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Against War and Pacifist Bliss
1999

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The pacifist abhors war and blesses the state. In times of peace, he has been taught — and he has believed — that society is a vast system of communication where all controls itself by means of dialogue, in a nonviolent manner. It follows from this that only one who, living on the periphery of these communicating vessels, mocks the hopeless cornerstone of vain democratic chattering with blows is candidate to suffer brute force.

Though he implicitly recognizes in this way that this society is not only dialogue but also violence, the pacifist citizen is not excessively worried by this: the violence is destined for others, for the new savages who have not yet acquired a proper communicative humanity and who deduce from this that society is much more violent from the sweet force of words that support a round table. The pacifist elevates the nonviolent image to a supreme principle — in which the peaceful course of capitalist affairs reflects itself — which mediated society gives itself.

When a state starts a war, the pacifist citizen orders it, “in the name of the people”, to conform to this idealized representation of daily life. Imbued with that idea of Rights which the state imposes for worship, he refuses to recognize how the state monopoly on violence, that by which countries guarantee

the respect *manu militari* of the law corresponds, with armies in state to state relations; and when two powers collide it is war that has the final word. Thus, as she glances with nonchalance on the police reduction of democratic dialogue in the affairs of internal politics, the pacifist citizen insists upon the exclusive use of words in foreign affairs: upon negotiation. He wants one without the other, as if one could be able to have Rights without violence, the state without war, the principle without the consequences that derive from it. Far from recovering from seeing these murderous consequences and from allowing the principle from which they emanate to be put into doubt, the pacifist invokes the principle of Rights against violence — which is the reverse side of it — and draws from this irrational process the moral superiority which he decorates himself with: “What stupidity, war!”

Thus, questioning his own rulers and accusing them of unawareness and irresponsibility, the pacifist would be candid as advisor to the prince with the purpose of shedding light upon the real interests of the nation. And the less he is listened to, the more satisfied he is to have accomplished the proper duty of the citizen: to tell the government what he thinks of public affairs — and so much the worse for the head of state, if he finds himself condemned by moral conscience. As long as the citizen, addressing herself to government, recognizes the legitimacy of the state, the state is able to act more as it pleases because, unlike the pacifist citizen, it does not deny the possibility of compensating for the gaps in its discourse, when necessary, by putting forth its own potential for destruction, flying squad included.

It is in this way that the pacifist has drawn up a separate peace with capitalist society, in which he denounces the “drivel” without ever putting it forth for discussion. To this secret complicity corresponds a purely symbolic activity. With his feverish activity, lighting candles, signing call after call, petition after petition, taking his own opinions for a walk on

the city sidewalk, the pacifist accomplishes absolutely nothing. The pseudo-activity of the pacifist and of the other propagandists of the “right to...” imitates, more or less consciously, advertising techniques: it assumes that the incessant repetitions of symbolic acts and of reduced slogans able to create an opposition to war and to “mobilize the citizens”. Notoriously, gratuitous morality sells well in times of war.

The pacifist practice is an extension, by other means, of the Live Aid Concert against world hunger. Placed outside of the production centers of capitalist society, opposition sets itself up in the sphere of entertainment, and of “political pastimes”, where the citizen believes in acting as a responsible and autonomous individual, raised from capitalist contrition to earn a living. This kind of opposition is not able to get a grasp on social reality because the encounter unfolds itself in a mediated unreality which pretends to be the only reality: while the pacifists produce the images of opposition to war, the mass media reduces this same war to a technological operation, covered with base sentimentality. There are two interpretations, two images of the clash; war and capitalist society, which in the meantime, are left alone and proceed. The curious ease with which the pacifist is transformed once again the next day into simple labor power that must carry out determined tasks results from these images. Moralizers abstain: there’s work going on here.

Thus, the atomized individual — who doesn’t have any occupation of her own except that of staying aware of the balance of their own pecuniary and emotional bookkeeping — wears the mask of the pacifist citizen from time to time. There, on the public square — or rather on the square of publicity — he proclaims his own high morality against the softness of daily life that she continues to reproduce simultaneously in private and at work. The pacifist is a moralizer in the sphere of mediated unreality and acts without any moral considerations when she is in the production centers of a state, whose warlike defects she denies. This double character of the pacifist is called impotence

in the best of cases, in the worst, hypocrisy.