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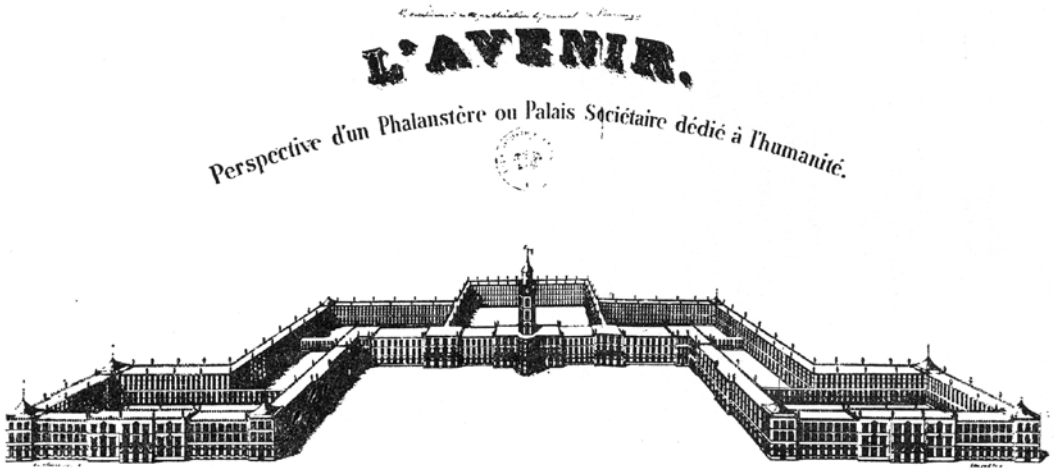
Cover image: portrait of Charles Fourier

According to Charles Fourier (1772–1837), humankind has been stuck in an incoherent state of quasi-civilization for 2,300 years. The passions have been systematically repressed, thanks in large part to the arrogance of philosophers and the charlatanism of priests. As a result, the world is cosmically out of whack. In response to this universal misery, Fourier heralds the science of Passional Attraction—that primordial, ubiquitous force that connects the whole in social series. His ambition is nothing short of establishing a new, Harmonian cosmic order. His writings are a glorious fuck you to all that exists.

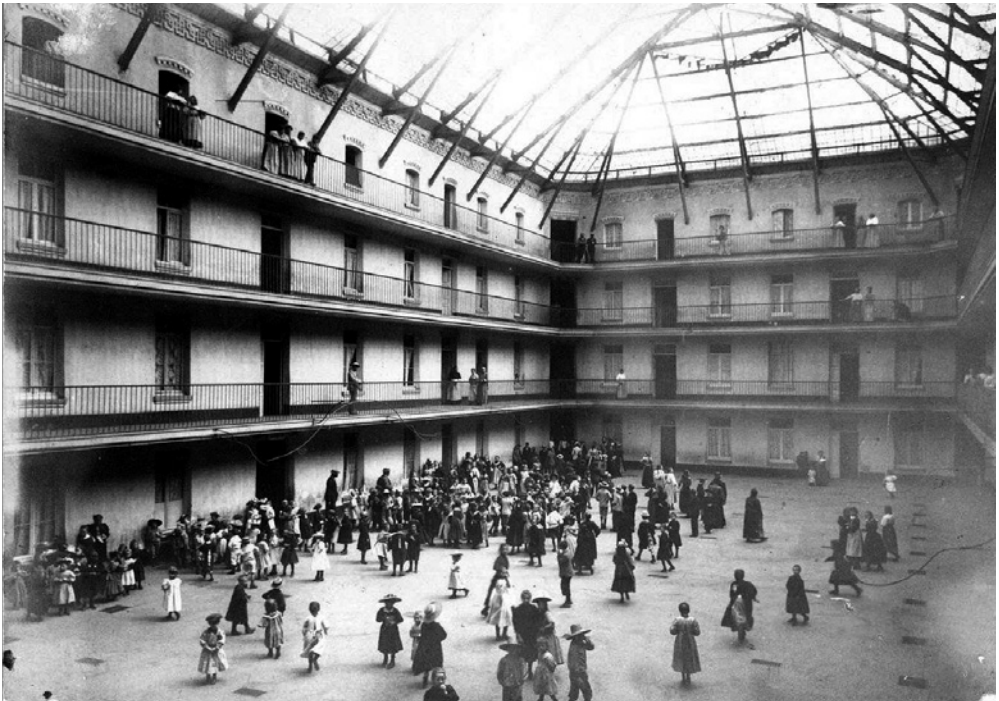
THE HARMONIAN COSMIC ORDER

Fourier posits twelve passions common to everybody. The five “luxurious” passions (corresponding to the five senses) tend toward luxury, pleasure, the formation of groups and affective ties; the four cardinal, affective passions—friendship, ambition, love, and “familism”—concern relationships with others; and the three “distributive or mechanizing” passions—the Cabalist, the Butterfly, and the Composite—concern calculation and the organization of pleasurable work. The twelve passions combine in a thirteenth super-passion, Unityism, that rules the Destinies for all time. This is the “inclination of the individual to harmonize everything around him and the whole human race ... it is a boundless philanthropy, a universal well-being,” the comprehension of the whole. According to this order, government must be based on a consultation of the passions since these essentially characterize the human being and its community. A repression of the passions will result in destructive, hypocritical social institutions like marriage and the nuclear family, from which Fourier argued that women must be freed—in fact, Fourier took the proto-feminist view that the degree of happiness in society could be measured by the independence of women.

In Harmony, Fourier’s proposed utopia, communal living would be the order of the day. Micro-societies called Phalansteries, founded on collective sensuousness and industry, would each be populated by 1,620 people—one male and one female for each of the 810 temperaments (810 temperaments!) Fourier recognized. This combination would enable infinite social, aesthetic, and sexual encounters, through which humankind



Charles Fourier's Phalanstère, Victor Considérant, early 19th c.



Jean-Baptiste André Godin's Familistère in Guise, built 1856–59

would regain its equilibrium. The *Phalanstère* would be “schlaraffisch eingerichtet” (“furnished like an El Dorado”), a place where even life’s pleasures—hunting, fishing, gardening, playing music, and staging operas—would be efforts worthy of reward. The children would organize themselves in Little Hordes by which they would raise each other while contributing to the everyday life of the Phalanstery. The social series of generations, divisions of labor, and temperaments would describe sub-groups of passionate inclinations, which would further combine in complex ways across the collectivity, resulting in a communal euphoria, a constant social high. In Fourier’s famous phrase, “the passions are proportional to the destinies.” Forget about genital love: *society is erogenous.*

Harmony would bring about vast improvements, genetically and socially. Humankind would mutate over nine generations to reach an average height of seven feet and a life expectancy of 144 years. There would be plenitude on all levels. The Earth’s original five moons would be restored and its polar tilt corrected. The polar regions would be free of ice by 1828 (a good thing, we presume). The oceans would turn to lemonade. Planet Earth would be crowned by a permanent *aurora borealis*. Constantinople would become the world capital. But Fourier—a theoretical hedonist if ever there was one—doesn’t stop here. He develops an entire *gastro-sophie* that involves the gratification of all of our 810 senses (Again: 810!—how decidedly he dispenses with the common misunderstanding that there are only five). Likewise, food is a cosmic vision, a “psychedelic gastronomy!” as the editor of the first Danish translation exults.

If all this sounds far out, then consider Fourier’s margin of error. All his calculus, he writes in *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808), are subject to the exception of a fraction of an eighth or a ninth:

This is always to be understood, even when I do no mention it. For instance, if I say as a general thesis, civilized man is very miserable, this means that seven-eighths, or eight-ninths of them are reduced to a state of misery and privation, and that only one-eighth escapes the general misfortune and enjoys a lot that can be envied.

This margin of error can perhaps also be applied to Fourier’s own brand of a radical Enlightenment. While he argues in favor of the emancipation

of slaves and women, his anti-Semitism, his prejudiced view of the Chinese, and his hatred of the English show the darker sides of his thinking.

Fourier cannot be taken seriously—and this is exactly the power of his text against any *esprit de sérieux*. With his blatant inventions and inconsistencies, his writings are ridiculous, they are simply TOO MUCH. French philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes called Fourier's science "overmuch," and considered his work a version of literary practice. "Never was a discourse happier," wrote Barthes, for it describes a new social order articulated on excess, bedazzlement, and, in Fourier's own words, the "need to protect everything we call vice."

THE SOUND OF ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE TRUTH

Fourier was neither mysticist nor reformist nor revolutionary. Contrary to his reception by Marx and other socialist thinkers, he did not consider himself a utopian. Fulfilling his vision of Harmony does not demand work and sacrifice, but is rather the inevitable outcome of scientifically-adjusted human behavior. His controversial views on the permissive, innovative character of sexual practices—including homosexual, polygamous, extra-marital, manic, and "omnigamous" (!?)—were purely an appreciation of the (heretofore derailed) cosmically harmonious social structures. (Fourier himself was prone to a particular mania he termed "Sapphienisme" whereby he was a lover and protector of lesbians and all-around promoter of their general wellbeing. He assessed approximately 26,400 companions worldwide with similar ideas.)

In this sense, the aim of science is simply to harness Passional Attraction as a cosmic source of energy and to bring mankind within the ordered domain of Passional Gravitation. Thus, Fourier's socialism is not what OUGHT to be, but what WILL be—naturally, rationally, and without revolution—as soon as our passions are realized socially, as soon as we are tuned in correctly, as it were, to a social space that in Fourier is reconfigured and proportioned *harmonically.*

The optimism of Enlightenment philosophers was often legitimized by utilitarian application. Utilitarianism rejects the ranking of (moral) value

according to *a priori* criteria in favor of the equal validity of each person's own search for happiness and pleasure. Fourier, to be sure, accepts and celebrates the subjective multi-directionality of vanity, passion, and inclination. To him, one must embrace the delights of contrast, competition, and rivalry on the level of the individual and social series. In Harmony, Industrial Armies roam the world and compete in aesthetic battles to build large-scale engineering projects, cook the most delicious pie, or stage the most impressive opera. Truth—that which in Fourier is “absolutely positive”—is the practical task of helping humanity become humanity through the eradication of illness, poverty, ignorance, and so forth. Fourier's anti-conformist God resides over a Combined Order whose permanent social revelation consists in variety and complexity—difference in age, fortune, ability, temperament. In the 1960s, the hippies would sum up such undogmatic tolerance with the slogan “do your own thing.” Let the pleasure principle rule. Don't moralize, don't pathologize.

Naturally, Fourier also had a theory for the history of the entire world. His cosmogony of the “ages of happiness” explains the progress and decay of civilization in ascending and descending vibrations, together comprising 80,000 years and 32 social metamorphoses, after which humankind will cease to exist. The ascending and descending vibrations serve to “pattern” movements between different stages of individual and historical being, corresponding to the progression from youth to decrepitude in the human life span. The musical analogy is elaborated in the way Fourier organizes an individual's passions and senses as a keyboard with 32 keys. Just as the passions are a keyboard, so is the Sun surrounded by a claviature of planets arranged in octaves. Hence, social change on Earth will influence the entire solar system and affect the planetary orbits positively. In a sense, Fourier's theories harken back to the ancient Pythagorean and Renaissance beliefs in an affinity between natural law and divine law, between the harmony of the passions and the harmony of the spheres.

In 1814, Fourier discovers the Aromal Fluid, the supersensible exhalation of the planets, an exemplary vital matter, a medium for the great chain of being, the connection between the Earth and the rest of the universe. He notes that “if everything is connected in the system of the universe,

there must exist a means of communicating between creatures of the other world and this.” The Aromal Fluid (or Aromal Movement) is this very “system for the distribution of known or unknown aromas, which control men and animals, form the seeds of winds and epidemics, govern the sexual relations of the planets and provide the seeds of created species.” It is a single, all-pervasive, and imperceptible substance—a bit like capital in our present cosmogony, we might say; a universal middleman.

In the few remarks he made on Fourier, 20th century French philosopher and literary theorist Maurice Blanchot described the “strange gift” of Passional Attraction as “a passion without desire.” Measured, non-erotic, yet obliging the entire universe to modify itself, a passion without desire doesn’t coincide directly with pleasure like the passion of an individual does. Blanchot’s reading implies that cosmic happiness extends beyond individuals. Passional Attraction vibrates instead across that vast, non-human-time scale of 80,000 years, ascending and descending in universal harmony and sympathetic fusion within the given order of the cosmic household. Fourier’s harmonial vibration is the timbre of the higher pattern to which the soul is already attuned.

HOW TO MAKE LOVE WITH WORLDS

Fourier’s vision for communal living, liberated sexuality, and cosmic harmony resonated with countercultural, “tribal” emancipation and holistic utopian projects of the 1960s, such as Buckminster Fuller’s “spaceship earth” and Martin Luther King’s “beloved community.” After his writings were republished in France in 1966–68, commentaries and new translations sprang up across Europe. His work was almost an obligatory reference in critical writing at the time, and in writing about architecture, with the Phalanstery providing inspiration for Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’habitation* (1947–52). In art and counterculture, Fourier’s work had an at least intermittent, spectral presence, for example in (the Situationist) Constant’s *New Babylon*, or the mandatory daily exchange of sex partners in Otto Muehl’s *Aktionsanalytische Organisation*. In general, Fourier’s conjoint theorization of labor and love dovetailed with the many post-World War II attempts at thinking Marx and Freud together.

Just as Fourier's teachings were sporadically realized in communes in Europe, North America, and South America in the 19th century, the 20th century spawned a psychedelic Phalanstery. Members of the San Francisco commune Togetherness explained to Dominique Desanti in the late 1960s, "We are Fourierists." Asked whether they had actually read Fourier, they replied, "we've been told." Theirs was a Fourier-to-order, infused with elements of Gandhism and concocted in a mix of memory and invention that in itself is quite appropriately Fourierian. Still, the members of the commune remained faithful to Fourierian pillars of faith, such as the inclusion of children in production, the division of the working day into two-hour shifts, and the integration of male and female tasks. Visitors had also told members of Togetherness that Fourier condoned the use of drugs as an adjuvant or stimulant. In the Haight-Asbury district, that "ex-hippie-capital turned into necropolis," they sold the commune's handicraft while "the bourgeois [came] to watch the post-hippies, drugged to the point of drifting away, voluntary onlookers, the foam of a broken wave."

While Fourier's 19th century followers tended to underplay or even censor his emphasis on the unrestrained development of desire, it seems that his resurgence in Sixties-era collectivism was focused precisely on the more Dionysian aspects of his socialism. Accordingly, Togetherness was built on the rule of love. Its denizens embraced Passional Attraction in an *amour diffus* that included lesbian and gay relationships, and in which orgies, instituted by Fourier as a superior form of love, were acts of principle. In Desanti's micropolitical turn of phrase, the drop-outs of Togetherness found "their universal love, a total tolerance of minoritarian and singular tendencies."

By 1969, Togetherness had suffered a meteoric decline and was dissolved by its members. Even in its collapse, Fourierism generated difference. Many of the former communards resettled within various opposing factions of the broader social revolt. Short-lived as it was, the example of Togetherness during the Summer of Love seems to refute Walter Benjamin's claim that "only in the summery middle of the 19th century, only under its sun, can one conceive of Fourier's fantasy materialized." Writing in 1969, Barthes predicted the decline of the Fourierist commune:

Could we imagine a way of living that was, if not revolutionary, at least unobstructed? No one since Fourier has produced this image: no figure has yet been able to surmount and go beyond the militant and the hippy. The militant continue to live like a petty bourgeois, and the hippy like an inverted bourgeois; between these two, nothing. The political critique and the cultural critique don't seem to be able to coincide.

In his 1955 book *Eros and Civilization*, a go-to text for the Sixties counter-culture, German philosopher Herbert Marcuse notes that, “Fourier comes closer than any other utopian socialist to elucidating the dependence of freedom on non-repressive sublimation.” Close, but no cigar—as the nature of Fourier’s idea, according to Marcuse, is based on the repressive elements of “a giant organization and administration,” which risks fascism, since the working communities of the Phalanstery “anticipate ‘strength through joy’ rather than freedom, the beautification of mass culture rather than its abolition.” To accuse Fourier of aestheticizing politics seems to rationalize his work through anachronistic knowledge of modern totalitarianism, but in the mid-20th century, comment on the fascist connotations of the *Phalanstère* was no doubt inevitable. Or maybe it was simply a question of irreconcilable temperaments between Marcuse, the well-meaning utopianist schoolteacher, and Fourier, the “delirious cashier,” as Flaubert called him.

Other post-World War II thinkers were also uncertain as to whether Fourier’s imaginative intoxication could be reclaimed for critical purposes. While his work was eagerly referenced, it remained exotic if not intractable; thus Scottish academic and geopoeticist (???) Kenneth White asks whether Fourierism is of “any interest to us in the present historical conjecture, or whether it is to be placed on the shelf of political antiquities once and for all, as a particularly grotesque item for dilettante admiration and curiosity.” Fourier never quite fit history, yet his happy discourse seems to trans-illuminate any given historical moment like an x-ray—it shows us what a particular moment is not, by showing us what could only be imagined (never realized) within it. As a result, and as per Fourier, “we always make love with worlds”—which is, in fact, a good definition of artistic thinking: to make love with worlds—nothing less.

GIRAFFE, REINDEER, DOG

Trans-world lovemaking provokes us to recognize strange signs in our native civilization. According to Fourier, the hieroglyph of truth here is the giraffe:

Since the characteristic of truth is to surmount error, the animal that represents it must be able to raise his head higher than all the others: this the giraffe can do, as it browses on branches 18 feet above the ground. It is, in the words of one ancient author, “a most fine animal, gentle and agreeable to the eye.” Truth is also most fine, but as it is incapable of harmonizing with our customs, its hieroglyph, the giraffe, must be incapable of helping humans in their work; thus God has reduced it to insignificance by giving it an irregular gait which shakes up and damages any burden it might be called upon to bear. As a result we prefer to leave it to inaction, just as nobody will employ a truthful man, whose character runs counter to all accepted customs and desires.

In other words, Fourier reasons that just as truth in the eyes of civilization is only beautiful when inactive, so the giraffe is only admirable when at rest. With this analogy, he supposes that God created nothing without a purpose—even the giraffe, which is supremely useless.

If one wishes to know what purposes the giraffe will serve in societies other than Civilization, then one must study the “counter-giraffe,” *aka* the reindeer (obviously)—a creature found only in hostile climates, “an animal which provides us with every service imaginable: you will see that God has excluded it from those social climates from which truth will also be excluded for as long as Civilization lasts.” (While it may be less apparent to us at the beginning of the 21st century that the reindeer is the *ne plus ultra* of animal benefactors, this is in part because reindeer were so thoroughly utilized for everything from food and milk to clothing, tools and transportation in preceding centuries that wild reindeer are today practically extinct, and the domesticated variety persist only in relatively small populations.) Fourier continues:

And when the societary order has enabled us to become adept at the use of truth and the virtues which are excluded from our lives at present,

a new creation will provide us, in the anti-giraffe, with a great and magnificent servant whose qualities will far surpass the good qualities of the reindeer, which so excites our envy and arouses our anger at nature for having deprived us of it.

Fourier's delirious parable errs nowhere near objectivity and consensus. In its irreducibility, it circumscribes the absence of truth. As we wait for this fantastic animal—the anti-giraffe—to arrive, we can delectate its profound aesthetic incongruence with all that exists, its devastating power of counter-actualization. If what one wants from Fourier is a social aesthetic, this is it: all that Fourier's philosophical system talks about is the social, yet it can never be social-IZED. It can never become operational or ameliorative. Power will never be able to use Fourier to heal the miseries it has created. More than 200 years after Fourier wrote his first book, at a time when art is encroached by economics like never before, this fact alone seems more important than ever for the thinking and the making of art.

Just think of the personal misery of Charles himself, who each day at noon waited for the patron who would sponsor the realization of one of his Phalansteries, but who never arrived; who dreamt of gastronomic orgies but ate bad food his entire life; who was found dead kneeling by his bed in his old frock-coat ... If we consider Fourier's text a blueprint for a new life-world, we will be melancholically sucked back into that reality we can never master.

"It was all in the mind," said Marx of Fourier. But so is any other theory, institution, or discourse that reproduces the world. Marx complained that Fourier was obliged to construct a new society "with elements supplied by his brain" because capitalist production was underdeveloped when he wrote. Perhaps it is this very appeal to reason rather than history that makes Fourier's imagination so radical. Even today, it has not been bought and sold. There is still nothing to surpass Fourier's projected state of absolute Harmony. To read Fourier now is perfect anachrony to capital's pre-emption of the future. Even (or especially) capital will never catch up to Fourier. His text tops off all the absurdities we are served by economics and politics alike, revealing them not as false and theatrical, but as gnomic and forlorn—incapable of touching his divine and unapologetic bullshit.

Fourier's philosophy corresponds in a sense to Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that desires don't belong to the realm of the imaginary, and are never transformed through desexualization or sublimation. Once sexuality is conceived as a force of production in its own right (the unconscious as a worker), it escapes restriction into narrow cells of family, couple, person, object. "Sexuality is everywhere," Deleuze and Guattari wrote, recalling Fourier's "vibrations and flows" to evoke how libidinal energy proceeds directly to the entire social field:

For the prime evidence points to the fact that desire does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, introducing therein breaks and captures—an always nomadic and migrant desire, characterized first of all by its "gigantism": no one has shown this more clearly than Charles Fourier.

It has been said that in the contemporary culture industry, imagination goes to the dogs. Not so in Fourier. Here we always make love with worlds. He lifts us up and sets us free.

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