

THE VIOLENT REVERIE: THE UNCONSCIOUS IN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

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If we substitute Erikson's nomination of the notions of *relativity* and the *unconscious* as two insights which provided “disturbing extensions of human consciousness in our time” with tyranny and militant terrorism we introduce an immediate shift from the realm of ideas to that of raw everyday experience.¹ Militant terrorism and institutionalised tyranny constitute some of the raw experience of man in contemporary societies.

Terrorism in our time compels us to recognise unflinchingly the discrepancy between our knowledge and mastery of nature and our worn out half-truths about human nature. Clearly the ascendancy of violence in social action is related to a theme in contemporary life brought into focus by the Harvard psychiatrist Erik Erikson. In his pioneering studies of identity and human development, he has on a number of occasions drawn attention to what he terms pseudospeciation.² He has clarified for us some of the human uses of scapegoating — the creation of heroes and villains as orienting images in the development of open or closed group identities.

¹ Erik Erikson in his **Dimensions of a new identity** (New York, 1974: 103) writes: “In fact, I would nominate the idea of relativity in the physical world and the concept of the unconscious in man's inner world (and I include in this Marx's discovery of a class unconscious) as two such disturbing extensions of human consciousness in our time. And I would postulate that any new identity must develop the *courage of its relativities and the freedom of its unconscious resources*; which includes facing the anxiety aroused by both.”

² For a wide-ranging discussion of pseudospeciation in the context of competing group identities see Erikson (ibid), and with H Newton **In Search of Common Ground** (New York, 1973). Erikson's notion of pseudospeciation (scapegoating) is clearly illustrated in the following brief extracts from his **Dimensions of a new identity** in which he writes: “But, alas, the new identity (that of American pioneers), to define itself, also needs some people *below*, who must be kept in their place, confined, or even put away. For in order to live up to a new self, a man always needs an otherness to represent at the bottom of the social scale that *negative identity* which each person and each group carries within it as a sum of all that it must not be.” (1974: 36. Later, he adds: “But, alas, as we also emphasised, man always needs somebody who is below him, who will be kept in place, and on whom can be projected all that is felt to be weak, low, and dangerous in oneself. If Americans had not had the Indians and the blacks — who far from having conquered their land could not defend it, or who, far from having wanted to come here had been forced to — the new Americans would have had to invent somebody else in their place.” (ibid: 78. For other stimulating discussions of this theme see Kovel's **White racism: A psychohistory** (New York: 1970) and Neumann's **Depth psychology and new ethic** (New York, 1973). Neumann (1973: 52) for example has this to say about pseudospeciation: “in the economy of the psyche, the outcast role of the alien is immensely important as an object for the projection of the shadow — that part of our personality which is “alien” to the ego, our own unconscious counter-position, which is subversive of our conscious attitude and security — can be exteriorised and subsequently destroyed.”

Such is the confusion of thought for action today that an American polemicist was obliged to say that "it is, of course, scarcely possible to open the question of Israeli or Arab conduct today without exciting the most lively passion and risking the most serious charge."³ It should be added immediately that it is not only partisan *publics* which we may expect to find in most societies but career politicians who, like Tolstoy's generals, believe that they always know the meaning of social events as well as their prospective consequences.

The reactionary character of the resistance to intellectual scrutiny of societies and nations even in the free world is best exemplified by the international reaction to the rise of the third world. In the short history of the ascendancy of the third world into the international arena there have been ample opportunities for the study of how societies cling with a vigorous tenacity to outmoded images and identities. For the ascent of the third world has meant, amongst other things, that the identities of the world's non-Caucasian peoples should be transformed as part of the evolution from a predominantly subservient colonial status into new yet unstable identity constellations.

Beginning with Negritude in the 1930s and the notion of the *African personality* during the 1960s there emerged in the United States and later in South Africa the *black consciousness* movements. I want to suggest that these movements, discontinuous as they appear and isolated both in temporal and geographic terms as they have been, are symptomatic of some profound need in the inner world of the black collective psyche to materialise a new identity to harness all the resources of its cultural and historical unconscious.

The psycho-historical propriety of these movements should by now have been fully established were it not for the competing and also deep-seated need mediating the older images which are required to survive in the service of pseudospeciation. The historical impasse in the late twentieth century has now assumed the form of a confrontation between new images (emerging identities) created by strong psychological and spiritual needs against older images sustained by an equally strong psychological need for psychosocial domination (scapegoating) of subordinate by superordinate groups.

In the case of South Africa, the black consciousness movement as identity retrieval and creation emerged as the *antithesis* of the white dominant culture. Through an exclusive South Africanism, fragmentary as it appears at times, white South Africa has succeeded in mobilising a geo-political identity for itself since the Act of Union in 1910. With the exclusion of blacks from the broader South Africanism, the identity of blacks (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) remained hostage to prevailing white images of the people of colour which though revealing a local character are certainly no original creation of white South Africa.

³ This observation is attributed to the American polemicist Berrigan in the April 1974 issue of **Ramparts**, p 11.

With the unfolding of the historical process, including as well much that is irrational in it, the identity of blacks came to be invested, as is the rule in pseudospeciation, with the negative attributes of the white identity.

This is the point at which a statement regarding identity retrieval and creation should be made. Whether the reference is to *Negritude* or *black consciousness* as philosophy and social movement, the dynamic involved seems to be one in which a colossal attempt is made to help the victims of racialism to arrive at a more profound appreciation of their alienation, to unmask the limits of the false consciousness by unleashing for constructive purpose the welter of their “unconscious resources”.

It is not true to the character of this impulse to be bound to vindictiveness of any kind since the momentum of such an impulse is inner-directed rather than other-directed. If vindictiveness is foreign to this impulse, anxiety is not. It is to be expected that as the people of colour agonise over their confrontation with their unconscious a communicative equivalence may arise to such an extent that more irrational (“primitive”) responses may be expected from superordinates.⁴ The profound challenge of black movements during this century on this continent and the *diaspora* amounts to the requirement for a frontal attack on the legacy of the unconscious so as to appreciate most fully the consequences of servitude and its companion — the false consciousness.

The unconscious as part of and mediator of the black experience (or any other for that matter) comes to constructive life in the literature, theatre and other arts of a people. This should remain true even at a most superficial level of analysis, for it is art at its best that explodes for our usually mundane consciousness those resonances which lie buried in man's innermost being. Art, like unconscious process, possesses the quality of shocking us out of our complacency by reflecting those contradictions and dimensions of human existence which prey on us while we sleep.

The themes which are hatched by these voices from limbo, like those of our dreams, are not partial to man's virtues. Naturally, much is brought to light which is diabolic in man. In the realms of art, the dream and reverie, nothing is beyond reach, impossible or inconceivable. Murders may be committed with complete abandon. Likewise, in our dreamlife, the most incompatible passions as well as the most contradictory notions are fused into terrifying unities. Most lay people and others not so lay would insist that our dreamlife makes little if any impact on what they believe to be the rational ordering of human communities. Yet the historically extreme situation such as we have at home in its compactness, demandingness and intolerableness forces the flood-gates of the unconscious into the open in one form of violence or another. Primitive fears of all kinds achieve mass circulation.

⁴ During periods of crisis when the superordinate-subordinate symbiosis is threatened by some action on the part of the subordinate a state of subjective equivalence is usually manifest in what is often referred to as “over-reaction” on the part of those in authority. This may account for the fact that the so-called “protest literature” is often found to be so disturbing by those in power. Since this over-reaction is often unequal to the objective situation, it seems reasonable to assume that it has its origins in the unconscious realm of primitive fantasies.

There is probably no comparable relationship which is as riddled with ambivalence, ambiguity and a potential for violence as that between a master and his slave. In this classical or prototypical instance of superordinancy and subordinancy is duplicated on an adult scale the whole psychology of subordination which since Freud's forays into childhood and the unconscious has become a little less baffling to us. In this study, only the bare outlines of this complex relationship will be touched on.

Psychoanalysis has taught us that the unconscious in its individual and collective variants is a legacy of both history and socialisation experience. The rearing of children (socialisation) over a long period of dependency is the longest in the animal kingdom and appears to get even longer with man's evolution in various subtle ways. The positive, that is, the health-giving elements, in this process of enabling the helpless and dependent child to prosper are well known to "psychological man" and his "therapeutic cultures".⁵ Negative unhealthy elements, on the other hand, to the extent that we know and understand them, are the stock-in-trade of the mental health professions in their encounters with failures of individual adaptation. The socialisation situation as we know it in most societies today is far from ideal.

The experience of *being* in infancy and early childhood with its characteristic dependency as well as the subsequent thriving of a sense of self is in itself of crucial significance yet, more often than not, it is this experience which becomes the first object of almost global amnesia. It is within such a context that we are able to see most clearly that the unconscious as legacy of socialisation depends for its development on this universal helplessness and dependency of the child and its adaptive need for amnesia. To the question why this cover-up is so crucial for this phase of human life several answers are possible. All the answers are, however, related to the fact that man begins his life in the face of overwhelming helplessness.⁶ In the face of powerlessness and dependency, the emerging self is forced in the interests of its own survival and to cope with anxiety to initiate adaptive measures. During infancy and later, children insist on getting their own way — luxuriating in their feelings of omnipotence. But gradually this posture of the child is experienced as unequal to the demands of the adult social and physical universe including the child's *encounter and internalisation of authority relationships* with its parents. The impact of what is seen as an enabling intervention by parents slowly forces the child into new corrective, integrative and adaptive approaches primarily intended to contain rising levels of anxiety, conflict, aggression and grief at the loss of omnipotence. This primal loss of omnipotence is compensated for in an unsatisfactory but adaptive manner by the child's adoption of *ambivalence* towards the authority of parents and other adults. Adults and parents, for their own part, reward the child for this subversion of impulses

⁵ See Philip Rieff's **The triumph of the therapeutic: Uses of faith after Freud** (New York, 1966).

⁶ Although many outstanding psychoanalytic observers such as Winnicott have discussed the dependency of the infant no one to my knowledge has been as convinced about the helplessness of the infant during the first year of life as Neumann who in his **The child: Structure and dynamics of the nascent personality** (New York, 1973) writes of the child as living through a "social uterine" or post-natal "embryonic" period.

natural to its condition on the basis of the prevailing arbitrary notions of “good” and “bad”.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly how in these two words is imbedded the seeds of what later becomes pathological in individual and group life.⁷ Or as Norman O. Brown puts it:⁸ “Here is the fall: the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, between ‘mine’ and ‘thine’, between ‘me’ and ‘thee’ (or ‘it’), come all together — boundaries between persons; boundaries between properties; and the polarity of love and hate.’ On the basis of its encounters with authority a child adopts this two-valued orientation, this crude distinction between good and bad as an axiomatic imperative for evaluating, regulating and ordering internal and interpersonal experience.

The saga of how a child emerges from its symbiotic dependency on its mother into a psycho-somatically differentiated self is a complex one.⁹ It should suffice here merely to add the following considerations. One should readily admit that it is a poor preparation for life’s “little ironies” to begin with this two-valued orientation involving a categorical discrimination between good and bad for, among other things, it precludes the development of finer discriminations in evaluations of self, others and experience. In the twilight zone of infancy, therefore, may be laid some of the rugged foundations of later sterile and rigid sensibilities.

In struggling with its dependency, compensatory omnipotent strivings, the terrors of impending annihilation and aggressive impulses, the child is rewarded, as we have seen, for losing some of the battles with parental authority. The ensuing adaptation whether neurotic or “healthy” assumes the character of ambivalence, this in the interests of circumvented high levels of anxiety and conflict so painstakingly documented by Melanie Klein and her followers.¹⁰ Through psychological splitting which in my view is the symbolic equivalent of the physical and spatial differentiation of the body schema’s in-side-outside dimensions, parental figures are split and internalised as good and bad. The same father object becomes part good father and part bad father. This ambivalent adaptation also applies to the child’s own evaluation and experience of self (self-representation) and there are good grounds for believing that it is this orientation which leaves the child with a polarised experience and representation

⁷ Discriminations between “good” and “bad” are part of the complex symbolic matrix which is at the core of the process of scapegoating.

⁸ Brown, N **Love's body** (New York, 1966) p 143. In his characteristically cryptic style in **Love's Bddy** he explains scapegoating in the following terms: “there is only one psyche, in relation to which all conflict is endopsychic, all war intestine. The external enemy is (part of) ourselves, projected; our own badness, banished. The only defense against an internal danger is to make it an external danger: then we can fight it; and are ready to fight it, since we have succeeded in deceiving ourselves into thinking it is no longer us.” p 162.

⁹ The complexity of the early experiences of the child is due in part to the fact that in infancy we are privileged to witness the interface between the symbolic and the bodily as these are represented in the needs of the child and the caretaking activities of a mother.

¹⁰ See for example Klein, M **Envy and gratitude and other works 1946-1963** (London, 1975) in particular: “Notes on some schizoid mechanisms” pp 1-24.

of its body into a “good” and pure upper body pole as against a “bad” and impure lower pole.

There is sufficient room here only to suggest the complexity of the coming into being of the unconscious and its preference for encountering authority in a contradictory and ambivalent fashion. However, what seems necessary in the present context seems to be an indication that the unconscious assumes its hydra-like quality from the child's encounter with both its own utter dependency and the overwhelming authority of the agents of society.

To put the issue of the unconscious (whose origins I have attempted to outline) and art in historically extreme situations in its most basic form we need to examine the prototypical example of choice with respect to the issue of superordinancy and subordinancy. The relationship between a master and his slave is particularly informative because this relationship carries within it all the elements of a *symbiotic dehumanisation* (Camus' community of victims) as well as the seeds of a non-metaphysical rebellion. We never stop wondering why it is that the slave indulges himself to the extent of making the task of dehumanisation easier for his master by consistently, indeed one is tempted to say religiously, colluding with the master in the slave's own harassment.

It may be said that this primarily unconscious collusion is something which goes against or must be seen against the slave's own conscious attitude since, it may be suggested, the slave does protest too much. But the reactionary character of such protest becomes apparent since its form is always benign enough as to ensure that the self-sustaining symbiotic relationship is left intact.

The central dilemma in the psychology of subordination both in its infantile (natural) and adult forms is the fear of losing ambivalence (subjective violence) for violence as social act — a transformation considered by the subject as possible both within the realm of unconscious fantasy and in reality. In both situations, those of the child encountering parental authority and that of the slave face to face with the authority of his master, ambivalence is predicated and sustained by violence against the self to placate once and for all the alternative in favour of objective violence against the representatives of authority. The unconscious, dialectical approach to reality is at its most powerful in this instance since violent impulse is bound up with the tenderest concern and affection for the object of hate. The ambivalent character of adaptation under conditions of subordination is maximised by its psychic precariousness — the anxiety about talion (retaliation) and the lingering possibility that subjective violence may without sufficient warning be transformed into violence as social act.

A formulation such as the one presented above has sound clinical backing in treatment situations and as psychotherapists we have become familiar with the various neurotic and sometimes psychotic ways in which individuals bring to a catastrophic denouement this universal childhood problem of ambivalence.

What has been said thus far has implied without explicitness that between ambivalence and objective violence (violence as social act) there often emerges under conditions of long subordination of one group by another a committed literature. At the level of the social *praxis* a literature of stature must emerge to mediate the dissonances between violence against the self and violence as social act.

Western literary critics have often drawn and continue to draw distinctions between African literature and that of the West. Implied and explicitly stated at times is the idea that, amongst other things, the limitations in African literature are those of range of themes and innovations in technique of presentation. Writing about 'African novels,' Per Wastberg has this to say:¹¹

“In most of them, the narrative is restrained and non-experimental, and character takes second place to situation and plot. An individual's emotional conflicts are seldom a central element. Nowhere in African literature, for example, do we find a gripping description of love or a great tragedy.”

Nadine Gordimer in **The Black Interpreters** echoes the words of Per Wastberg as follows:¹²

“The thematic preoccupation of many white writers in the world today is no, no, no; without a ‘yes’, without positive affirmation of any kind to follow. Country boy coming to town says ‘no’ to his exploitation there, ‘no’ to his secondclass status in the competitive white world; but he does not turn his back on that world; opt out, even when he realises that the world he left behind in his tribal village has a value he must not lose or fail to assert, either. The African hero . . . despite his disaffection and bitterness, is a man who says yes and yes and yes . . . The angry young man of European novels of the fifties and early sixties does not exist in African literature. Neither does that other darling of English and American contemporary fiction, the man or woman, often an academic, in whom the fruits of mass culture and/or intellectual privilege have produced a sour fermentation of disillusion with the material satisfactions offered by an affluent, industrial society. The Been-To suffers, but he is not sick at heart. He believes that things have gone wrong; not that they are inherently wrong, built on a foundation of moral decay. Another European theme that has no place in African literature is that of the problem of communication itself. . . In Africa, it seems, the lines are still clear.”

This lengthy comparative statement, condescending as it is in part, is followed by the pronouncement: “Black writers choose their plots, characters and literary styles; their themes choose them.”

I must admit that at first sight the last part of this statement appeared compellingly convincing. Here I thought, is a profound insight. But a little recollection of the history of man in revolt such as Camus has provided us with coupled with what we have recently learnt and are learning about the psychology of the colonised, led to further reflection on the question. I do not want to appear to be creating a storm in a tea cup but the issues involved here are of such importance that even a passing reference should turn out to be rewarding.

There is a sense in which no writer chooses his themes or the images which crowd his consciousness prior, during and after the creation of a work of art. Since the creative impulse tends to straddle itself across several layers of the individual's consciousness, the act of *choosing* is part of a more cognitive set of conditions and at the tail-end of the

¹¹ See Wastberg, P **Themes in African literature today** (Spring, 1974) p 139.

¹² See Gordimer, N **The Black Interpreters** (Johannesburg 1973), p 9 & p 11.

process and probably not part of the incubative stage. Another way of conceptualising the events involved here is to say that it seems more likely that themes, images and reveries are not arbitrary since in the ultimate analysis the writer must draw from the collective cultural consciousness (including that which is unconscious) of his people and should he be a prominent writer, he can add new nuances and dimensions to such a consciousness.

The intellectual history of the west suggests that human development is guided by a simple and pragmatic principle. Although this principle is simple in its immediate clarity its sources in the human psyche are organised around the principle of “hierarchy of prepotency” of human needs and motives.¹³ The idea that human consciousness as it expresses itself cognitively, spiritually, in social action and historically thrives on the destruction of any opposition to its dominant position should certainly not be taken for a novel idea. Hegel seems to have been the first man, as far as I know, to have recognised and formulated this incorporative and, by the same token, destructive quality of human consciousness. Depending on the context, this encounter with oppositional reality is effected on a symbolic and/or social level.

The important insight which should emerge from an acceptance of this characterisation of human consciousness is that consciousness begins its destruction of opposition with the most immediate object and widens the circles to the ultimate bounds, which in the case of Western man is Creation itself. Is it surprising that whilst Western man has been struggling to kill God, people of colour have been concentrating their attention on the church instead? It may be instructive at this point to make an observation with a substantiating quote.

From my own experience, I endorse the view of Sartre who, writing about anti-Semitism and the Jew, suggests that owing to his special history and situation the Jew has not yet been allowed to be integrated into world society. He is not, to put it plainly, simply a man. That is to say that he is not defined in terms other than his Jewishness. In Sartre's own words:¹⁴

“The disquietude of the Jew is not metaphysical; it is social. The ordinary object of his concern is not yet the place of man in the universe, but his place in society. He cannot perceive the loneliness of each man in the midst of a silent universe, because he has not yet emerged from society into the world. It is among men that he feels himself lonely; the racial problem limits his horizon. Nor is his uneasiness of the kind that seeks perpetuation; he takes no pleasure in it — he seeks reassurance ...”

“It is society, not the decree of God, that has made him a Jew and brought the Jewish problem into being. As he is forced to make his choices within the perspective set by

¹³ In motivation theory as advocated by the late American psychologist Maslow, the satisfaction of basic needs such as physiological needs predictably leads to the ascendancy of high-order needs such as those for self-esteem and self-actualisation. Human Consciousness, bound as it is to human needs and by the same token motivation, appears to be guided by a similar principle — one of immediacy.

¹⁴ See Sartre, J P **Anti-Semite and Jew** (New York: 1948) pp 134-135.

his problem, it is in and through the social that he chooses even his own existence. His constructive effort to integrate himself in the national community is social; social is the effort he makes to think of himself, that is, to situate himself, among other men; his joys and sorrows are social; but all this is because the curse that rests upon him is social. If in consequence he is reproached for his metaphysical inauthenticity, if attention is called to the fact that his constant uneasiness is accompanied by a radical positivism, let us not forget that these reproaches return upon those who make them: the Jew is social because the anti-Semite has made him so.”

I think that what Sartre says about the situation of the Jew applies with equal force to the situation of the man of colour. African literature may at this point in history be thriving on a 'radical positivism' by being a literature of the socially pragmatic. Is there any reason for the surprise implicit in Nadine Gordimer's statement?

It is this “radical positivism” which gives rise to a committed literature. To ask and expect blacks to abandon this radical positivism for a sterile and unpromising metaphysics of a world they have not yet entered is like asking a semi-starved man to exchange his loaf of bread for a ticket to a concert of chamber music. By adopting a radical positivism — letting their creativity emerge from the resonances and dissonances of the socio-political fabric of which they are a part, black writers remain rooted and true to the themes struggling for expression, resolution and clarification in the consciousness of their people.

Unless we understand this radical positivism of the oppressed and the psychological conditions which nourish it we are unlikely to appreciate fully creations such as the fragments at the beginning of this book or the following passage written years ago by a famous black writer:¹⁵

“We broke down the doors. The master's room was wide open. The master's room was brilliantly lighted, and the master was there, quite calm . . . and we stopped . . . He was the master. . . I entered. 'It is you', he said to me, quite calmly . . . It was I. It was indeed I, I told him, the good slave, the faithful slave, the slavish slave, and suddenly his eyes were two frightened cockroaches on a rainy day . . . I struck, the blood flowed: That is the only baptism I remember today.”

What are we to make of a murder represented creatively with almost clinical precision? Anger, resentment, ambivalent feelings and the impulse to violence must present themselves under diverse situations in the lives of members of subordinate groups. In between these primarily unconscious themes which occasionally seek objective expression in social action such as a politically motivated assassination or a terrorist blood-bath such as we have become accustomed to in the late twentieth century is to be found the 'mask' or what I prefer to call the *false consciousness*.

This false consciousness which consists of the proverbial smile of the colonised, the expressionless face in the wake of intense provocation and the unconscious collusion with super-ordinates in the former's dehumanisation is the expression in social action of a corresponding ambivalence in the subjective lives of subordinates. It appears as if

¹⁵ This passage is cited by Fanon, F in his *Black skin white masks* (New York: 1967) p 198.

there are two main avenues open to subordinates once the conditions are ripe for unmasking this false consciousness.

For the rank and file, the path from subjective violence against the self to violence against others, in particular super-ordinates and their *symbolic representations*, may on occasion be a very short one. Psychologically and particularly from the psychoanalytic intuition this *tour de force* occasions little surprise. What is regarded as 'acting out' in psychoanalytic psychotherapy is extremely informative with regard to the issue under immediate consideration. The patient who "acts out" is resistant to the therapist's efforts at helping him to transform non-premeditated action of unconscious origin into language form such as to correspond to conscious thoughts and feelings the patient should entertain.¹⁶

This resistance to the therapist's intervention is occasioned by the unconscious' preference for action on a reckless and sometimes large scale. It is as if the individual who is acting out were saying that action should come before understanding and explanation that is, before language. Individuals participating in a riot appear to be acting similarly since even here language, to the extent that it mediates understanding, explanation and conventional modes of dealing with social reality, is suspended. In psychoanalytic terms it could be said that the impulse to violence as *primary process* (unconscious) short-circuits language and cognitive elements, the so-called *secondary process*, in its instant transformation into action during the act of violent rebellion. During this transformation, not only are secondary processes non-functional but in addition, the twin emotion in the spectrum of ambivalence is also undermined to such an extent that the violent act is the more potent in proportion to the experienced elimination of ambivalence.

In rebellion, the act becomes charismatic in that it achieves for the subject instantly the important aims of *focusing* and *ritualisation* so significant for the elimination of ambivalence.¹⁷

The violent rebellious act appears to be more importantly a product of a chronic, silent and secret anguish. Once the act is committed the subject experiences a perverse kind of purgation since both the impulse and its consequent act are universalised. It is this insight which led Camus to say in writing about a "community of victims that" it is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men — even the man who insults

¹⁶ "Acting out" in the context of psychoanalytic therapy refers to the tendency of patients in some situations to act on the basis of the first and most immediate impulse. Jerome Singer (1971) in his discussion of "The vicissitudes of imagery in research and clinical use" has this to say about acting out: "He (the patient) learns soon that, when he experiences a sudden irrational fear or burst of rage, the appropriate thing to do is to quietly replay in his mind's eye his own sequence of thought. Usually this will reveal the specific memory or transference distortion that triggered the emotion, and the use of the replay method averts action on the basis of the first impulse, which could lead to fatal consequences." p 167.

¹⁷ See Erikson, E **Gandhi's Truth** (New York, 1969) for a discussion of the significance of ritualisation.

and oppresses him — have a natural community.¹⁸ Is it not true that the natural community as opposed to the 'community of victims' is the universal community of man?

One could say that the black writer as a radical positivist is located midway between historical and metaphysical rebellion. He differs from his brethren to the extent that in his case the silent and secret anguish forms itself finally into images and not as is the case with the slave into instant action during a propitious moment. The image does not present itself in its fullness without a period of gestation. The artist like his brethren must come to terms with ambivalence, self-intoxicating resentment and violence against the self. In his case, however, it can be noticed that the short-circuit we referred to above fails to occur. The unconscious is directed towards a more creative course and thereby allows language to mediate between itself and possible acting out in the social sphere.

For the artist, therefore, the creative act itself assumes the same importance which the violent and/or rebellious act assumes for the common rebel. The image(s) forces itself from formlessness into clarity and through the creative act the artist also transforms subjective experience into the realm of the universal — the natural community. The artist is enchanted by the charisma of an image.

An implicit contradiction may have suggested itself to the astute reader by this time. It will shortly be evident that such a contradiction is more apparent than real and does not require a radical dialectic for its clarification.

Can it be said of the artist that he is a radical positivist if it can also be demonstrated that he is more enchanted by images rather than action? His first solution for the problem of subordination and its consequent violent and rebellious impulse is symbolic rather than actual. He responds at a more primitive level by placing his whole weight behind ritualisation on a symbolic level in the place of a real murder as a social act. To come back to the black writer of repute whom we quoted earlier we immediately recognise as we look more closely the writer's reverence in the face of the symbolic. Indeed, I think we should say there is a ritualistic precision in the manner in which the slave slaughters his previous master. In this short passage is concentrated all the major elements of an act as ritual. Ritual has several important uses in the affairs of man and one of these uses is that of clarification — of subverting with due courtesy such imponderables as death. It is notable that the murder portrayed in the passage is not rash but executed with a cold calculation that is undergirded with veneration. The outcome consists of both clarity and a new level of confidence or, shall we say, authenticity? The "I" after the ritual is no longer a "grammatical fiction".

The artists' elimination of the "I" as grammatical fiction by subduing the impulse to violence into a shocking but realistic image has consequences for social action or representations of the self in public which restore to the artist his identity as a radical positivist.

What, we are entitled to ask, is the pragmatic value of this ritual murder which attaches itself to such disturbing images? To begin with, this ritualisation which takes the artist to

¹⁸ Camus, A **The rebel** (New York, 1956) p 16.

the outer limits of the violent and rebellious reverie in undermining ambivalence, and by the same token violence to the self, erodes the false consciousness at its core. Even though this intuition remains true in fundamental respects it may be argued by those who attach serious significance to the fascinating split between the objective and the subjective that such a psycho-spiritual culmination amounts to nothing since objectively the artist remains, in the case of blacks at least, a member of a subordinate group and unfree.

Though appealing such a view suffers from the shortcomings of a radical reductionism since we now know that subordination over time involves not only structural instrumentalities of dominance but also *psycho-social instrumentalities*, the latter being in the final analysis the most dehumanising.

The radical positivism of the literature of the oppressed arises from the fact that ideally it achieves for the artist and his readership a long-term unmasking of the false consciousness. It invalidates the competing cleavages in the self of the man of colour enabling him to break the symbiotic chain between him and his superordinates, thus clearing the way for a natural community as opposed to the community of victims. The master is assassinated in the realm of reverie and the seductive image to enable the subordinate to live realistically and authentically with superordinates in the social sphere.

I have made the claim that the violent reverie may be put to constructive social use by the people of colour. In making this point I choose for special emphasis two aspects. The first of these is that the violent reverie in its painful gestation overtime and its ultimate instantaneous blossoming into metaphysical murder as ritualisation creates unity in the psychic economy of subordinate individuals by dispelling an immobilising ambivalence. It makes it possible for the slave to live with himself but more importantly with his master. Since with the transformation the slave says: "It is I . . . It is indeed I", his master is bound to respond to the new reality in whatever way is most propitious at the time.

Secondly, the constructive use of the violent reverie prepares the way for the superordinate victim to recognise and appreciate the subordinate victim at a more profound level than was possible before. Sentimental rationalisations for the familiar ordering of the slave-master symbiosis are placed under severe strain by the new identity of the slave as rebel.

Today, perhaps more than ever before, it has become imperative to bridge the experiential gap between Negro-phobes and blacks both here and in the *diaspora*. Such an achievement could sustain painfully-won victories in the spheres of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding as well as ensure that these victories are not spurious but long-lasting. From the violent reverie must be allowed to emerge a literature virile enough to touch us (despite some initial shock, disbelief or anxiety) where it matters most — the innermost core which informs our relations in public. We should never assume without serious reflection that the cold fire or ritual murder which gather around the violent reverie are without emotional sting or impact. Nor is it necessary to wait for the arsonist's flame before we take the constructive elements of the violent reverie into account.

The black reader who is confronted with Mashangu's violent reveries or those of Césaire quoted above will be struck by their enticing but terrifying familiarity. On the other hand, we can expect non-blacks to be shocked by what may at first sight appear to be excesses of an inflamed imagination. When all is said and done we ignore, suppress and abort the violent reverie and the subsequent image at our own peril. The African writer as radical positivist can say prophetically: "weep not for me but for yourself and your children", and, we should add emphatically, for our children.

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