Phillippe Sollers/Louis-Ferdinand Celine]. In the last resort, old regime man will always try to make good on his back-up *right*, his *right* to an inward emigration. Today all these fractions are part of a vast movement remaking the battle-fronts, all seeking to ally themselves with liberal-humanism so as to escape the historical confrontation between the Empire and whatever escapes it.

6. A GOLDEN PERSONALITY

The man of the Old Regime is still, whatever he may think, a *liberal puritan*, even when he plays at dressing himself up in the *worn-out* masks of the libertine, the high-lifer, the hero, the bandit, the rebel, the strategist, the novelist, or even the expert ataraxia-enthusiast. These are just so many roles that he masters only enough to give off an illusion. The impurity, violence, subversion, the negative, and the sacred he enjoys invoking once in a while, are just so many pretexts for another infinite literary rumination. In general, all the experience of the man of the Old Regime is highly structured, built around references, not to the commodity – which is vulgar in his eyes – but to culture. Like his much maligned brother-Blooms, he has purchased a whole panoply for himself; and he sees himself as quite upwardly mobile on the culture market of subjectivity-casting. His particular form of showiness remains, towards and against everything, a very French product within the world-wide production of subjectivities.

7. A LITTLE LITANY (AN EXAMPLE OF THE PANOPLY)

Festivist mode of production fashioning new humanity / the Brussels Health Authorities refrigerate everyday life / “principle of precaution” = morbid theology / disappearance of Evil, and hence of Good, from the Original Sin, and thus of the joy of sinning / end of the Sacred / juvenile festivism = preserver of fascism / anthropological mutation having already taken place / irreversible decadence of the critical mind / slipping of populace towards a dream-like state / seizure of power by the pleasure principle / demolition of all the load-bearing structural separations which built the adult world / diffuse will to return to the state of innocence from before the Fall / abolition of Conflict / creation = subversion of the mixed economy / return of the human race to animal life / desire: now purely utilitarian, mechanical / return of Culture to the fold of Nature / examination of the Old World, of History / “Because life’s like that. It’s something continuous, with its mix of nice people and mean people, which has been brought to a stop now.” / change in the function of literature: no longer reflecting the contradictions of human beings, but celebrating a neo-human free of any contradictions (values of good citizenship,

conviviality, parity, fraternity) / a new imperative of Citizen Wellbeing / replacement of the negative by intersubjective self-negativity / there is no reality anymore / disappearance of the concrete under the battering ram of the Universal / tyranny of nice sentiments, transparency, mirthless people / health through literature / “thinking will be like vomiting” / long live the aristocracy of critical thought! / playful erasure of differences / computerized oppression / poetico-morbid re-enchantment of public space / closely entwined romanticism of community / victimocracy / the self as an authenticity bloc, as proof, as opus / triumphant survival of life / process of provincial alignment / resurfacing of the romantic lie / museumization of cities / change in the nature of the concept of an “event” (inversion of meaning/sense) / parodic end to the division of labor (everybody stay in their proper place!), of money, of classes, and lots of other things / collapses of all kinds / reading = access to a vast pre-spectacular human experience, to true conversation / reading = finished / nostalgia for authentic bourgeois publicity and skill in it (salons) / “people now resemble their times more than they do their parents” / erasure of personality / unaddressed falsehoods / perpetual present / miserable contemporaries ever more separated from the possibility of getting to know any authentic experience / pseudo-ization of the world and of things / necessity to discover one’s individual preferences / critique first and foremost the full-fledged disavowal of mankind.

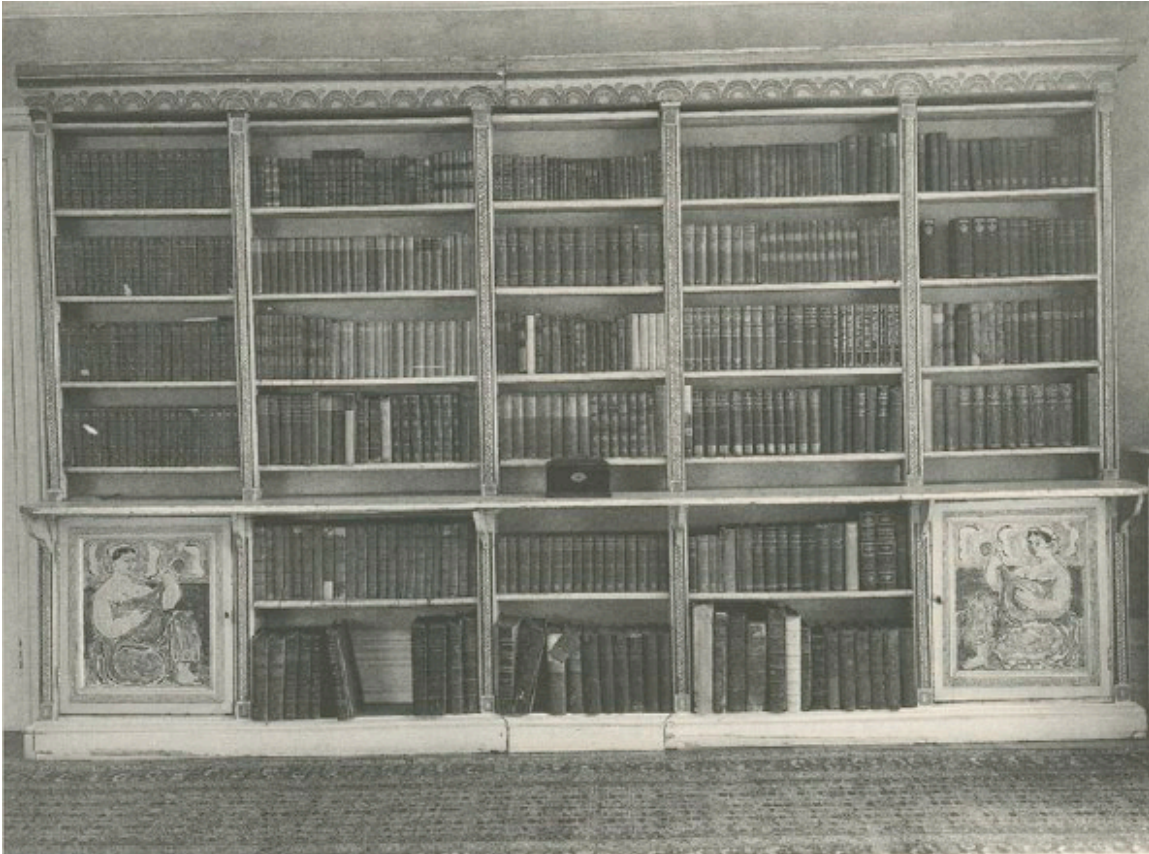
8. POLISHING

This kind of Old Regime “sensibility,” which relies on yesteryear’s well-proven forms-of-life, can only arise, theoretically – or even literally – when what’s old knows itself to be old and breaks off from the historical process: it involves living forms not recognizing themselves as such but letting themselves only be evoked in memory, once they’ve already expired. Thus the Old Regime posture reveals itself as integrally *liberal*: it proceeds from a fundamental choice to make a “museum-like” secularization of thought, one that is certainly tacit, but is justified culturally again and again, and hence intrinsically unfolds within the sphere of representation - although no one invokes their attachment to the “real,” to the “concrete” more insistently than the man of the Old Regime does. In fact, this is one of those little contemporary mythologies that like the others is seeking to get itself anthropologically patented. Nothing to it but another slick little play on words where our fortune-teller valiantly strikes down the paper tigers he pulls out of his hat, and, since, as everyone knows, “History is over” and there’s nothing at stake, proves himself to be just another post-modern toad like the rest - but one that rolls in the trough of the self-importance of “critical” thought. He’s a *civilized* Bloom, one that’s been civilized by the impersonal, by what “PEOPLE” think.

9. A HERITAGE TO MAKE THE MOST OF

The man of the Old Regime spends the majority of his time playing the tired out hero of The Modern Era who – since he doesn’t have the strength anymore to claim to be himself – contemplates himself indefinitely in the posture he’s *inherited*. This heritage is the rickety assumption of all the old artificial dividing lines producing that cozy being called the modern citizen, inhabiting, for better or worse, his own inexperience of the world. Persisting, with the obligatory catholic bad faith, in an obsolete psychological paradigm (Balzac above all!), the man of the Old Regime seeks out everywhere the proofs of the particular Human Comedy he’s attached to, even while he is immersed in the bloomesque

Farce, wandering lost with no landmarks to guide him. He'd like to think he's a Descartes or a Casanova, when he's really just a condescending despiser of social entertainment, the cartographer of his own renunciations, the herald of the incantatory negative, which works to make his passivity into a pretty looking little book of critical lucidity, perfect as a gift for the new year (your oldest son will adore it, that little intellectual; you'll see!). In any case, the clothes he wears don't match his build.



When humanity has attained to such a stage where every bit of progress, each new invention, inexorably sinks men into a deeper inhumanity, language too degenerates quickly, and all understanding becomes impossible.

J. Semprun

10. AN ADVERTISED AUTHORITY

The undeniable charm one can get from playing the tragic games of nostalgia, from making the melancholic sentiment of the flowing away and irreversibility of time into the alpha and omega of all critical reflection on existence and the course of the world, carries within it the risk of autistic rambling, the risk of getting all caught up in a posture that becomes a mere hatred of *what's there*, of what's *being played out*. When reality doesn't reveal itself to be anything anymore but the decadence of a past grandeur, it doesn't matter how much we pose as *hold outs*: the velvet gloves are still on. What we denounce about the man of the Old Regime is thus not that he has at bottom so little real experience, since that's a condition that is now common to us all, but rather his puerile

mania for gumming up the game with the repressive function that his much-advertised experience performs, which he pulls out as a perpetual argument for his authority. In the last resort, his infantilism squared perhaps merely arises from the fact that he's *flipping out*; from the fact that he's refused to attain to any experience of the present conflict outside of the civilized, police-like framework proper to his class.

11. A BIT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The position of the man of the Old Regime is an untenable one, since his critique, founded on hatred as well as on a voluntary misunderstanding of the conflict and experiments that are going on now, has in the end a reactionary basis: the visceral incapacity to live *in* this world and the pure will to *differentiation* that flows from that. Descartes or Casanova were the majestic sons of their era, whereas our man has but one wish: to no longer be part of this world, and to find the wrong reasons for that flight. That's why the critical descriptions made by this or that man of the Old Regime always remain literary in nature, as if he were signaling from beyond the grave, transmuting the abjectly impoverished material that he does no more than give a name to in sniggering satires and baroque vanity about the vacuity of worldly life, in the little encyclopedias of inconveniences he feeds on, or in the sublime tombs of an era only some laudatory biography could save. The acts of the man of the Old Regime thus reproduce the classical act of the religions: the creation of a metaphysical "back-world."

12. WHERE'S THE BODY AT?

It appears then that the sensibility of the man of the Old Regime is but the opposite term of a false opposition, one that renders said opposition profoundly in solidarity with the enlightened false consciousness of the super-hipster: beneath the vague super-referential agitation of a fidgety postmodernity and the cynical arrogance of a self-proclaimed traditionalism, there is the same – idealist – incapacity to start from the self, from one's own form-of-life, one's *current* (and not just hypothetical or incantatory) desires and means, to give oneself room to understand what's at play, where one stands in this whole thing, and to figure out how to escape the general *paralysis*. If the pious agitation in favor of the "third millennium" is laughable, the therapeutic stubbornness in favor of the *critical mind* is much more so. Within a capitalist society that not only integrates critique but makes it operate to its profit, it's much more a question of feeding the thickness of a critical corporeity with an effective grip on reality than of discoursing on the reasons for one's powerlessness. Among these two brother-enemies, so tragically in need of one another in order to exist and oppose one another, who respectively hypostatize a pleasure principle and a reality principle that are equally abstract, who live in an empire of symbols that the one seeks to *surf* and the other to *deconstruct*, there is a real lack of any true *presence in the world*.

13. HANDRAIL

Condemned to perpetually find in his tow what he can only *denounce*, moved by an inexhaustible resentment in the face of the presupposed loss of what he thought he might possess one day, the man of the Old Regime wears himself out in the Sisyphus' task of spitting at it all in plain sight, and passing off his real powerlessness as a superior and unassailable consciousness. This manner of always attempting to transform lead into

gold, this *authorized* critique of the Spectacle, this *second hand* life, is on its way to becoming the most popular of cultural commodities; the man of the Old Regime is an informed, demanding, and meticulous consumer, one that does not take kindly to reprimand. He's paid for his seat on the boat of modernity; he shouldn't have to be on the lookout for the ticket man; and thus he's well in his right to *complain about it* when the ship sinks. *Subjectivation via the kinds of complaints proper to believers has, in the man of the Old Regime, been secularized as a critical consumerism.*

14. THE NIXED FOOL

Cybernetic capitalism presents itself as ever more idealistic about its reformatting of the world, the goal of which is to extract "informational value." Among other things, it makes the "consciousness that you've not been *duped*" work to its benefit as the conceited urge to not come off looking the fool that the man of the Old Regime shares. All discursive or partial contestation is thus brought back into the Whole and contributes to reinforcing the system by rendering it more impermeable to the critique of the process in acts. This tends in this way to generalize enlightened false consciousness, rendering its underlings *complicit* in the ongoing cybernetic normalization process, in order to immunize them against all possibility of making a *real* departure from the Program. They can wink their eye or lift their arms to the sky all they like; they remain merely the marvelous little props of a grumpy old humanism. To the extent that everything becomes explainable and criticizable, nothing can happen anymore at all. And so the "non-dupes" wander through the night. And they are sinister. The Old Regime posture is a past-experience neutralization device that works by coagulating it into *reference values*. And so our man (including his garden, his humanities, and his identity) carefully cultivates the practice of little differences, slight deviations, miniscule put-downs, always seeking to set himself up as against what he disdainfully calls the Integrated Spectacle, the Great Whatever, the party-party society, the present abjection, or more seriously still, what he sees as alienation's herds of fanatics sinking to the deepest depths of the abyss (upon the signal "cell-phone" or "rollerblades," grind teeth audibly), always camouflaging his irreducible attachment to precisely that which he ostensibly vomits: Power, which he so hates but secretly desires, since it *makes him live*-- in his totally carefree manner. If the man of the Old Regime is now sick and dying, it's because he's turned all the energy he mobilized to produce his "consciousness" against himself in an autotomic process of progressive self-paralysis. A disastrous flight forward, this self-devouring which forbids itself any real activity since it would be a priori "polluted" by the grip of Power. Wherever power circulates, wherever human relationships are experienced in anonymity and opacity, for instance among these technoid cretins that he never ceases jeering at, he will be unable to *grasp* anything nor understand anything, and will make do with the cretinizing or alienating power of the "times," of fashion, or of the mass media. Though he does see how authoritarian social entertainment is just *one* of the present modalities of domination, the man of the Old Regime will remain attached to the repression-hypothesis (while easily mocking – for the wrong reasons – leftist attempts at "liberation"), which permits him to pose as a holdout against the "dehumanization" process brought about by the "ongoing anthropological mutation" by simply distancing himself from it, as an individual irreducible to the confusion of it all, as impervious to a fantastical total social power. An easy sleight of hand. A simple play on words.

Solidarity between power and its critique, by the frenetic disclaiming of any lines of flight that might differ from the politics proper to the back-world. And he willingly admits it: he's merely a *high-end* spectator on the collapse, a detached chronicler of the course of the disaster; a spirited reporter, reporting from the edge of the abyss.

15. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONSCIOUS

An idealist spectator, who first and foremost schematizes all empirical data by means of the scrawny transcendental of the sedimentation of past experience – which he never got much of after all, our little orphan of Historical Meaning, who ceaselessly falls back on the paternal function, the symbolic order, the reality principle, a hypothetical history that took place and is now finished, wears himself out abstractly denouncing (Look out! Here comes the construction kit!) semiotic confusion, sexual indifferentiation, the digital reformatting of experience, the global commodification of the world, panoptico-festive control, the generalization of living currency throughout standard social relations, the health police regulating everyday life, declaring that his is a critique of the *irrationality* of our times, and that all men would really need to do would be to become conscious of the structural irrationality at work, and show some good sense, in order for everything to go better in the best of possible *common decency*. The aesthetic of disaster, catastrophe, and collapse (which have always already taken place) almost automatically changes into a reinforcement of a good inclination towards critique, thus contributing to the triumph of the citizen-ideology of forms-of-life that are assisted-living but *conscious*. But the youth of today -- do tell; are they really conscious?

The young men that surround us – above all the youngest of them, the adolescents – are almost all monsters. Their physical aspect is almost terrifying, and when it's not, it is sickeningly sad. Their fur is really horrible; their hair looks like some kind of caricature; they have those pale complexions, those extinguished eyes... These must be the masks of some kind of barbaric initiation, but it's barbaric in a lackluster way. Or perhaps these are the masks of a kind of diligent and unconscious integration that kindles no compassion.

Pasolini

16. A PORTRAIT GALLERY

All the traditional forms of authority and mastery have visibly lost their aura and have been degraded into the postures of expert, technician, politician, victimology consultant; as for the man of the Old Regime, that doctor in nothing, that strategist that always loses, that professional of language, he is reduced to *aping* the cheerful fatcat, the anarcho-poujadist [Pierre Poujade: champion of small-business conservatism], the protective, gruff *Pater*, the reasonable cynic, the man of infallible judgment, the little cherub peering into the abyss, the stable but disturbed humanist, the honest man who occasionally keeps bad company, the grinning shopkeeper who doesn't lose his cool, the right wing anarchist, or more commonly the *realpolitiker of emotion*. Like the others, he plays a role; a role with some composure, as required for the proper maintenance of the French mental décor. But he distinguishes himself by his strategy, which is to *counter today's poverty with yesterday's*, without even seeking to concretely fill himself with such poverty but by exorcising it and refusing to *grasp* it. Invariably all his wisdom comes

down to this miserable dialectic between false obviousness and distancing: *well of course* (God and Man are dead, woman does not exist, transparency reigns, the world is rotten, children and hybrid beings have taken power, control is in full swing, apparatuses govern us, the world turns), but what do you expect (milady); *that's how it is*, and you know what, it's always been that way and always will be that way; sure, everything's been getting worse, but for we of the old school, to be aware of it and not be like the urban zombies that we pass by now and then – well, that's the essential thing; it doesn't cost anything, does it? And that's why – between you and me – your son's got no balls.



I always had a taste for interiors... intimate habits, private conventions, the details of houses: a new interior for me to penetrate was always a pleasant discovery for me.
Sainte-Beuve

17. AN INTERIOR MAN

The man of the Old Regime doesn't really have any fun; a smile at the corner of his mouth, he chooses the petty false consciousness of someone who thinks he knew about it first and is putting up with it. Everything he can't manage to understand he throws into one of his two conceptual garbage bins that he makes such an extensive and manifestly defensive use of; stupidity and barbarism. He thinks that urbaneness, tact, politeness, courtesy above all, and good manners comprise a legacy passed down to us which will suffice to protect us from commodity barbarism.

He practices a false pathos of distance, referring everyone back to their own suffering, a pathos that does not increase his potential but makes him an *untouchable*, in the proper sense. He endlessly expects the worst, which has ended up not even needing to happen; in fact, he *desires* the worst, not for its own sake, but because all in all only the worst would permit him to remain in his cynical half-withdrawn position, threatened as he is by that possibility, which radically changes the deal and resides – always already there – in abeyance, *between bodies*. But to free himself, he'd have to come down off his pedestal, abandon a relationship with the world constituted of *suspension*, interruption, and internalization, and leave behind the altar of substantial rationality, before which he chants endlessly, as well as those refined, small pleasures that he plays defense attorney for, and that are certainly nothing but *vindictive submission*.



18. A GUARD-DOG MAN, ON DUTY

The man of the Old Regime is the unfortunate consciousness of our times which has ended up loving its misery and indeed even delights in and feeds off it. However quick he is to use the billyclub of "alienation" to disqualify any gesture however slightly ecstatic, it's just because he's been dying of sour grapes ever since *events* arose: because events send him back to his solipsistic solitude, his waiting room lifestyle, contemplative and aggressive. It's piquant to note that the man of the Old Regime does take up most of the concepts of the old critical theory right when they cease to be operational, but always feels a certain annoyance about the concept of separation. Basically he just can't manage to grasp the coexistence of the extreme separation and the extreme symbiosis-relinquishment of Blooms within the spectacle of social entertainment, because separation is precisely the *cipher* of his unavowable solidarity with Bloom, the dead angle of his self-consciousness which he'd so sought after. In the same way, his opposition to transperential mobilization by informational Capital or to a despicable praise for confessions as of value in themselves are all done out of reactionary motives: the man of the Old Regime invokes the secret only as a fetish, and only practices it in a truly anti-social opacity, because he is incapable of attaining to even the slightest sharing,

any interruption to his culturally acquired suspension. A man of existential moderation, he puts his retention-hysteria to work for him. He's the perfect picture of an anal-type Victorian: lucid, he nonetheless holds back. But for what?

19. PROVEN USE

The man of the Old Regime lives and acts from the fantastical perspective of posterity, in this sense in conformity with a sovereignty that is simply *literary*. If he *has* always already comprehended everything and expected everything, that everything appears to him to have already been done or tried, it's just because he *is* already comprehended within the little circle of his renunciations: thus his activity is primarily of a linguistic nature: with him, critical theory becomes an analysis of the language of a society which is quickly earning the qualification of totalitarian, all the while retrenching itself in a grumpy attitude of haughty non-participation. Putting the world at a distance and declaring it null and void for its excess vulgarity is enough for him. The unspoken imperative here remains *the Puritanism of proper usage* (of language, emotions, objects, foods, the critical spirit; in brief, of his "profession of being a Man," in general), everywhere and on all occasions. What makes up the man of the Old Regime is, in the end, merely the *radical theory of the citizen*, hooked into the IVs of the 18th centurist encyclopedism and orthographical correctness. All upsurge of an offensive practice will thus be immediately accused as a *taking advantage of custom*, that civilized version of the police-like notion of "arme par destination" [using as a weapon something not customarily used as a weapon]. To our "*that shit happens*," he'll always oppose his pathetic "*but, you just don't do that sort of thing!!!??*"

20. NO TOUCHING, BUDDY

We find among the men of the Old Regime an absolute rejection of "monstrosity," a ferocious denial of impropriety as such; in brief: a motive in all the subtle forms of tautological and infantile identity politics at play in his bedroom psychology, and that Barthes in his time masterfully put down to the poujadist philosophy of *good sense*: the man of the Old Regime is *also*, but not above all, the white, male, cultured petty-bourgeois, who's afraid of everything because he is nothing and doesn't know how to do anything. What he opposes to Biopower is simply a less up-to-date version of normalcy, a forgetting of bodies rather than their neutralization. The lie of affirming a non-vacillating feeling of reality and its permanence rests on a fatal confusion between the feeling of cleanness affirmed to no one in particular (only out of reaction against the fantasized mass of the unclean par excellence: the commodity and its cultural corollary, hybridity) and that of true substantiality, as a sedimentation of successive possessions, in the sense where gestures, acts, conflicts take possession of us and make us *thicker* (which is just the opposite of heaviness). The beautiful completeness that he carries like a flag before him prohibits all communication with the man of the Old Regime: there we find his ideal of complete separation, permitting *predictable* and *sure* relations: among well-mannered people we don't *touch* one another! He thus lives in the paranoid fear of the bursting of his constitutive lie of a "stable" construction of the self projected to the outside as a big weighty thing prohibiting any real transmission of experience. Like his other ghosts, his advertised paternalism is absolutely hollow because he has nothing to transmit, since he has no real skill, no knowledge-power, just his posture and his

references, which will for a little while longer still permit him to be able to do without the world. As a consequence of this, the man of the Old Regime lives in a closed universe where he only ever finds himself and his peers, unfortunate and wandering systems of reference whose free space is always limited to a few salons, libraries, and box offices.



And when he has anything to complain about besides the way the world's going, he can always call the authorities. There's a whole, stuffy world oozing out of his person, that of the backwards psychological contradictions that undermined the classical bourgeoisie of the 19th century (hypocrisy, frustration, inexperience, neurosis, social drama, hatred of the other, greed, misogyny, narcissism, anal fixation, mediocrity, racism, gossip, constant terror of ridicule, obscene outbursts, the proper authoritarianism, cult of "style," – warning, this list is non-exclusive!).

21. HEAVY, BUT NOT THICK

A whole economy of nostalgia for origins is at work in his discourse: the dreamed-of primordial originator, even situated in history, has more value than the impure, tardy, composite, finished, intrinsically alienated element we evolve in. The man of the Old Regime wants (or says that he wants, which for him is the same thing), a *restoration* (of presence, of meaning, of reality, of the Father, of God, of the King, of the Republic, of man, of order, of separation); in brief, a restoration of precisely those great idealist narrations that have for so long served to justify the mass prohibition on any acts of singular or collective sovereignty. He is, subsequently, *heavy*, Gaullist, paralytic, universalist by default and regionalist by virtue of the Michelin guide [a popular roadmap], incapable of getting out of the maze of a politics of the *whole* - a praxis indexed to a teleological heavy machinery (that certainly doesn't cost anything). Quote: "Whisper in the conservatives' ears: time's running out."

22. A POLITICS OF QUOTATION

The man of the Old Regime makes a poor use of the notion of *majority*, as do all heirs; because majority is what he permanently mobilizes against the slightest threat of excess or overflow, outside of a few culturally admissible forms (drunkenness, sexuality, splits, and so on). The defense of heritage ("nothing or almost nothing can be judged from now on with yesterday's vocabulary and words. We'll have to put quotes around every word, as if handling them with tweezers.") isn't a bad thing in itself, no more than the historical meaning that he brags that he's the last possessor of. Though like all of us he's come quite late, when the world is already old and heavy with the weight of all the unrealized possibilities of history, for him this late birth feels like reason to put on a moralizing air, a stylized varnish, an aesthetic of a little tight-lipped smile, an ethics of weak-willed submission. Authority and discipline only ever manifest themselves in him as repression, and not as a true mastery of the self including even its abandonment. Certainly, nothing's fairer than his critique of the hysterical minority state that those who have been socialized by all-normalizing capitalism wallow in; but such a critique is nothing if it is not

practiced *continuously*, as a real, everyday growth of potential. As a means of differentiation and as an alibi, it is not merely pathetic, it's authentically *infantile*.



23. CRITIQUE AND EXPRESSION

The Old Regime posture comes from a pathos that is a priori allied, if only objectively, with the normalization process that it rejects, because it never targets the true enemy, that monstrous coalescence of local apparatuses regulating and restraining ever more what it is *materially* possible to do, and just takes it out on the bait graciously put within its reach (modernity, alienation, Capital, globalization, the Spectacle, etc.). In reality, it appears that the social gratification is all the greater for what you might *declare* yourself to be, do, or think, as that easily falls in as a gear within the mythical mechanisms of individuality (still free!) that bourgeois publicity rules, without ever bearing consequence. The man of the Old Regime, who calls upon negativity, the struggle for recognition, upon desire, who calls up evil (in literature or

elsewhere), on guilt, or still to secrecy, remains in fact the only heir to the avant-gardist practice – though he himself rejects it – of slogans. He cherishes his comfortable “freedom of expression,” all the while tasting the delights of “ill will,” at a time when, just for laughs, one can incite to murder in the newspapers because you’re not allowed to just make a simple mistake anymore in the subway. Criticism without effectiveness, that is, *capitalization on consciousness*, has its origins in freedom of opinion, that luxury that the bourgeoisie gave itself to furnish the boredom of its Sunday afternoons, and which went from being the occupation of the “brightest” of their children at first to being on the way towards becoming the flower of our semiotics industry. Certainly this critique can be useful locally since in certain very specific cases the bird’s eye position proper to the man of the Old Regime permits him to clarify and name the *surface* phenomena that rule the present times -- among others: perpetual emotional blackmail, partying as ideology, charity as a mode of control, the sinister reign of good sentiment, the logic of decompartmentalization, the passion for undifferentiated recognition as crowd management, puerile moralism putting the whole of History under the microscope to renaturalize it, reanimalize it, and then judicialize all human existence. But on the other side of it, what do we have? A sorrowful longing – on the part of our well-informed expert on the *phenomena called “social”* – for his dear departed little nugget of individuality and his starchy art of living, for perspective on a life spent just rambling on, singing the same tired tune of resentment and phony substantiality.

An existence concretely subject to spectacular norms is, in its conditions, fatally accompanied by an erasure of personality, which leaves one always more separated from the possibilities of having any really authentic experience and thus of discovering one's individual preferences.

Debord

24. PRODUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

This then is quite the unconditional defense of the bourgeois individual against the indifferenciation of Bloom, unilaterally perceived as the social production of an obscene dumbing-down and desubjectivation. On this capital point, the man of the Old Regime deceives himself however, since he takes the spectacular propaganda at face value only wherever he's decided not to follow it: it would be false to say, in effect, that Bloom is a mere product of the Spectacle; what is produced by the Spectacle is merely the majority of the Blooms' present lifestyles. It would be a strategic error of the most serious importance to see Bloom as merely the product of nothingness, to only perceive, effectively important as it is, that which he has lost in mastery, in freedom, in *spirit*, in culture, in "refined" enjoyment, in style – in sum, in *classical existence*. Because he has also gained something: the devastated battlefield of individuality, a terrain of experimentation for all the attempts at assuming Bloom, where all the fragments of past experience, all the *figures* of the past, can be taken up once more and *put back into play* without acting as prohibitive moral imperatives. There are pleasant processes of (de)subjectivation, but as for this rancid subjectivation, it's *always* unpleasant.

25. THE WAR OF TASTE

What we're dealing with in the man of the Old Regime is a metaphysical figure for a *reduced sovereignty*; above all: (corny old tune) perfect command, good taste, critical judgment, a frenzied self-consciousness, decency, courtesy. The man of the Old Regime still manages to get off on this joy in identity, exaltation of peers, his universality, his human nature, his fine polish. In fact, that's just the man of *cold calculation* talking, the man of little strategies for differentiation, character assassination, the conquest of opinion -- null strategies because they take place only within the space of publicity proper to his form-of-life. The fundamental choice is to penetrate (or not) into that world, and not what might be said there (he can't *do* anything there, one way or another). The consequence: infinite variations in contemporary literature on the Tocquevillian theme of the unavoidable loss of the kind deeds and well-made things of the past. The man of the Old Regime is thus the perfect economic subject: he who *pays* for his experience, as he does for everything, whether it be in cash money or in his effective submission to the social order. Once he's robbed by some little twink, or by some other "youth," or beaten accidentally by a cop, he can write tremblingly in his *Journal* for the year about where a adventurous, non-conformist life gets you, and just how much he holds in contempt the social-democratic flock of men in shorts who are content just to consume discount experiences, while regretting, obviously, that social civility has been so cheapened.

26. A MATURE MAN

Attached to the decent publicity of the bourgeois era, hostile to all moments of truth the lasting principle of which would be civil war – all his being tends to *naturalize* his weakness and his offensive neutrality as an unquestioned model for inter-subjective usage and relations: everything that cannot be reduced to the most threadbare bourgeois humanism (moments of sovereignty, suffering, vertigo, theft, violence, outbursts, break-ins, rioting, anonymity, hysteria) will be subtly censured and made insignificant in light of a decent attitude of passive lucidity. The man of the Old Regime believes in harmless discourse on truths, not in the territorialized truth-apparatuses or in mute criminality without excuses. And so we find once more our old enemy, the antique liberal fear of the masses, of the formless, of the marginal, of dissolution, of anonymous ecstasy.



27. BIG BROTHER

One of the objects that are left to the man of the Old Regime for him to use to believe he's making any kind of impact on the world with his practice is retrology; to wit, the jester's paranoid speculation about the mysteries of power; he wants to be *in on the game* (one of the primary enjoyments of those who have nothing to fear is knowing themselves to be in on the secret, and shuddering at the excessive means that domination has at its disposal). This is a sign of an infantile admiration for the dreamed-of gears of a Power supposedly hidden away in some secret place, in some ministry of Love, of the Interior, of Peace or of Truth, an admiration coupled with heroic rhetoric about great strategic confrontations. In the very specific case of the analysis of judicial repression in the insurrectionary movement of 1970s and early 1980s Italy, for example, this gave us the famous Calogero theorem, named for the "anti-terrorist" magistrate who took as his "working hypothesis" that not only was there a unique direction being taken by all the different armed groups, but also a manipulation of the Movement or of the autonomous action by one single thinking head of subversion, the famous "O" or the mythical "Grand Old Man," a hypothesis which served to justify the invention of a new misdemeanor: that of "moral responsibility." One can only be surprised to see that the sad passion for *assignment*, the urge to reveal *individual* responsibilities, proper to all police-like concepts of History, is still at work in today's so-called "critical" analysis. The retrological perspective is, furthermore, an idealist perspective, one of a totalizing subjectivity: it demands a view from above, the piercing gaze of the eagle flying above the battlefield. So there are no more deeds, just intents, maneuvers, lures, disinformation: it's another way of sweeping under the rug *what has really happened*, since what's happening can't be real but rather just indicts a greater reality, a back-world that forms the foundation for ours as illusion and manipulation. In passing we could perhaps benefit here from imagining a little general maneuvering his troops by sheer force of thought.

28. THE PACKAGED LIFE OF THE DECLASSED ONES

We aren't attacking the declared stability of a form-of-life here; we're attacking its *sterility*. The man of the Old Regime is world-poor, since the false abundance he gives himself gives a concrete authorization to zero experience of historical conflictuality besides an extremely far-off, mediated one. This doesn't prevent him from capitalizing on the little anecdotal tissue that forms his existence by pompously calling it *life experience*. What's left to the bourgeois when the bourgeoisie has disappeared is merely hypocrisy as an art of living, a fantastical compensation for their powerlessness before the impersonal forces that rule their lives. At bottom, under cover of a pessimistic anthropology with Hobbesian overtones and the "lucidity" that comes with it, these Blooms with their packaged rich men's lives of are moved by fear: their terror of physical violence is the *real motive* for their critique. Sociologically, we here find together both the hard-up little landlord and the declassed intellectual dreaming of a time when domination was as retarded as they are and who tremble in the face of the incomprehensible multitudes, who will end up having their hides. How could anyone fail to hear the solid materiality of the fiduciary sense behind their perorations about the loss of values? Are they worried about their twilight days? They're right to. Between the intimate acknowledgement of civil war as a total social fact, the obligation to live up to it, and to the hatred that we have of it, there's nothing but all these bad-faith operations aiming to transfigure the terror of physical violence into metaphysical banalities of the anxiety-with-no-object type, to absolutize a eunuch critique of the procedural excesses taken in the regulation and normalization of violence. In brief, there's nothing left anymore between the ethics of civil war and apologies for the State and control but the typical backwater of vain pretense, the spectacle of extremism and visceral bad faith, all so proper to our fine nation.

Whoever never knew life in the Old Regime doesn't know how sweet it can be to be alive.
Talleyrand

29. A CRAFTY PRIEST

One of the nice old barbeysian fantasies of the man of the Old Regime is to imagine himself to be a defender of the patriarchal values at the heart of a society that tends towards the matriarchal. And in fact, this latter fact allows him to hold forth like the 19th century bourgeois ladies used to with their husbands, knowing all the while that the males above all seek to remain non-contradicted within the order of discourse and of representations, but that it's up to them to run the shop, manage the home, hold together the infrastructure. We clarify that his profound theoretical misogyny has nothing exclusively masculine about it, since it's one of the rhetorical specialties of the women of the Old Regime that have recently appeared on the scene, who put their self-hatred to work in a hysterical delirium that's almost touching. The "whole man" of discourse, law, with a Name, a Father; in



brief, the Author, the master subject and the owner of his apartment, is today gently dispossessed by the all-enveloping, enthusiastic management of all-normalizing economy, which interferes everywhere, even in the intimate nooks and crannies of his desires. In this matter, the absolute and *sticky* symbiosis of the police chief and Madam Maigret that we find in Simenon's novels, with its two faces, the Law and the Norm, is quite enlightening. But it is elsewhere, in the curious affinity between the Young-Girl and the man of the Old Regime, that the nature of this character really reveals itself. In his frequentation of the Young-Girl, the man of the Old Regime gets off on being able to counterpose to a simple self-foreignness his own, cultivated, well-referenced self-foreignness. Nothing's sweeter in the eyes of those who think they're oh so very deep than the spectacle of a supposedly innocent life, immanent to itself, that they can kindly patronize or mock. Because the relationship between the man of the Old Regime and the Young-Girl is based on a common simulation - the one simulating life and the other culture - it is also the most stable relationship there is, the one that is the least threatening. In fact, Old Regime subjectivity shows itself as the ideal complement to the conquering superficiality of the Young-Girl. The deep solidarity between the full man of the Old Regime posture and the maternal and pastoral power of the norm thus demands that their opposition remain - on the surface - so they can go on functioning to trip up the suckers. Maigret, like her brothers in literature O'Brien from *1984* and the Grand Inquisitor in the *Brothers Karamazov*, aims at a comprehension of social pathology whose deep design is the infinite and senseless reproduction of society. They don't judge anymore; now they want to *understand*, so as to be able to cure people of the irreducible restiveness that characterizes them. They want to *make them live*. Also, nothing's more absurd than to critique the process of normalization via security-enhancing references to the Law: much deeper still, the authorized critique that the man of the Old Regime practices is but a harmless, puerile playacting, objectively allied with all-normalizing domination. On this supplementary head, the Old Regime discourse is today a concluded narrative, with no dark side to it at all. He has nothing more to teach us; he just operates as a simple apparatus for the *socialization of paralysis*. That's how it is. We have to move on to something different.

30. WHAT'S COMMON TO MORTALS

Because of his incapacity to share in a true Commonality, the only "social" life that the man of the Old Regime has is the company of so-called strong-minded people, the elitist circles of elective affinity formed by rancid individualities bound together by a shared worship of etiquette and courtesy, the club of the Great Disdainers in the face of History. There'll certainly be enough solitude, finiteness, and exposure to go around, but only negatively, in an ultra-domesticated, aseptic mode, never allowing for the slightest line of flight other than suicide, drink, rambling and senility, which, though there's nothing contemptible about them in and of themselves, are all the same merely part of the admission of a collective defeat, the impossibility of any continual, lusty play among these forms-of-life. A community of bad sentiment is just as impossible and undesirable as would be a community of good sentiment. The misery of his everyday life, from his embittered humanism to the expired code of seduction that he uses, demonstrate at every possible opportunity that the form-of-life that the man of the Old Regime upholds is *transitory* and unadapted for the great game of civil war, even if he's almost managed to

persuade himself of the immutable foundations of his habitus. It is an *unassumable* form-of-life inasmuch as it is attenuated, passive, and, in sum, repulsive and *ugly*. Blooms playing the role of the Man of the Old Regime are certainly most often too mutilated to go all the way along with what they might possibly become. They will have to, however; otherwise they'll just persist in their puerile attachment to their weakness, their classic prejudice against all *offensive communization* of existence, continue denouncing the anonymous joy that comes with such communization as a "fusional transcendence of individual separation," and thus they'll either disappear, or get rid of themselves and attain to something different, something more joyous and more sharp-edged, within the Imaginary Party.