



LEFT

The Psychological Structure of Fascism	
Author(s): Georges Bataille and Carl R. Lovitt	
Source: <i>New German Critique</i> , No. 16 (Winter, 1979), pp. 64-87	
Published by: Duke University Press	
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/487877	
Accessed: 10-04-2020 08:02 UTC	
JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.	
Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms	



LEFT

Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *New German Critique*

CENTER

LEFT

*The Psychological Structure of Fascism**

LEFT

by Georges Bataille

LEFT

Having affirmed that the infrastructure of a society ultimately determines or conditions the superstructure, Marxism did not undertake any general elucidation of the modalities peculiar to the formation of religious and political society. While Marxism did acknowledge possible responses by the superstructure it has not gone from mere assertion to scientific analysis. This essay attempts a rigorous (if not comprehensive) representation of the social superstructure and its relations to the economic infrastructure in the light of fascism. The fact that this is but a fragment of a relatively substantial whole explains a great number of lacunae, notably the absence of any methodological considerations;¹ it was even necessary to forego justifying the novelty of my point of view, and to limit myself to the presentation of my basic position. However, the simple presentation of the structure of fascism had to be preceded by a description of the social structure as a whole.

It goes without saying that a study of the superstructure presupposes the development of a Marxist analysis of the infrastructure.

1. The Homogeneous Part of Society

A psychological description of society must begin with that segment which is most accessible to understanding — and apparently the most fundamental — whose significant trait is tendential homogeneity.² *Homogeneity* signifies here the commensurability of elements and the awareness of this commensurability: human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations; in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence.

* Throughout this essay Bataille employs “he” (il) and “man” (l’homme) as generic terms. The translation maintains this usage in order to leave the conceptual problems it causes manifest.

1. This is obviously the principle shortcoming of an essay that will not fail to astonish and shock those who are familiar with French sociology, modern German philosophy (phenomenology) and psychoanalysis. As a piece of information, it can nevertheless be insisted upon that the following descriptions refer to *actual experiences* and that the psychological method used excludes any recourse to abstraction.

2. The words *homogeneous*, *heterogeneous* and terms derived from them are stressed each time they are taken in a sense particular to this essay.

LEFT

Production is the basis of social *homogeneity*.³ *Homogeneous* society is productive society, namely useful society. Every useless element is excluded, not from all of society, but from its *homogeneous* part. In this part, each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity *valid in itself*. A useful activity has a common measure with another useful activity, but not with activity *for itself*.

The common measure, the foundation of social *homogeneity* and of the activity arising from it, is money, namely the calculable equivalent of the different products of collective activity. Money serves to measure all work, and makes man a function of measurable products. According to the judgment of *homogeneous* society, each man is worth what he produces; in other words, he stops being an existence *for itself*: he is no more than a function, arranged within measurable limits, of collective production (which makes him an existence *for something other than itself*).

But the *homogeneous* individual is truly a function of his personal products only in artisanal production, where the means of production are relatively inexpensive and can be owned by the artisan. In industrial civilization, the producer is distinguished from the owner of the means of production, and it is the latter who appropriates the products for himself: consequently, it is he who, in modern society, is the function of the products; it is he — and not the producer — who founds social *homogeneity*.

Thus in the present order of things, the *homogeneous* part of society is made up of those men who own the means of production or the money *destined for their upkeep or purchase*. It is exactly in the middle segment of the so-called capitalist or bourgeois class that the tendential reduction of human character takes place, making it an abstract and interchangeable entity: a reflection of the *homogeneous things* the individual owns.

This reduction is then extended as much as possible to the so-called middle classes that variously benefit from realized profit. But the industrial proletariat remains for the most part irreducible. It maintains a double relation to homogeneous activity: the latter excludes it — not from work but from profit. As agents of production, the workers fall within the framework of the social organization, but the homogeneous reduction as a rule only affects their wage-earning activity; they are integrated into the psychological *homogeneity* in terms of their behavior on the job, but not generally as men. Outside of the factory, and even beyond its technical operations, a laborer

LEFT

3. The most accomplished and expressive forms of social *homogeneity* are the sciences and the technics. The laws founded by the sciences establish relations of identity between the different elements of an elaborated and measurable world. As for the technics — that serve as a transition between production and the science —, it is because of the very homogeneity of products and means that they are opposed, in underdeveloped civilizations, to religion and magic (cf. Hubert and Mauss, *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*, in *Année sociologique*, VII, 1902–1903, p. 15).

CENTER

LEFT

66 *Bataille*

LEFT

is, with regard to a *homogeneous* person (boss, bureaucrat, etc.), a stranger, a man of another nature, of a non-reduced, non-subjugated nature.

LEFT

IV. The State

In the contemporary period, social *homogeneity* is linked to the bourgeois class by essential ties: thus the Marxist conception is justified whenever the State is shown to be at the service of a threatened homogeneity.

As a rule, social *homogeneity* is a precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent. It forms spontaneously in the play of productive organization but must constantly be protected from the various unruly elements that do not benefit from production, or not enough to suit them, or simply, that cannot tolerate the checks that homogeneity imposes on unrest. In such conditions, the protection of *homogeneity* lies in its recourse to imperative elements which are capable of obliterating the various unruly forces or bringing them under the control of order.

The state is not itself one of these imperative elements; it is distinct from kings, heads of the army, or of nations, but it is the result of the modifications undergone by a part of homogeneous society as it comes into contact with such elements. This part is an intermediary formation between the homogeneous classes and the sovereign agencies from which it must borrow its obligatory character, but whose exercise of sovereignty must rely upon it as an intermediary. It is only with reference to these sovereign agencies that it will be possible to envision the way in which this obligatory character is transferred to a formation that nevertheless does not constitute an existence valid in itself (*heterogeneous*), but simply an activity whose usefulness with regard to another part is manifest.

In practical terms, the function of the State consists of an interplay of authority and adaptation. The reduction of differences through compromise in parliamentary practice indicates all the possible complexity of the internal activity of adaptation required by homogeneity. But against forces that cannot be assimilated, the State cuts matters short with strict authority.

Depending on whether the State is democratic or despotic, the prevailing tendency will be either adaptation or authority. In a democracy, the State derives most of its strength from spontaneous homogeneity, which it fixes and constitutes as the rule. The principle of its sovereignty — the nation —, providing both its end and its strength, is thus diminished by the fact that isolated individuals increasingly consider themselves as ends with regard to the State, which would thus exist *for them* before existing *for the nation*. And, in this case, personal life distinguishes itself from homogeneous existence as a value which presents itself as incomparable.

LEFT

III. Dissociations, Critiques of Social Homogeneity and the State

Even in difficult circumstances, the State is able to neutralize those *heterogeneous* forces that will yield only to its constraints. But it can

CENTER

LEFT

succumb to the internal dissociation of that segment of society of which it is but the constrictive form.

Social *homogeneity* fundamentally depends upon the homogeneity (in the general sense of the word) of the productive system. Every contradiction arising from the development of economic life thus entails a tendential dissociation of *homogeneous* social existence. This tendency towards dissociation exerts itself in the most complex manner, on all levels and in every direction. But it only reaches acute and dangerous forms to the extent that an appreciable segment of the mass of *homogeneous* individuals ceases to have an interest in the conservation of the existing form of homogeneity (not because it is homogeneous, but on the contrary, because it is in the process of losing that character). This fraction of society then spontaneously affiliates itself with the previously constituted *heterogeneous* forces and becomes indistinguishable from them.

Thus, economic circumstances act directly upon homogeneous elements and promote their disintegration. But this disintegration only represents the negative form of social effervescence: the dissociated elements do not act before having undergone the complete alteration that characterizes the positive form of this effervescence. From the moment that they rejoin the *heterogeneous* formations that already exist in either a diffuse or an organized state, they acquire from the latter a new character: the general positive character of heterogeneity. Furthermore, social *heterogeneity* does not exist in a formless and disoriented state: on the contrary, it constantly tends to a split-off structure; and *when social elements pass over to the heterogeneous side, their action still finds itself conditioned by the actual structure of that side.*

Thus, the mode of resolving acute economic contradictions depends upon both the historical state and the general laws of the *heterogeneous* social region in which the effervescence acquires its positive form; it depends in particular upon the relations established between the various formations of this region when *homogeneous* society finds itself materially dissociated.

The study of *homogeneity* and of the conditions of its existence thus necessarily leads to the essential study of *heterogeneity*. In fact, it constitutes the first phase of such a study in the sense that the primary determination of *heterogeneity* defined as non-*homogeneous* supposes a knowledge of the *homogeneity* which delineates it by exclusion.

LEFT

IV. *Heterogeneous Social Existence*

The entire problem of social psychology rests precisely upon the fact that it must be brought to bear on a form which is not only difficult to study but whose existence has not yet been the object of a precise definition.

The very term *heterogeneous* indicates that it concerns elements which are impossible to assimilate; this impossibility which has a fundamental

CENTER

LEFT

68 *Bataille*

LEFT

impact on social assimilation, likewise has an impact on scientific assimilation. These two types of assimilation have a single structure: the object of science is to establish the *homogeneity* of phenomena; that is, in a sense, one of the eminent functions of *homogeneity*. Thus, the *heterogeneous* elements excluded from the latter are excluded as well from the field of scientific consideration: as a rule, science cannot know *heterogeneous* elements as such. Compelled to note the existence of irreducible facts — of a nature as incompatible with its own homogeneity as are, for example, born criminals with the social order — science finds itself *deprived of any functional satisfaction* (exploited in the same manner as a laborer in a capitalist factory, used without sharing in the profits). Indeed, science is not an abstract entity: it is constantly reducible to a group of men living the aspirations inherent to the scientific process.

In such conditions, the heterogeneous elements, at least as such, find themselves subjected to a de facto censorship: each time that they could be the object of a methodical observation, functional satisfaction is lacking; and without some exceptional circumstance — like the intrusion of a satisfaction with a completely different origin —, they cannot be kept within the field of consideration.

The exclusion of *heterogeneous* elements from the *homogeneous* realm of consciousness formally recalls the exclusion of the elements, described (by psychoanalysis) as *unconscious*, which censorship excludes from the conscious ego. The difficulties opposing the revelation of *unconscious* forms of existence are of the same order as those opposing the knowledge of *heterogeneous* forms. As will subsequently be made clear, these two kinds of forms have certain properties in common and, without being able to elaborate immediately upon this point, it would seem that the *unconscious* must be considered as one of the aspects of the *heterogeneous*. If this conception is granted, given what we know about repression, it is that much easier to understand the incursions occasionally made into the *heterogeneous* realm have not been sufficiently coordinated to yield even the simple revelation of its positive and clearly separate existence.

It is of secondary importance to indicate here that, in order to avoid the internal difficulties that have just been foreseen, it is necessary to posit the limits of science's inherent tendencies, and to constitute a knowledge of the *non-explainable difference*, which supposes the immediate access of the intellect to a body of material, prior to any intellectual reduction. Tentatively, it is enough to present the facts according to their nature and, with a view to defining the term *heterogeneous*, to introduce the following considerations:

1) Just as, in religious sociology, *mana* and *taboo* designate forms restricted to the particular applications of a more general form, the *sacred*, so may the *sacred* itself be considered as a restricted form of the *heterogeneous*.

Mana designates the mysterious and impersonal force possessed by

CENTER

LEFT

individuals such as kings and witch doctors. *Taboo* indicates the social prohibition of contact pertaining, for example, to cadavers and menstruating women. Given the precise and limited facts to which they refer, these aspects of *heterogeneous* life are easy to define. However, an explicit understanding of the *sacred*, whose field of application is relatively vast, presents considerable difficulties. Durkheim faced the impossibility of providing it with a positive scientific definition: he settled for characterizing the sacred world negatively as being absolutely heterogeneous compared to the profane.⁴ It is nevertheless possible to admit that the *sacred* is known positively, at least implicitly (since the word is commonly used in every language, that usage supposes a signification perceived by the whole of mankind). This implicit knowledge of a heterogeneous value permits a vague but positive character to be communicated to its description. Yet, it can be said that the heterogeneous world is largely comprised of the sacred world, and that reactions analogous to those generated by sacred things are provoked by heterogeneous things that are not, strictly speaking, considered to be sacred. These reactions are such that the heterogeneous thing is assumed to be charged with an unknown and dangerous force (recalling the Polynesian *mana*) and that a certain social prohibition of contact (*taboo*) separates it from the *homogeneous* or ordinary world (which corresponds to the profane world in the strictly religious opposition);

2) Beyond the properly sacred things that constitute the common realm of religion or magic, the *heterogeneous* world includes everything resulting from *unproductive* expenditure⁵ (sacred things themselves form part of this whole). This consists of everything rejected by *homogeneous* society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin, etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses; the numerous elements or social forms that *homogeneous* society is powerless to assimilate: mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individuals or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.);

3) Depending upon the person, *heterogeneous* elements will provoke affective reactions of varying intensity, and it is possible to assume that the object of any affective reaction is necessarily *heterogeneous* (if not generally, at least with regard to the subject). There is sometimes attraction, sometimes repulsion, and in certain circumstance, any object of repulsion can become an object of attraction and vice versa;

4. *Formes elementaires de la vie religieuse*, 1912, p. 53. Following his analysis, Durkheim comes to identify the *sacred* and the *social*, but this identification necessitates the introduction of an hypothesis and, whatever its scope, does not have the value of an immediately significant definition (it actually represents the tendency of science to posit a *homogeneous* representation in order to avoid the discernible presence of fundamentally *heterogeneous* elements).

5. Cf. G. Bataille, *La notion de dépense*, in *La critique sociale*, 1, January 1933, p. 302.

CENTER

LEFT

70 Bataille

LEFT

4) *Violence, excess, delirium, madness* characterize heterogeneous elements to varying degrees: active, as persons or mobs, they result from breaking the laws of social *homogeneity*. This characteristic does not appropriately apply to inert objects, yet the latter do present a certain conformity with extreme emotions (if it is possible to speak of the violent and excessive nature of a decomposing body);

5) The reality of *heterogeneous* elements is not of the same order as that of *homogeneous* elements. *Homogeneous* reality presents itself with the abstract and neutral aspect of strictly defined and identified objects (basically, it is the specific reality of solid objects). *Heterogeneous* reality is that of a force or shock. It presents itself as a charge, as a value, passing from one object to another in a more or less abstract fashion, almost as if the change were taking place not in the world of objects but only in the judgments of the subject. The preceding aspect nevertheless does not signify that the observed facts are to be considered as subjective: thus, the action of the objects of erotic activity, is manifestly rooted in their objective nature. Nonetheless, in a disconcerting way, the subject does have the capacity to displace the exciting value of one element onto an analogous or neighboring one.⁶ In heterogeneous reality, the symbols charged with affective value thus have the same importance as the fundamental elements, and the part can have the same value as the whole. It is easy to note that, since the structure of knowledge for a homogeneous reality is that of science, the knowledge of a heterogeneous reality as such is to be found in the mystical thinking of primitives and in dreams: it is identical to the structure of the unconscious;⁷

6) In summary, compared to everyday life, heterogeneous existence can be represented as something other, as incommensurate, by charging these words with the positive value they have in affective experience.

LEFT Examples of heterogeneous elements

If these suggestions are now brought to bear upon actual elements, the fascist leaders are incontestably part of heterogeneous existence. Opposed to democratic politicians, who represent in different countries the platitude inherent to homogeneous society, Mussolini and Hitler immediately stand out as something other. Whatever emotions their actual existence as political agents of evolution provokes, it is impossible to ignore the force that situates them above men, parties, and even laws: a force that disrupts the regular course of things, the peaceful but fastidious homogeneity powerless to maintain itself (the fact that laws are broken is only the most obvious sign of the transcendent, heterogeneous nature of fascist action).

LEFT

6. It appears that the displacements are produced under the same conditions as are Pavlov's conditioned reflexes.

7. On the primitive mind, cf. Levy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive*; Cassirer, *Das mythische Denken*; on the unconscious, cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

CENTER

LEFT

Considered not with regard to its external action but with regard to its source, the force of a leader is analogous to that exerted in hypnosis.⁸ The affective flow that unites him with his followers — which takes the form of a moral identification⁹ of the latter with the one they follow (and reciprocally) — is a function of the common consciousness of increasingly violent and excessive energies and powers that accumulate in the person of the leader and through him become widely available. (But this concentration in a single person intervenes as an element that sets the fascist formation apart within the heterogeneous realm: by the very fact that the affective effervescence leads to unity, it constitutes, as *authority*, an agency directed *against* men; this agency is an existence *for itself* before being useful; an existence for itself distinct from that of a formless uprising where *for itself* signifies “for the men in revolt”.) This *monarchy*, this absence of all democracy, of all fraternity in the exercise of power — forms that do not exist only in Italy or Germany — indicates that the immediate natural needs of men must be renounced, under constraint, in favor of a transcendent principle that cannot be the object of an exact explanation.

In a quite different sense, the lowest strata of society can equally be described as heterogeneous, those who generally provoke repulsion and can in no case be assimilated by the whole of mankind. In India, these impoverished classes are considered untouchable, meaning that they are characterized by the prohibition of contact analogous to that applied to sacred things. It is true that the custom of countries in advanced civilizations is less ritualistic and that the quality of being untouchable is not necessarily hereditary; nevertheless, being destitute is all it takes in these countries to create between the self and others — who consider themselves the expression of normal man — a nearly insuperable gap. The nauseating forms of dejection provoke a feeling of disgust so unbearable that it is improper to express or even to make allusion to it. By all indications, in the psychological order of disfiguration, the material poverty of man has *excessive* consequences. And, in the event that *fortunate* men have not undergone *homogeneous* reduction (which opposes a legal justification to poverty), if we except those shameless attempts at evasion such as charitable pity, the hopeless violence of the reactions immediately takes on the form of a challenge to reason.

V. The Fundamental Dualism of the Heterogeneous World

The two preceding examples, taken from the broader domain of *heterogeneity*, and not from the sacred domain proper, nevertheless do present the specific traits of the latter. This is readily apparent with

8. On the affective relations of the followers to the leader and on the analogy with hypnosis, cf. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the “Ego”*; (reprinted in *Essais de psychanalyse*, 1929).

9. Cf. W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the religion of the Semites*, First series, *The Fundamental institutions*, Edinburgh, 1889.

LEFT

72 Bataille

LEFT

reference to the leaders, who are manifestly treated by their followers as sacred persons. It is much less evident with reference to forms of poverty which are not the object of any cult.

But the revelation that such vile forms are compatible with the sacred character precisely marks the decisive headway made in the knowledge of the sacred as well as in that of the *heterogeneous* realm. The notion of the duality of sacred forms is one of the conclusive findings of social anthropology: these forms must be distributed among two opposing classes: *pure* and *impure* (in primitive religions certain impure things — menstrual blood, for example — are no less sacred than the divine nature; the awareness of this fundamental duality has persisted until relatively recent times: in the Middle Ages, the word *sacer* was used to designate a shameful illness — syphilis — and the deeper meaning of this usage was still intelligible. The theme of sacred poverty — impure and untouchable — constitutes precisely the negative pole of a region characterized by the opposition of two extreme forms: in a certain sense, there is an identity of opposites between glory and dejection, between exalted and imperative (higher) forms and impoverished (lower) forms. This opposition splits the whole of the *heterogeneous* world and joins the already defined characteristics of *heterogeneity* as a fundamental element. (Undifferentiated *heterogeneous* forms are, in fact, relatively rare — at least in developed societies — and the analysis of the internal *heterogeneous* social structure is almost entirely reduced to that of the opposition between two contrary terms.)

LEFT

VI. The Imperative Form of Heterogeneous Existence: Sovereignty

Heterogeneous fascist action belongs to the entire set of higher forms. It makes an appeal to sentiments traditionally defined as *exalted* and *noble* and tends to constitute authority as an unconditional principle, situated above any utilitarian judgment.

Obviously, the use of the words *higher*, *noble*, *exalted* does not imply endorsement. Here these qualities simply designate that something belongs to a category *historically* defined as *higher*, *noble*, or *exalted*: such particularized or novel conceptions can only be considered in relation to the traditional conceptions from which they derive; they are, furthermore, necessarily hybrid, without any farreaching effect, and it is doubtless preferable, if possible, to abandon any representation of this order (for what admissible reasons would a man want to be noble, similar to a representative of the medieval, military caste and absolutely not ignoble, that is to say similar, in accordance with the judgment of history, to a man whose material destitution would have altered his human character, made him *something other?*).

Having formulated this reservation, the meaning of higher values must be clarified with the help of traditional qualifiers. *Superiority* (imperative

CENTER

LEFT

sovereignty¹⁰) designates the entire set of striking aspects —affectively determining attraction or repulsion — characteristic of different human situations in which it is possible to dominate and even to oppress one's fellows by reason of their age, physical weakness, legal status, or simply of their necessity to place themselves under the control of one person: specific situations correspond to diverse circumstances, that of the father with regard to his children, that of the military leader with regard to the army and the civilian population, that of the master with regard to the slave, that of the king with regard to his subjects. To these real situations must be added mythological situations whose exclusively fictitious nature facilitates a condensation of the aspects characteristic of superiority.

The simple fact of dominating one's fellows implies the *heterogeneity* of the master, insofar as he is the master: to the extent that he refers to his nature, to his personal quality, as the justification of his authority, he designates his nature as *something other*, without being able to account for it rationally. But not only as *something other* with regard to the rational domain of the common measure and the equivalent: the *heterogeneity* of the master is no less opposed to that of the slave. If the heterogeneous nature of the slave is akin to that of the filth to which his material situation condemns him to live, that of the master is formed by an act excluding all filth: an act pure in direction but sadistic in form.

In human terms, the ultimate imperative value presents itself in the form of royal or imperial authority in which cruel tendencies and the need, characteristic of all domination, to realize and idealize order are manifest in the highest degree. This double character is not less present in fascist authority, but it is only one of the numerous forms of royal authority, the description of which constitutes the foundation of any coherent description of fascism.

In opposition to the impoverished existence of the oppressed, political sovereignty initially presents itself as a clearly differentiated sadistic activity. In individual psychology, it is rare for the sadistic tendency not to be associated with a more or less manifest masochistic tendency. But as each tendency is normally represented in society by a distinct agency, the sadistic attitude can be manifested by an imperative person to the exclusion of any corresponding masochistic attitudes. In this case, the exclusion of the filthy forms that serve as the object of the cruel act is not accompanied by the positioning of these forms as a value and, consequently, no erotic activity can be associated with the cruelty. The erotic elements themselves are rejected at the same time as every filthy object and, as in a great number of religious attitudes, sadism attains a brilliant purity. This differentiation can be more or less complete —individually, sovereigns have been able to live power in part as an orgy of blood — but, on the whole, within the *heterogeneous* domain, the imperative royal form has historically effected an

10. The word *sovereign* comes from the lower Latin adjective *superaneus* meaning *superior*.

LEFT

74 Bataille

LEFT

exclusion of impoverished and filthy forms sufficient to permit a connection with *homogeneous* forms at a certain level.

In fact, as a rule, *homogeneous* society excludes every *heterogeneous* element, whether filthy or noble; the modalities of the operation vary as much as the nature of each excluded element. For homogeneous society, only the rejection of impoverished forms has a constant fundamental value (such that the least recourse to the reserves of energy represented by these forms requires an operation as dangerous as *subversion*); but, given that the act of excluding impoverished forms necessarily associates *homogeneous* forms with imperative forms, the latter can no longer be purely and simply rejected. To combat the elements most incompatible with it, *homogeneous* society uses free-floating imperative forces; and, when it must choose the very object of its activity (the existence *for itself* in the service of which it must necessarily place itself) from the domain that it has excluded, the choice inevitably falls on those forces which have already proved most effective.

The inability of *homogeneous* society to find in itself a reason for being and acting is what makes it dependent upon imperative forces, just as the sadistic hostility of sovereigns towards the impoverished population is what allies them with any formation seeking to maintain the latter in a state of oppression.

A complex situation results from the royal person's modalities of exclusion: since the king is the object in which homogeneous society has found its reason for being, maintaining this relationship demands that he conduct himself in such a way that the *homogeneous* society can exist *for him*. In the first place, this requirement bears upon the fundamental *heterogeneity* of the king, guaranteed by numerous prohibitions of contact (taboos); this heterogeneity, however, is impossible to keep in a free state. In no case may *heterogeneity* receive its law from without, but its spontaneous movement can be fixed, at least tendentially, once and for all. Thus, the destructive passion (sadism) of the imperative agency is as a rule exclusively directed either toward foreign societies or towards the impoverished classes, towards all those external or internal elements hostile to *homogeneity*.

Historically, royal power is the form that results from such a situation. As for its positive function, a determining role is reserved for the very principle of unification, actually carried out in a group of individuals whose affective choice bears upon a single *heterogeneous* object. A shared orientation has, in itself, a constitutive value: it presupposes — vaguely, it is true — the imperative character of the object. Unification, the principle of *homogeneity*, is only a tendential fact, incapable of finding in itself a motive for requiring and imposing its existence; and, in most circumstances, the recourse to an external requirement has the value of a primary necessity. Yet the pure *having to be*, the moral imperative, requires being *for itself*, namely the specific mode of *heterogeneous* existence. But this existence

CENTER

LEFT

precisely escapes the principle of having to be and can in no case be subordinated to it: it immediately accedes to *Being* (in other words it produces itself as a value *being or not being*) and never as a value that has to be. The complex form in which the resolution of this incompatibility culminates poses the *having to be* of *homogeneous* existence in *heterogeneous* existences. Thus, imperative *heterogeneity* not only represents a differentiated form with regard to vague *heterogeneity*: it additionally supposes the structural modification of the two parts, *homogeneous* and *heterogeneous*, in contact with one another. On the one hand, the *homogeneous* formation akin to the royal agency, the State, derives its imperative character from this agency and seems to attain existence *for itself* by bringing about the barren and cold *having to be* of the whole of homogeneous society. But the State is in reality only the abstract, degraded form of the living *having to be* required, at the top, as an affective attraction and royal agency: it is simply vague *homogeneity* become a constraint. On the other hand, this mode of intermediary formation which characterizes the State penetrates imperative existence through reaction; but, in the course of this introjection, the proper form of homogeneity becomes — this time for real — existence *for itself* by denying itself: it becomes absorbed by *heterogeneity* and destroys itself as strictly *homogeneous* from the fact that, having become the negation of the principle of utility, it refuses all subordination. Although profoundly penetrated by the *reason of State*, the king nevertheless does not identify with the latter: he wholly maintains the separate character of divine supremacy. He is exempt from the specific principle of homogeneity, the compensation of rights and duties constituting the formal law of the State: the king's rights are unconditional.

There is hardly any need to suggest at this point that the possibility of such affective formations has brought about the infinite subjugation that degrades most forms of human life (much more so than abuses of power which, furthermore, are themselves reducible — insofar as the force in play is necessarily social — to imperative formations). If sovereignty is now considered in its tendential form — such as it has been lived historically by the subject to whom it owes its attractive value — yet independently of any particular reality, its nature appears, in human terms, to be the noblest — exalted to majesty —, pure in the midst of the orgy, beyond the reach of human infirmities. It constitutes the region formally exempt from self-interested intrigues to which the oppressed subject refers as to an empty but pure satisfaction. (In this sense the constitution of royal nature above an inadmissible reality recalls the fictions justifying eternal life.) As a tendential form, it fulfills the *ideal* of society and the course of things (in the subject's mind, this function is expressed naively: *if the king only knew . . .*). At the same time it is strict authority. Situated above *homogeneous* society, as well as above the impoverished populace or the aristocratic hierarchy that emanates from it, it requires the bloody repression of what is contrary to it and becomes synonymous in its split-off form with the heterogeneous

CENTER

LEFT

76 *Bataille*

LEFT

foundations of the law: it is thus both the possibility of and the requirement for collective unity; it is in the royal orbit that the State and its functions of coercion and adaptation are elaborated; the homogeneous reduction develops, both as destruction and foundation, to the benefit of royal greatness.

Posing itself as the principle for the association of innumerable elements, royal power develops spontaneously as an imperative and destructive force against every other imperative form that could be opposed to it. It thereby manifests, at the top, the fundamental tendency and principle of all authority: the reduction to a personal entity, the individualization of power. While impoverished existence is necessarily produced as a multitude and homogeneous society as a reduction to the common measure, the imperative agency — the foundation of oppression — necessarily develops along the lines of a reduction to a unit in the form of a human being excluding the very possibility of a peer, in other words as a radical form of exclusion requiring avidity.

VII. *Tendential Concentration*

This tendency toward concentration appears to be in contradiction, it is true, with the coexistence of distinct domains of power: the domain of royal sovereignty is different from military power and from the domain of religious authority. But taking note of this coexistence is precisely what draws attention to the composite character of royal power, in which it is easy to find the constitutive elements of the other two powers, the religious and the military.¹¹

It thus becomes apparent that royal sovereignty should not be considered as a simple element having its own autonomous source, such as the army or the religious organization: it is exactly (and furthermore uniquely) the actualized concentration of these two elements formed in two different directions. The constant rebirth of military and religious powers in a pure state has never modified the principle of their tendential concentration in the form of a single sovereignty: even the formal refusal of Christianity has not prevented — to use vulgar symbolic terminology — the cross from lying on the steps of the throne with the saber.

Considered historically, this concentration can be achieved spontaneously: the head of the army succeeds in having himself crowned *king* through the use of force, or the established *king* takes hold of military power (in Japan, the emperor recently actualized this form, without, it is true, his own initiative having played a determining role). But each time, even in the

LEFT

11. Freud, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the "Ego,"* studied precisely the two functions, military (army) and religious (church), in relation to the imperative form (unconscious) of individual psychology which he called the *Ego Ideal* or the *superego*. If one refers to the whole of the elements brought together in the present study, that work, published in German in 1921, appears as an essential introduction to the understanding of fascism.

CENTER

LEFT

case where royalty is *usurped*, the possibility of the uniting of powers depended upon their fundamental affinities and especially upon their ~~LEFT~~ essential concentration.

The consideration of the principles governing these facts obviously becomes crucial from the moment that fascism renews their historical existence, that is, once again unites military and religious authority to effect a total oppression. (In this regard, it can be stated — without prejudicing any other political judgment — that any unlimited actualization of imperative forms amounts to a negation of humanity as a value which depends upon the play of internal oppositions.) Like Bonapartism, fascism (which etymologically signifies *uniting, concentration*) is no more than an acute reactivation of the latent sovereign agency, but with a character in a sense purified by the fact that paramilitary groups substituted for the army in the constitution of power immediately have that power as an object.

LEFT

~~LEFT~~ VIII. *The Army and the Heads of the Army*

As a rule, the army exists functionally because of war, and its psychological structure is entirely reducible to the exercise of that function. Thus its imperative character does not directly result from the social importance linked to the material power of controlling weapons: its internal organization — discipline and hierarchy — are what make it preeminently a noble ~~LEFT~~ society.

Obviously, the *nobility of arms* initially supposes an intense *heterogeneity*: discipline and hierarchy are themselves but forms and not the foundations of *heterogeneity*; bloodshed, carnage, and death, exclusively, are commensurate with the fundamental nature of weapons. But the ambiguous horror of war still has only a vulgar *heterogeneity* (at best undifferentiated). The exalted, exalting control of weapons supposes the affective unification necessary to their cohesion, i.e., to their effective ~~LEFT~~ value.

The affective character of this unification is manifest in the form of the soldier's attachment to the head of the army: it implies that each soldier equates the latter's glory with his own. This process is the intermediary through which disgusting slaughter is radically transformed into its opposite, glory, namely into a pure and intense attraction. The glory of the chief essentially constitutes a sort of affective pole opposed to the nature of the soldiers. Even independently of their horrible occupation, the soldiers belong *as a rule* to a vile segment of the population; divested of its uniforms and wearing ordinary clothing, a professional army of the 18th century would have looked like a wretched populace. But even the elimination of enlistments from the lower classes would fail to change the deeper structure of the army; this structure would continue to base affective organization upon the social infamy of the soldiers. *Human beings* incorporated into the army are but negated elements, negated with a kind of rage (a sadism)

CENTER

LEFT

78 *Bataille*

LEFT

manifest in the tone of each command, negated by the parade, by the uniform, and by the *geometric* regularity of cadenced movements. The chief, insofar as he is imperative, is the incarnation of this violent negation. His intimate nature, the nature of his glory, is constituted by an imperative act that annuls the wretched populace (which constitutes the army) as such (in the same way that the slaughter is annulled as such).

In social psychology, this imperative negation generally appears as the characteristic of *action*; in other words, every affirmed social *action* necessarily takes the unified psychological form of *sovereignty*; every lower form, every ignominy, being by definition passive, is transformed into its opposite by the simple fact of a transition to action. Slaughter, as an inert result, is ignoble; but, shifted onto the social action that caused it, the ignoble heterogeneous value thus established becomes noble (the action of killing and nobility are association by indefectible historical ties): all it takes is for the action to effectively affirm itself as such, to freely assume the imperative form that constitutes it.

This operation — the fact of assuming *in complete freedom* the imperative character of action — is precisely what characterizes the chief. It becomes possible to grasp here in an explicit form the role played by unification (individualization) in the structural modifications that characterize superior *heterogeneity*. Starting with formless and impoverished elements, the army, under the imperative impulse, becomes organized and internally achieves a *homogeneous* form on account of the negation directed at the disordered character of its elements: in fact, the mass that constitutes the army passes from a depleted and ruined existence to a purified geometric order, from formlessness to aggressive rigidity. In actuality, this negated mass has ceased to be itself in order to become affectively (“affectively” refers here to simple psychological behaviors, such as *standing at attention* or *marching double-time*) the chief’s thing and like a part of the chief himself. A troop *at attention* is in a sense absorbed by the existence of the command and, thus, absorbed by the negation of itself. *Standing at attention* can be analogically considered as a figurative movement (a kind of geometrical negative) elevating not only the chief but all who follow his orders to the (geometrically) regular form of imperative sovereignty. Thus the implied infamy of the soldiers is only a basic infamy which, in uniform, is transformed into its opposite: order and glamor. The mode of *heterogeneity* explicitly undergoes a thorough alteration, completing the realization of intense *homogeneity* without a decrease of the fundamental *heterogeneity*. In the midst of the population, the army retains the distinction of being *wholly other*, but with a sovereignty linked to domination, to the imperative and separate character which the chief transmits to his soldiers.

Thus the dominant direction of the army, detached from its affective foundations (infamy and slaughter), depends upon the contrary *heterogeneity* of *honor* and *duty* incarnated in the person of the chief. (If the chief is not subordinate to a real agency or to an idea, duty is incarnated in his

CENTER

LEFT

person in the same way as in that of the king.) Honor and duty, symbolically expressed by the geometry of the parades, are the tendential forms that situate military existence above homogeneous existence as imperative and as a pure reason for being. Having a limited bearing on certain levels of action, these forms, in their properly military aspect, are compatible with infinitely craven crimes, but they suffice to affirm the exalted value of the army and to make the internal domination characterizing its structure one of the fundamental elements of a supreme psychological authority instituted above the subjugated society.

Nevertheless, the immediate result of the power of the head of the army is only an internal homogeneity independent of social *homogeneity*, whereas specific royal power exists only in relation to homogeneous society. The integration of military power into social power therefore supposes a structural change: it supposes the acquisition of modalities characteristic of royal power in relation to the administration of the State, as they were described in relation to this power.

LEFT

IX. Religious Power

It is granted in an implicit and vague manner that holding military power has been sufficient to exert a general domination. Nevertheless, with the exception of colonizations, which extend a pre-established power, examples of long-lasting, exclusively military dominations are hard to find. In fact, simple material armed force is incapable of founding any power: in the first place, such force depends on the internal attraction exerted by the chief (money is insufficient to constitute an army). And when the chief wants to use the force at his disposal to dominate society, he must further acquire the elements of an external attraction (of a *religious* attraction valid for the entire population).

It is true that the latter elements are sometimes at the disposal of force, yet, as the origin of royal power, military attraction probably has no primacy over religious attraction. To the extent that it is possible to formulate a valid judgment about the distant past of mankind, it seems fairly clear that religion — not the army — is the source of social authority. Furthermore, the introduction of heredity regularly marks the predominance of a religious form of power: it can rely upon its blood lines, whereas military power depends first of all on personal value.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascribe a specific meaning to that which, in the blood or in the aspects of royalty, is characteristically religious: here one essentially confronts the bare and unlimited form of undifferentiated *heterogeneity*, before any of its perceptible elements (ones that can be made explicit) has been fixed by a still vague direction. This direction does exist nonetheless, but, in every causal state, the structural modifications that it introduces leave the field to a free projection of general affective forms, such as anxiety or sacred attraction. Furthermore, structural modifications are

CENTER

LEFT

80 *Bataille*

LEFT

not what are immediately transmitted through physiological contact in heredity or by sacred rites, but rather a fundamental *heterogeneity*.

The (implicit) signification of the purely religious royal character can only be attained to the extent that its origin and structure appear to be shared with those of a divine nature. Though it is impossible, in such a cursory presentation, to present all of the affective movements involved in the establishment of mythical authorities (culminating in the positioning of a fictitious supreme authority), a simple juxtaposition is amply revealing. Unequivocal facts (identifications with the divine, mythical genealogies, the Roman or Shintoist imperial cults, the Christian theory of divine right) correspond to the shared structure of the two formations. On the whole, the king is considered in one form or another to be an emanation of a divine nature, along with everything that the principle of emanation entails in the way of identity when dealing with heterogeneous elements.

The notable structural modifications that characterize the evolution of the representation of the divine — starting with free and irresponsible violence — simply makes explicit those characterizing the formation of the royal nature. In both cases, the position of the sovereign is what directs the alteration of the heterogeneous structure. In both cases, we witness a concentration of attributes and forces; but, in the case of God, since the forces that he represents are only composed in a fictitious being (not subject to the limitation of having to be realized), it was possible to yield more perfect forms, more purely logical schemata.

The supreme being of theologians and philosophers represents the most profound introjection of the structure characteristic of *homogeneity* into *heterogeneous* existence: in his theological aspect, God preeminently fulfills the sovereign form. However, the counterpart to this possibility is implied by the fictitious character of divine existence, whose *heterogeneous* nature, lacking the limitative value of reality, can be overlooked in a philosophical conception (reduced to a formal affirmation that is in no way lived). In the order of free intellectual speculation, the idea can be substituted for God as supreme existence and power; this implies the admittedly partial revelation of a relative *heterogeneity* of the Idea (such as occurred when Hegel raised the Idea above the simple *having to be*).

LEFT

X. *Fascism as the Sovereign Form of Sovereignty*

Stirring up such apparently anachronistic phantoms would surely be senseless if fascism had not, before our very eyes, reappropriated and reconstituted from the bottom up — starting, as it were, with nothing — the very process described above for the establishment of power. Until our times, there had only been a single historical example of the sudden formation of a total power, namely the Islamic Khalifat. While both military and religious, it was principally royal, relying upon no prior foundation. Islam, a form comparable to fascism in its meager human wealth, did not even have

CENTER

LEFT

recourse to an established nation, much less a constituted State. But it must be recognized that, for fascist movements, the existing State has first been something to conquer, then a means or a frame,¹² and that the integration of the nation does not change the schema of their formation. Just like early Islam, fascism represents the constitution of a total heterogeneous power whose manifest origin is to be found in the prevailing effervescence.

In the first place, fascist power is characterized by a foundation that is both religious and military, in which these two habitually distinct elements cannot be separated: it thus presents itself from the outset as an accomplished concentration.

It is true, however, that the military aspect is the predominant one. The affective relations that closely associate (identify) the leader to the member of the party (as they have already been described) are generally analogous to those uniting a chief to his soldiers. The imperative presence of the leader amounts to a negation of the fundamental revolutionary effervescence that he taps; the revolution, which is affirmed as a foundation is, at the same time, fundamentally negated from the moment that internal domination is militarily exerted on the militia. But this internal domination is not directly subordinated to real or possible acts of war: it essentially poses itself as the middle term of an external domination of society and of the State, as the middle term of a total imperative value. Thus, qualities characteristic of the two dominations (internal and external, military and religious) are simultaneously implied: qualities derived from the introjected *homogeneity*, such as duty, discipline and obedience, and qualities derived from the essential heterogeneity: imperative violence and the positioning of the chief as the transcendent object of collective affectivity. But the religious value of the chief is really the fundamental (if not formal) value of fascism, giving the activity of the militiamen its characteristic affective tonality, distinct from that of the soldier in general. The chief as such is in fact only the emanation of a principle which is none other than that of the glorious existence of a nation raised to the value of a divine force (which, superseding every other conceivable consideration, demands not only passion but ecstasy from its participants). Incarnated in the person of the chief (in Germany, the properly religious term, prophet, has sometimes been used), the nation thus plays the same role that Allah, incarnated in the person of Mahomet or the Khalif,¹³ plays for Islam.

Fascism therefore appears first of all as a concentration and so to speak condensation of power¹⁴ (a meaning actually indicated in the etymological

LEFT

12. The modern Italian State is to a great extent a creation of fascism.

13. *Khalif* etymologically signifies *lieutenant* (standing in for [tenant lieu]); the full title is "lieutenant of the emissary of God."

14. Condensation of *superiority*, evidently related to a latent inferiority complex: such a complex has equally strong roots in both Italy and Germany; this is why, even if fascism develops subsequently in regions having attained a complete sovereignty and the awareness of

CENTER

LEFT

82 *Bataille*

LEFT

value of the term). This general signification must furthermore be accepted in several ways. The accomplished uniting of imperative forces takes place at the top, but the process leaves no social fraction inactive. In fundamental opposition to socialism, fascism is characterized by the uniting of classes. Not that classes conscious of their unity have adhered to the regime, but because expressive elements of each class have been represented in the deep movements of adherence that led to the seizing of power. Here the specific type of unification is actually derived from properly military affectivity, which is to say that the representative elements of the exploited classes have been included in the affective process only through the negation of their own nature (just as the social nature of a recruit is negated by means of uniforms and parades). This process which *blends* the different social formations from the bottom up must be understood as a fundamental process whose scheme is necessarily given in the very formation of the chief, who derives his profound meaning from the fact of having shared the dejected and impoverished life of the proletariat. But, as in the case of military organization, the affective value characteristic of impoverished existence is only displaced and transformed into its opposite; and it is its inordinate scope that gives the chief and the whole of the formation the accent of violence without which no army or fascism could be possible.

LEFT
XI. The Fascist State

Fascism's close ties with the impoverished classes profoundly distinguish this formation from classical royal society, which is characterized by a more or less decisive loss of contact with the lower classes. But, forming in opposition to the established royal unification (the forms of which dominate society from too far above), the fascist unification is not simply a uniting of powers from different origins and a symbolic uniting of classes: it is also the accomplished uniting of the *heterogeneous* elements with the *homogeneous* elements, of sovereignty in the strictest sense with the State.

As a uniting, fascism is actually opposed as much to Islam as it is to traditional monarchy. In fact Islam created from nothing, and that is why a form such as the State, which can only be the result of a long historical process, played no role in its immediate constitution; on the contrary, the existing State served from the outset as a frame for the entire fascist process of organic organization. This characteristic aspect of fascism permitted Mussolini to write that "everything is in the State," that "nothing human or spiritual exists nor *a fortiori* does it have any existence outside of the State."¹⁵ But this does not necessarily imply an identity of the State and the imperative force that dominates the whole of society. Mussolini himself, who leaned toward a kind of Hegelian divinisation of the State, acknowledges in willfully obscure terms a distinct principle of sovereignty that he

the sovereignty, it is inconceivable that it could ever have been the autochthonous and specific product of such countries.

[15. Mussolini, *Enciclopedia italiana*, article *Fascismo*.]

CENTER

LEFT

alternately designates as *the people, the nation, and the superior personality*, but which must be identified with the fascist formation itself and its leader: "if the people . . . signifies the idea . . . that is incarnated in the people as the will of a few or even of a single person . . . It has to do," he writes, "neither with race nor with a determined geographical region, but with a grouping that is historically perpetuated, of a multitude unified by an idea that is a will to existence and to power: it is a self-consciousness, a personality."¹⁶ The term *personality* must be understood as *individualization*, a process leading to Mussolini himself, and when he adds that "this superior personality is the nation as State. It is not the nation that creates the State . . .,"¹⁷ it must be understood that he has: 1) substituted the principle of the sovereignty of the individualized fascist formation for the old democratic principle of the sovereignty of the nation; 2) laid the groundwork for a conclusive interpretation of the sovereign agency and the State.

Nationalist-Socialist Germany — which, unlike Italy (under the patronage of Gentile), has not officially adopted Hegelianism and the theory of the State as soul of the world — has not been afflicted with the theoretical difficulties resulting from the necessity of officially articulating a principle of authority: the mystical idea of race immediately affirmed itself as the imperative aim of the new fascist society; at the same time it appeared to be incarnated in the person of the Führer and his followers. Even though the conception of race lacks an objective base, it is nonetheless subjectively grounded, and the necessity of maintaining the racial value above all others obviated the need for a theory that made the State the principle of all value. The example of Germany thus demonstrates that the identity established by Mussolini between the State and the sovereign form of value is not necessary to a theory of fascism.

The fact that Mussolini did not formally distinguish the *heterogeneous* agency, the action of which he caused to penetrate deeply into the State, can equally be interpreted as an absolute seizure of the State, and as a strained adaptation of the sovereign agency to the necessities of a regime of *homogeneous* production. It is in the development of these two reciprocal processes that fascism and the reason of State came to appear identical. Nevertheless, the forms of life rigorously conserve a fundamental opposition when they maintain a radical duality of principles in the very person of the one holding power: the president of the Italian council and the German chancellor represent forms of activity radically distinct from those of the Duce or the Führer. Further, these two figures derive their fundamental power not from their official function in the State, like other prime ministers, but from the existence of a fascist party and from their personal position at the head of that party. In conjunction with the duality of *heterogeneous* and *homogeneous* forms, this evidence of the deep roots of

16. *Ibid.*17. *Ibid.*

LEFT

84 Bataille

LEFT

power precisely maintains the unconditional supremacy of the *heterogeneous* form from the standpoint of the principle of sovereignty.

LEFT

XII. The Fundamental Conditions of Fascism

As has already been indicated, *heterogeneous* processes as a whole can only enter into play once the fundamental *homogeneity* of society (the apparatus of production) has become dissociated because of its internal contradictions. Further, it can be stated that, even though it generally occurs in the blindest fashion, the development of heterogeneous forces necessarily comes to signify a solution to the problem posed by the contradictions of *homogeneity*. Once in power, developed *heterogeneous* forces dispose of the means of coercion necessary to resolve the differences that had arisen between previously irreconcilable elements. But it goes without saying that, at the end of a movement that excludes all subversion, the thrust of these resolutions will have been consistent with the general direction of the existing homogeneity, namely, with the interests of the capitalists.

The change resides in the fact that, having had recourse to fascist *heterogeneity*, these interests, from the moment of crisis on, are those of a group opposed to privately-owned enterprises. As a result, the very structure of capitalism — the principle of which had been that of a spontaneous *homogeneity* of production based on competition, a de facto coincidence of the interests of the group of producers with the absolute freedom of each enterprise — finds itself profoundly altered. The awareness, developed in some German capitalists, of the peril to which this freedom subjected them in a critical period, must naturally be placed at the origin of the effervescence and triumph of National-Socialism. However, it is evident that this awareness did not yet exist for Italian capitalists who, from the moment of the march on Rome, were exclusively preoccupied with the irresolvability of their conflicts with the workers. It thus appears that the unity of fascism is located in its actual psychological structure and not in the economic conditions that serve as its base. (This does not contradict the fact that a general logical development of the economy retroactively provides the different fascisms with a common economic signification that they share, to be sure, with the political activity — absolutely foreign to fascism in the strictest sense — of the current government of the United States.)

Whatever the economic danger to which fascism responded, the awareness of this danger and the need to avoid it actually represent an as yet empty desire, which could be propped up by money. The realization of the force able to respond to the desire and to utilize the available monies takes place only in the heterogeneous region, and its possibility depends upon the actual structure of that region: on the whole, it is possible to consider this structure as variable depending on whether the society is democratic or monarchical.

I truly monarchical societies (as distinct from the adapted or bastardized political forms represented by England today or prefascist Italy) are

CENTER

LEFT

characterized by the fact that a sovereign agency, having an ancient origin and an absolute form, is connected to the existing *homogeneity*. The constant evolution of the constitutive elements of this *homogeneity* can necessitate fundamental changes, but the need for change can become represented internally only in an alerted minority: the whole of the homogeneous elements and the immediate principle of *homogeneity* remain committed to upholding the juridical forms and the existing administrative framework guaranteed by the authority of the king; the authority of the king coincides reciprocally with the upholding of these forms and this framework. Thus the upper part of the *heterogeneous* region is both immobilized and immobilizing, and only the lower part formed by the impoverished and oppressed classes is capable of entering into movement. But, for the latter, passive and oppressed by definition, the fact of entering into movement represents a profound alteration of their nature: in order to take part in a struggle against the sovereign agency and the legal homogeneity oppressing them, the lower classes must pass from a passive and diffuse state to a form of conscious activity; in Marxist terms, these classes must become aware of themselves as a revolutionary proletariat. This proletariat cannot actually be limited to itself: it is in fact only a point of concentration for every dissociated social element that has been banished to *heterogeneity*. It is even possible to say that such a point of concentration exists in a sense prior to the formation of what must be called the "conscious proletariat": the general description of the heterogeneous region actually implies that it be posited as a constitutive element of the structure of a whole that includes not only imperative forms and impoverished forms but also *subversive forms*. These subversive forms are none other than the lower forms transformed with a view to the struggle against the sovereign forms. The necessity inherent to subversive forms requires that what is low become high, that what is high become low; this is the requirement in which the nature of subversion is expressed. In the case where the sovereign forms of a society are immobilized and bound, the diverse elements that have been banished to *heterogeneity* as a result of social decomposition can only ally themselves with the formations which result when the oppressed class become active: they are necessarily dedicated to subversion. The fraction of the bourgeoisie that has become aware of the incompatibility with established social frameworks becomes united against figures of authority and blends in with the effervescent masses in revolt; and even in the period immediately following the destruction of the monarchy, social movements continued to be governed by the initial anti-authoritarian character of the revolution.

LEFT

But in a democratic society (at least when such a society is not galvanized by the necessity of going to war) the *heterogeneous* imperative agency (nation in republican forms, king in constitutional monarchies) is reduced to an atrophied existence, so that its destruction no longer appears to be a necessary condition of change. In such a situation, the imperative forms can even be considered as a free field, open to all possibilities of effervescence

CENTER

and movement, just as subversive forms are in a democracy. And when homogeneous society undergoes a critical disintegration, the dissociated elements no longer necessarily enter the orbit of subversive attraction: in addition there forms at the top an imperative attraction that no longer immobilizes those who are subjected to it. As a rule, until just recently, this imperative attraction only exerted itself in the direction of restoration. It was thus limited before hand by the prior nature of the disappeared sovereignty which most often implied a prohibitive loss of contact between the sovereign agency and the lower classes (the only spontaneous historical restoration, that of Bonapartism, must be put into relation with the manifest popular sources of Bonapartist power). In France, it is true, some of the constitutive forms of fascism were able to be elaborated in the formation — but especially in the difficulties of the formation — of an imperative attraction aimed at a dynastic restoration. The possibility of fascism nonetheless depended upon the fact that a reversion to vanished sovereign forms was out of the question in Italy, where the monarchy subsisted in a reduced state. Added to this subsistence, it was precisely the insufficiency of the royal formation that necessitated the formation of — and left the field open for — an entirely renewed imperative attraction with a popular base.

Under these new conditions (with regard to the classical revolutionary dissociations in monarchical societies) the lower classes no longer exclusively experience the attraction represented by socialist subversion, and a military type of organization has in part begun to draw them into the orbit of sovereignty. Likewise, the dissociated elements (belonging to the middle or dominating classes) have found a new outlet for their effervescence, and it is not surprising that, given the choice between subversive or imperative solutions, the majority opted for the imperative.

An unprecedented situation results from the possibility of this dual effervescence. During the same period and in the same society, two competing revolutions, hostile to one another and to the established order, are being formed. There develop at the same time two segments that share a common opposition to the general dissociation of *homogeneous* society; this explains the numerous connections between them and even a kind of profound complicity. Furthermore, independently of their common origin, the success of one of the fractions implies that of the opposing fraction through a certain play of balance: it can cause it to occur (in particular, to the extent that fascism is an imperative response to the growing threat of a working class movement), and should be considered in most cases as the sign of that occurrence. But, unless it is possible to reestablish the disrupted *homogeneity*, it is evident that the simple formation of a situation of this order dictates its own outcome in advance: an increase in this effervescence is accompanied by a proportionate increase in the importance of the *dissociated elements* (bourgeois and petty bourgeois) as compared to that of the elements that had never been integrated (proletariat). Thus the chances for a working class revolution, a liberating subversion of society disappear to

LEFT

LEFT
the extent that revolutionary possibilities are affirmed.

As a rule, it seems therefore that revolutionary movements that develop in a democracy are hopeless, at least so long as the memory of the earlier struggles against the royal authority has been attenuated and no longer necessarily sets *heterogeneous* reactions in opposition to imperative forms. In fact, it is evident that the situation of the major democratic powers, where the fate of the Revolution is being played out, does not warrant the slightest confidence: it is only the very nearly indifferent attitude of the proletariat that has permitted these countries to avoid fascist formations. Yet it would be puerile to presume to enclose the world in such a neat construction: from the outset, the mere consideration of affective social formations reveals the immense resources, the inexhaustible wealth of the forms particular to affective life. Not only are the psychological situations of the democratic collectivities, like any human situation, transitory, but it remains possible to envision, at least as a yet imprecise representation, forms of attraction that differ from those already in existence, as different from present or even past communism as fascism is from dynastic claims. A system of knowledge that permits the anticipation of the affective social reactions that traverse the superstructure and perhaps even, to a certain extent, do away with it, must be developed from one of these possibilities. The fact of fascism, which has thrown the very existence of a workers' movement into question, clearly demonstrates what can be expected from a timely recourse to reawakened affective forces. Unlike the situation during the period of utopian socialism, morality and idealism are no more the questions today than they are in fascist forms. Rather, an organized understanding of the movements in society, of attraction and repulsion, starkly presents itself as a weapon — at this moment when a vast convulsion opposes, not so much fascism to communism, but radical imperative forms to the deep subversion which continues to pursue the emacipation of human lives.

LEFT

Translated by Carl R. Lovitt

CENTER