

So we do move, after all
A polemic on establishing mechanical mundanity
Time's up/Johannes Domsich

The infinite possibilities the world offers us are manifested in the sardonic rags to riches fantasies of the dream factory and in adages such as "each to his own," and yet: do we really have this opportunity of being individual, do we possess the knowledge, time or money to live, survive and endure such casual individualities?

Few things are as cliché-ridden as the human freedom to do as one pleases. Few things are as emotionally, almost mythologically, transfigured as the leading strings we are subjected to in our lifetime. Life, it would seem, is a balance between the extremes of wanting and being able to do something, a permanent battle between the ego and the public that can only be waged in words or in silence.

Individuality is the imperative of the beginning latter half of the 20th century. A burden that henceforth will be a heavy cross for us to bear and that will torment us by the permanent compulsion to evaluate ourselves and the images of others. The borderline of culture is undistinctive and distinctive, a staccato of yes and no that makes us reel between the extremes of love and rejection. But individuality, the thorny road of the ego with all its concepts, its will, wishes and dreams, into the social sphere is no longer a cross-roads between right and wrong living as described by the myths of the ancient world. We are not brooding at the fork in the road like Heracles, lost in thought, wondering which way to turn. And there is no mentor arguing the consequences of the decision, thus taking us by the hand with divine prejudice. No, we are racing forward in slow motion on an individualisation highway — prematurely senescent and yet apparently stuck fast in adolescence — side by side but without any real chance of ever meeting, restoring our strength, if we are lucky, in the cool, inhospitable resting places of hedonism. We no longer compare, we no longer vary the lives of our predecessors, their knowledge is but a childlike concept of a long-forgotten time. Time is what we would need to shape a life of ramifications and to embark on the meandering path of possibilities.

Who controls our destinations, who determines the vehicles between the treadmill of day-to-day life and the jungle of therapeutic aberrations? Coincidence and not hesitant brooding. Is it the last religion left to us, the administrator of the estate of spirituality that has robbed us of the religions of this world? Ordinarity is the demarcation of our lives, it replaces day and night, sleep and waking, the grey areas between the essentialities and trifles that we must accept as being our life.

Nothing is a matter of course, for nothing is truly comparable. The masses of mediation have become mass media [solo fighters]. There are as many opinions and sentiments as there are people. We resemble the thought experiment of being a reflective sphere in a reflected hollow sphere — but where would the light of our self-reflection come from if not from the view of the other, the stranger?

This chilly individuality keeps us awake, it demands permanent creation of the ego, incessant establishment of objectives and musealization, the transfiguration of our past. We define ourselves [in party squabbling] not by what we do, but rather by what we dream of. The blueprint of our lives is more a novel than reality. Nothing may be insignificant, no remnant of life is unworthy of analysis. Perhaps mankind has found his end in the ecstasy of self-realization at the cost of cultivation. It is no longer the products or, before them, the creativity

of the tools that determine our nature. Gone is the equality of movement from experience, the security and knowledge of what we do. [Correctness produces frustration in its authority and tempts us with the ornament — the painted face that cannot only be a Loosian crime.] Work and art, Meyerhold maintains, bear no resemblance to one another any more. Gone is the knowledge that what is right requires, indeed possesses, no justification.

Man as a creator has become the creature of his self — be it as a result of hubris or indolence. He is the product that is assessed merely according to how sought-after it is, how long it can preserve its youth, how well it is suited as an archive of culture [B. Groys], as a place within the mechanised, medialised memory of anonymous masses that can only be bought with power. We produce ourselves, with machines of vanity in the magazines and fitness centres of the civilised world. We toughen up for a project that is again but an I and not a We, and we live solitude in the schizophrenic state of being commodity and buyer at once. And it is precisely this solitude — often interpreted as a self-elected or much longed-for hermitage — that hurls us into a premonition of forlornness. Our lack of relationships is nerve racking and makes us yearn for the cradle of the wild extended family. But in the segmentation of our lives we only have the strength for "life-period partnerships," for we have lost fidelity, that means responsibility, in the demise of the throwaway society.

Mankind would seem to be nearing a state of complete exhaustion in his hysteria and whirring nervousness [G. Steiner]. He cannot sleep for sleep is the automatism of everyday life in which socialization and not the "director-actor ego" calls the tune. We cannot sink back into culture but only react and drift along, for we are all the culture that is left to us — one for one, everyone is his own artist, everyone a medium of his self. And our image is only found in the prejudices that are the last wretched remnants of societies, a parody of cultural identity.

We want to and yet we don't want to, we can and yet we cannot. Delegation [capitulation] guides the creativity of mankind with the aid of which he wished to create for himself a snugness of inactivity — a [digital] land of milk and honey in which his will commands and not, as in the paradise of happiness [bliss], the consequence of suffering [good behaviour]. He who is alone can of course call the shots [and moan about his own orders]. Machines are designed to be servants both taking on responsibility and doing work. We have "excarnated" everything [A. Assmann] by having others rule, think and work ... Nothing is left, we have nothing more to do other than devote our attention cosmetically, as it were, to ourselves. And so we play at working, with loosened tie knots and red ears that come from drugs and not diligence — that is also but a kind of narcotic. The reassuring (albeit transfigured) gesture of work has become a gesture of self-gratification.

But when the cat's away, the mice will play. What is happening in the world we [the pearl of Creation as men of private means] have retired from? Can we be sure of the automatons, the stewards of our materialism? This is why we distrust machines or glorify them, which, in the end, amounts to the same thing. We are incapable of using them merely due to the fact that we cannot devote our attention [quietly] to ourselves. In this way we humanize them into being virtual colleagues, agents, secretaries, dialogue or sex partners, we who have come to be virtual global villagers ourselves, and hurl them into the labyrinth of digitization.

Machines can be of more use than this. In the most conceited and, at the same time, cowardly case we dream of inventing a vehicle for our mind to travel through time. Immortality bought at the cost of incorporeality. But without a body our minds and desires would be completely transformed. Miraculously enough, Hollywood is right: Death does become us! Who wants to liver forever without the conditions of the body? We would have no language, for nothing

could be "grasped," "handed down" or "touched upon," the appeal of second chances [M. Frisch] is gone, adrenaline is an ineffective drug, and sex is too lonely as a monologue to give any pleasure. Ergo, there's just no doing without a body, and the next fantasy has to do with the stage: no more ageing, but rather unending adolescence.

Everything that has to be done from now on has time, although time [visualized as a grinning Reaper] really no longer exists. The enactment of decline can now commence for we no longer sense it in ourselves but rather in actors, delighting in the effect of time [J. Tinguely]. Romanticism has found its place in a patina free of humans — the Earth is wearing out, not Man [M. Jackson]. For if the human body and its movements are the last product of the ego, that only maximises nightmarish mortal agony. Decline proves the impossibility of continuity, and our yearning for standstill grows after a life without patina. But patina cannot be digitized, rather digitization cancels time as the function of representation. This is why the land of milk and honey is the site of absolute immobility, the human will directs at a standstill. With the magic of genetics we have machines live and die for us. Why are robots [that's why robots are] so reluctant to learn to walk?

"Make sure you get somewhere in life!" How I used to [and still do] hate this phrase wielded by those who have nothing left before them in life. We cannot detach ourselves from the parable of flowing ["the river flows, the wise man knows," M. Gore], it gives us solace like the rain that excuses us when we do not wish to leave our caves. The synonym of getting somewhere in life is an endless source of luxury, the dream of being moved, just as we are "moved" by what is beautiful and by what is right. Yet we have become too inert to trust the images of the world, to abandon ourselves to them and to move in our minds. It's that agonizing delegation again. The essence of success is no longer happiness for now everything's going "like clockwork," and we're having fun non-stop. This probably explains our fascination with the weather channels and media sport. The success of the weather and all manner of Olympic games is due to their independence of human will. Perhaps it is too banal: Man conceives what he needs, his thinking is binary and banal in terms of what he has and what he has not. If he is trapped like an unprotected worm in the vale of tears between original sin and purgatory, he just dreams up a golem, Avalon and flying, roast doves. But if he is hanging on the umbilical cord, isolated like a deep-sea diver, he is delirious at the mercy of a menacing Nature of Kantian dimensions. There's no pleasing human beings [nor their God] which is why we find so many starving managers in the "wild" and workaholics in the free marketplace of the free world.

Modern lifestyle — which has substituted the concepts of modernism and perhaps of all times — can be described in two determinants: Permanent existence with selective presence. There's no other explanation for the manipulability of mankind, there's no other way I can imagine the vast amount of energy applied to create systems of absence. It would seem that we are quite happy on our puppet strings, simplifying the world to the essence of a PR manual: Is our product [am I] right, do we [I] communicate correctly, do the customers like it [me] — do they love each other?

Everything we have devised with the aim of experiencing more, knowing more, and better recognising, has also achieved the exact opposite. For the enhancement of perception also entails a weakening or eradication of the other. Keen hearing, far-sightedness, sensitivity and eloquence equally imply deafness, blindness, superficiality and speechlessness. In truth, this intensification conceals, and the world is verily intensive enough as it is. It is alien to us and yet it haunts our fears. Take time for everyday life! Sleep does not breed monsters, it prevents

nonsense and crime. Stay in the downy feathers of unreflectedness, you won't miss much because:

When the cat's away, clever mice will sleep.