Literature and the Arts since the 1960s

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Protest, Identity and the Imagination

Edited by

Jorge Almeida e Pinho and Márcia Lemos

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INTRODUCTION

JORGE ALMEIDA E PINHO
AND MÁRCIA LEMOS

The social and political events of the 1960s, and following decades, challenged social models and initiated huge progresses, which occurred on many fronts from that moment onwards. Such were the cases of changes in culture and the arts, but also in society, by a strong rejection of outdated laws, promoting a new affluence, and, above all, sexual and personal freedom. Not everything was bright, though; it was also an era of protest and failed dreams, when imagination had to be called upon to foster the swinging and liberating sides of that decade, erasing big fears and horrors.

Yet the feel of those times was different due to an underlying sense of potential for positive change, both for individuals and societies as a whole. Problems and possibilities were both being faced up to by many people, but the extent of avoidance and denial at that time's society was overwhelming and intellectually challenging to everyone involved. There was a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, a trust that one could reach out to others and find shared joy, shared protest and collective possibilities.

The question of what we learned from the 1960s is a useful one for all age groups, for any age, and it is therefore imperative to find ways to keep these lessons in our collective memory. The final decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century saw the proliferation of public debates around the importance of "memory" and there has been extensive literature published on the subject. In *Les lieux de mémoire* (1997), Pierre Nora explains that the growth in popularity of "sites of memory," such as libraries, museums or commemorations, to cite just a few, indicates that there is a revival of memory.[1] Nora begins by drawing a distinction between memory and history, pointing out that the former is constantly evolving and may consequently be threatened by amnesia,[2]

[1] Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 23.

[2] In *Twilight Memories*, Andreas Huyssen examines the threat of amnesia too: "The difficulty of the current conjuncture is to think memory and amnesia together rather than simply to oppose them. Thus our fever is not a consuming historical

which forces everybody to recognise the importance of commemorative surveillance.[3]

In *How Societies Remember* (1993), Paul Connerton had already supported the need for various performances to preserve and transmit knowledge of the past to future generations;[4] a point of view shared by Maurice Halbwachs in his very influential study titled *On Collective Memory* (1992):

> We ask how recollections are to be located. And we answer: with the help of landmarks that we always carry within ourselves, for it suffices to look around ourselves, to think about others, and locate ourselves within the social framework in order to retrieve them.[5]

The 1960s, as a particular instance of legacies of violent conflict, but also fraught peacemaking, should thus be celebrated and interrogated as such a landmark, especially at a juncture in world history (and European history in particular) in which national and regional identities are in various ways on the frontline of political discussion once more, with consequences and outcomes that remain unclear. That is why it seems very important to study the impact of its defining causes, hopes and regrets predominantly on the creative imagination as literature and the arts will forever remain some of the most important sites of memory.

The awakening moment for that extraordinary significant period in the global socio-political memory was May 1968, which came to be seen as the culmination and epitome of a series of processes involving protest and the affirmation of previously silent or subaltern causes. Such processes and causes were predicated on challenges to established powers and mindsets, and hence on demands for change, which have had rich consequences, both in literature and the arts.

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fever […], which could be cured by productive forgetting. It is rather a mnemonic fever that is caused by the virus of amnesia that at times threatens to consume memory itself." Andreas Huyssen, "Introduction: Time and Cultural Memory at our Fin-de-Siècle," in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7.

[3] Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 29.

[4] Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993), 4.

[5] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated and introduced by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 175.

Studies of the 1960s often focus on either the Civil Rights Movement in the USA or the May 1968 events in France.[6] Yet there seems to be a gap in the study of the 1960s from a multicultural and comprehensive perspective, including reflections of these seminal years in literary and artistic products and productions from different parts of the globe.

Accordingly, the contributors to this volume emphasise the empowering of the imagination, not only of the late 1960s but also beyond those years up to the present. The art, screening and staging of protest, and the words and images in action, namely in films, television and street art, as well as the large scope reached by literature in the world, reflecting conflict and violence in public and literary discourses, are also given detailed attention. Thus, examples taken from narratives of dissension, in fictionalized works, poetry, or translated works, and focusing on youth and conflict, identity, stereotypes and iconoclasm (verbal, visual) are essential to depict that era and the changes which have been implemented since then.

Some of the essays in this volume will additionally approach disruptive and constructive tropes of conflict and the making of contemporary societies. From audiovisual to digital media, protest since the 1960s promoted an array of collective action in the political domain, including new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, class-based struggles and women's movements. Nevertheless, it can be stated that such phenomena took an impressive step forward somewhere at those times and, within a few years, with some historical hindsight, it gave rise to a new wave of social movements and alternative politics. It was, definitely, a momentous occasion hard to forget. As David Farber contends, referring specifically to the Americans and their historical context, people "cannot seem to let the sixties go gently into the night."[7]

Together, the seventeen essays on this collection provide a wide panoramic view of this mythologized historical period through a series of

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[6] Examples of the former include James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), Neil A. Hamilton, *The ABC-Clio Companion to the 1960s Counterculture in America* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1997), or David Farber (ed.), *The sixties: from memory to history* (Library of Congress: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Examples of the latter include Bruno Barbery and Philippe Tesson, *May 1968: At the Heart of the Student Revolt in France* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet Pte Ltd, 2018) and Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013).

[7] David Farber (ed.), "Introduction," in *The sixties: from memory to history* (Library of Congress: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1.

essays focusing on specific case studies. The collection is thus divided into three parts.

The first part of such essays looks into the 1960s as an awakening moment, that of the cognizance of social and political issues and their impact on society as a whole. Perceived inequalities and the resulting activism fostered an emphasis on open dialogue and on the public expression of disagreement as a powerful means of societal change. This is the moment for the not largely spontaneous, ill-organized and easily isolated expressions of opposition to the established *status quo*, which would gradually be transformed into reformist changing movements that destabilised the normal course of events, notably departing from very diverse artistic fields.

One literary work specifically produced to influence the masses in quite concrete ways, literary and futuristic visions of the human species, national protests in Poland, Latin-American theatrical phenomena, cinema's influential milestones or a very peculiar view of Spanish society during the long period of Franco's dictatorship are in Part I of this book and clearly demonstrate such diversity of approaches. These are the early panoramic experiences of an awakening period, which fostered a significant shift in worldviews all around the globe, at a critical turning point in history.

Of those diverse perspectives and anticipating major changes in this period, Jorge Almeida e Pinho pays a minute attention to the work of Raoul Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life* (*Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, Gallimard, 1961). Vaneigem's very peculiar urge for spontaneity to emerge and to allow for creativity and individual liberty in real life experiences would be reflected in the students' movement of 1968, which emulated his suggestion of a revolutionary society. Besides, other media weapons became essential to disseminate the revolutionary ideals of the May 68 movement. In this essay Jorge Almeida e Pinho highlights Vaneigem's ideals and the changes implemented in media interventions of the 1960s and in current translation conventions with a view to explaining and exploring concrete differences between translated texts and originals, as well as the interventionist and manipulative role of translators and editors in the final work of a literary work.

Pietro Deandrea, on the other hand, relies on Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953) description of a future human history kindly leading to global peace and wealth thanks to the use of a superior technology by the alien Overlords to portray inevitable shifts in society. Deandrea's analysis of this sci-fi classic work, which verges on the brink

between utopia and dystopia, shows how a literary work can be subject to different interpretations, under the light of its sheer implications on good and evil, man's spiritual yearning, the uniqueness and limitations of humanity or the adaptability of human values to future changes. In this essay, the author further interprets the novel through the lens of the post-war generational break, as an anticipation of the 1960s youth protest. In addition, Pietro Deandrea focuses on how two artistic products, David Bowie's 1971 song "Oh! You Pretty Things" and the 2015 TV series *Childhood's End*, would re-interpret this novel, from their own peculiar cultural contexts and perspectives.

The context of Poland is under Anna Suwalska-Kołecka's scrutiny to explain how students' protests in 1968 were triggered off by a ban imposed by Communist authorities on a specific play, *Forefathers' Eve* (*Dziady* in Polish) directed by Kazimierz Dejmek for the National Theatre, in Warsaw. Since this seminal movement by the students was above all against political censorship, the regime felt it needed to suppress ruthlessly all dissent. Thus, it launched a strict anti-Semitic campaign to find scapegoats for all society's ills and to divert social opinion from that special situation. Fifty years after these events, the author reflects that when the Polish nationalistic party won elections, theatre was again criticised for productions considered morally objectionable or politically incorrect by government authorities. Aiming above all to commemorate the impact of 1968 on Poland's socio-political memory, this essay presents a detailed description of selected theatre events in Poland that were used as vehicles for social and political critique. Seen as a highly sensitive barometer of the state of Polish democracy and of the manifestations of severe conflicts within the community, Anna Suwalska-Kołecka discusses and analyses such chosen productions.

With Johanna González the discussion still revolves around theatre, but she moves our attention to Colombia. Since the 1950s, in a society which, according to the author, learned that expression is not a right but transgression, Art took a protester power. Indeed, the 1960s represented in Latin America a fighting period against the economic and political influence of the United States, especially supported by the Soviet Union. In theatre, *Creación Colectiva* (collective creation) was a phenomenon perceived in Latin America as a collective way of producing a play, which aimed at analysing the political context and, after that, developing a clear and resolute stance. In Colombia, two cases connected to this form of theatre are relevant and exemplary shown in this essay: *Teatro Experimental de Cali*, directed by Enrique Buenaventura, and *Teatro La Candelaria*, directed by Santiago García. Johanna González tries to show

how Colombian national theatre took on the revolutionary atmosphere of May '68, and how this attitude is still present and allows for some reflexion about the violent period this country has undergone for more than fifty years.

Katrin Pieper, on the other hand, directs the scope of her analysis to another form of art expression: cinema. Stanley Kubrick's *2001, a Space Odyssey* (1968) with its unique special effects, psychedelic images and famous score is a milestone for most cinematographers, especially because it deals with questions of power and powerlessness, of the human psyche, of the meaning of life itself. In 1968, Kubrick stated that this film revolutionised cinematic narration and viewing habits and six months after it premiered in the USA, Kubrick's film would be shown in Portuguese film theatres, during the Portuguese *Estado Novo* dictatorship. Katrin Pieper compared the subtitles used in the film with the original dialogues and scrutinised censorship official documents to ascertain all the changes implemented in the final Portuguese version of this pioneering epic. In this essay, the author answers relevant questions related to the censors' attitude towards a philosophical science fiction film, while also assessing their reaction to the emotional images and music score that were supposed to slip directly into the subconscious. Besides, she also tried to find out how this minimal script was translated, and if the Portuguese version was able to empower viewers' imagination at a time of serious control and totalitarianism.

As final authors in this section, Ángel López-Gutiérrez and María Julia Bordonado Bermejo take us on a journey throughout the political and social changes that occurred in Spain since 1968, when the end of Franco's dictatorship began to become visible. This change is shown at a time of very serious conflicts, such as the terrorist acts by ETA and GRAPO, because most Spaniards wanted to close a dark stage and initiate a new era of freedom. According to the authors, university students, trade unions and young politicians, helped by artists, writers, filmmakers, playwright writers, made it possible and this attitude was patent in the latter works. This essay attempts to evince a time when culture and the arts, especially literature and music, contributed to the mobilization of people, in favour of a major political change and against the terrorist groups that caused so much pain in Spanish society.

The second part of the volume turns to literary representations of identity and memory in places as diverse as Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Algeria, South Africa, India or the United States of America. Of the various strands of socio-political memory associated with this period, Edna Longley's essay pays special attention to the developments marking

the beginnings (c. 1968) but also the proclaimed end (1998) of the Northern Irish Troubles. Inspired by the title of a programme of poetry and song, financed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, in Spring 1968, a few months before the Troubles, Longley perceptively examines how Northern Ireland offered a fertile ground for the Civil Rights Movements that pullulated the USA and France at the time and how a peaceful march (Derry, October 5, 1968) could turn into such a traumatic event due to the prevalence of a local context, that is the fact "that rival groups in Northern Ireland have always claimed territory by *marching*." Despite the importance of a moment in time that would forever shape the creative imagination of Northern Ireland, Longley warns against the dangers of reducing the rich and intricate poetry written between 1968 and 1998 as a mere reflection of the Troubles.

Paulina Grzęda turns to South Africa where the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 was followed by public disturbance and severe repression; and the progressive rigidity of the apartheid legislation of the 1960s and the 1970s found an echo in South African literature, prompting the renaissance of a historical novel which privileged realist strategies of representation, in the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, as Grzęda interestingly points out, the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s and the establishment of the United Democratic Front in the 1980s triggered a cultural turn to "protest literature" firmly committed to the task of recording the violence of the apartheid system, and guaranteeing its permanence in collective memory. However, this vision of culture as a weapon and the submission of aesthetic choices to political imperatives were not exempted from criticism from a number of South African intellectuals. Grzęda's essay examines how South African fiction shifted from the public agora to the private realm, to self-reflexivity and auto-critique, in a cultural turn inwards, which fostered formal experimentation and anticipated modern democracy in the country.

Nadia Naar Gada, on the other hand, departs from Assia Djebar's *La femme sans sépulture* [Woman without sepulchre, 2002] to examine women's contribution to the Algerian independence and the apparent historical erasure of it by post-independence authoritarian officials through their deliberately ambiguous language or political doublespeak. Once again, the malleability of memory comes to the fore and the need for surveillance advocated by Nora proves to be essential.[8] According to Gada, Djebar's text and its representation of protest are integrally dependent on the particular social and historical circumstances of its

[8] Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 29.

deployment. Gada's analysis is framed by the theoretical tools of African Trickster Tradition and their paradigmatic symbols, such as the Trickster forms of deviation, reversion and disguise. Combined, they undermine the dominant formerly uninterrogated discourses and pinpoint the flaws in the ruling political and social order to finally unmask the official history and reveal the true role of women in the Algerian War.

Natacha Díaz Luis thoroughly investigates the issue of identity in Samina Ali's *Madras On Rainy Days* (2004), set in India, but deeply imbedded in the American culture and context. Díaz applies Pierre Bourdieu's canonical paradigms of race, class and gender to the protagonists of the novel, a couple trapped into an arranged marriage, to demonstrate the plasticity of identity which is necessarily more than a simple combination of self and social perception. The acculturated practices of Indian Americans settled in the United States enable an analysis of the American dream seen by external eyes and reveal different prejudices within a community full of traditional beliefs. As Díaz points out, the process of identity construction of the two main characters is highly influenced and further complicated by two factors: Layla's hybrid character, which raises the need to reconcile her "Indian identity" with her "American one"; and her husband's homosexuality. Thus, Ali's *Madras On Rainy Days* and Díaz's reading of it problematize individual quests for identity in a communal context not fit to encapsulate them.

With Catrinel Popa's essay, the discussion is recentred in Eastern Europe, where the communist past is often represented in literature by the use of fantastic, carnivalesque or grotesque elements. In her text, Popa provides an enlightening reading of selected novels from Eastern European contemporary fiction that display a philosophy of memory as the ghost of the past continues to loom widely. Popa presents Răzvan Rădulescu as one of the most unconventional voices in this context and analyses his *Viaţa şi faptele lui Ilie Cazane* [The Life and Deeds of Elijah Cazane, 1997], from a comparatist perspective, alongside with other novels such as Katerina Tučková's *Dumnezeiţele din Moravia* [The Goddesses of Žítková, 2012] or György Dragoman's *Rugul* [The Bone Fire, 2014]. As Popa points out, one thing that all these novels surely have in common is a vision of the political police as the embodiment of the ultimate Evil in former Eastern totalitarian regimes.

Elsa Simões fascinatingly charts the effects of the social and sexual revolution of the late 1960s on the characters of Martin Amis's *The Pregnant Widow* (2010), and namely on its protagonist Keith Nearing. Indeed, the main character's recollection of the past, when he was only in his twenties, unveils an atmosphere of exhilaration regarding social and

sexual change that walked side by side with a sense of insecurity as personal and gender roles were challenged and identities had to be reshaped not without conflict and pain. As American women fought for sexual liberation in a claimed conquest of male territory and both men and women needed to dissociate from the past, many characters eventually understand that such sudden changes often bring about negative consequences. Simões provides the example of two women: Rita who, after a life of sexual enjoyment, deeply laments the fact of not having had any children, and Violet, the protagonist's younger sister, who actually dies due to her unrestrained sexual behaviour and promiscuity.

Concluding this section, Paula Barba Guerrero focuses on Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) and the importance of memory becomes ever more pervasive as Woodson's verse memoir dialogues with the collective memory of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. As Guerrero interestingly points out, even within disruptive movements intended to empower neglected or minoritised groups, history tends to crystallise some particular events, moments and protagonists, leaving others behind. Through her analysis of Woodson's text, Guerrero offers thus an alternative reading of the 1960s events from the perspective of a black young woman, a neglected voice even by those who fight for neglected voices. Guerrero's essay looks into Woodson's transformation into a storyteller at a very young age and examines literature not only as a privileged site of memory, but also as an instrumental site of contestation of hegemonic politicized discourses. Accordingly, language becomes more than just a communicative medium; it becomes a tool for processing traumatic memories and engraving individual experiences into the broader framework of collective memory.

The final section of the volume is an attempt at discovering the future triggered off by the events of the 1960s and the decades to follow. Some of the essays in this part provide a possible outline of disruption, but also of construction in the making of our own and future societies. It is definitely a moment for the rise of a new wave of alternative views. Manuel Portela kicks off by presenting the current infrastructure of the global networks of digital communication and eloquently describes its evolution into a highly complex system of real-time data collection by mega-corporations that has transformed the nature of the internet. Cunningly pointing out that while the front-end of this system is the apparently altruistic provision of instantaneous services for the common good of humanity—such as web search engines, interactive maps, channels for social interaction, virtual shops, and open access to the media library of human culture—, its back-end is based on extremely granular

processes of data analytics that track many patterns of individual behaviour. Thus, the use of artificial intelligence techniques for enhancing this feedback loop between harvesting and controlling human symbolic production has political and social consequences whose long-term effect Manuel Portela considers difficult to foresee. The examples provided in this essay related to world digital literature are ways of imagining the internet in two related senses: as an infrastructure of protocols channelling our symbolic production into the grid of the network and, thus, extending the domain of capitalism to the individual acts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening; as a global interface for literary and artistic expression interrogating our technological present. Through this nuclear interrogation, Manuel Portela ponders whether it is possible to imagine the internet differently: the beyondness and the strangeness of its technical, economic and symbolic protocols at the current historical moment, and how they redefine the constraints of our social practices and political relations.

The next author, Rui Silva, devoted himself to analyse the revolutionary work of a group of 17 artists based in New York ("Artists Meeting for Cultural Change"), who wrote, designed and published a book titled *An* Anti-*catalog* used as a direct protest to the exhibition American Art, held at the Whitney Museum in 1976. The show and the catalogue were designed as an overview on the American art from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Still, they were subject to contestation from the beginning by minority leaders, feminist organizations and several other spokespersons from the art and literature community, arguing for the inadequacy of holding such a narrow and biased selection of American artists on a public venue. The Anti-*catalog* created in 1977 embodies an articulated critique of the structure of legitimacy in the art field, evidencing the institutionalized discourse from the official catalogue of the exhibition. The obvious purpose of essay is to reflect on the possibilities of the book as an object of dissent and organized protest, by analysing the present and future use of an anti-book as a political/aesthetic strategy of action.

Whether aiming to reinforce conservative values or subvert them, to indoctrinate or to question, folk and fairy tales have long served political purposes, according to Inês Botelho's essay. In her own words, during the 17th and 18th century French fairy tales meant to perfect the civilizing process, criticize the aristocracy and bourgeoisie not in order to propel any revolution but simply to moralise them. Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, scripted to demythologise the rhetoric of a post-racial America after the election of Barack Obama, rose throughout 2017 also as an extremely socially

relevant work. Not specifically designed as a fairy tale, it is nonetheless seen as a new version of both "Beauty and the Beast" and "Bluebeard" and Inês Botelho investigates how these tales manifest in the film. In 2018, a new Disney *Beauty and the* Beast (Bill Condon) premiered and the Best Picture Oscar went to *The Shape of Water* (Guillermo del Toro) and *Get Out* produced the most compelling version of the tale. This essay proposes to demonstrate that while the stories gothic undertones add to the horror atmosphere, the presence of familiar and classical tropes contributes to confront the public's expectations and helps deconstruct the idea of a peaceful cohabitation between people with still vastly different experiences, and how tales can be told anew by imbuing them with clear political undertones.

The last essay in this book is by Damla Yeşil, and it analyses the role of poetry in shaping group identity, alongside with examples from the 1960s, in which poetry came hand in hand with the concept of resistance. The German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte's work on the analysis of performance and on the role of poetry in enhancing the community feeling provides the theoretical support for this essay. The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests in the USA, in 2011, and the Gezi Park uprising in Turkey, in 2013, are the object of Damla Yeşil's highly contemporary research. She sees poetry as a tool to theatricalise and aestheticize the political event, while strengthening the community feeling. Her concern with the Turkish uprisings is a clear display of how contemporary events may have influenced the demonstrators' poetry during and after the protests and how one clear function of poetry during such protests is to preserve the memory of the uprising to transfer it to later generations.

This volume therefore combines a broad scope with an attention to detail as a means to characterise the 1960s and beyond. Furthermore, it reflects the recurrent public interest in exploring the connections between literature and the arts, in all its plural and material forms, as well as a particular interest in the 1960s as both one of the most tumultuous and one of the most creative periods in world history.

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PART I

THE AWAKENING MOMENT: THE 1960S AND BEYOND

CHAPTER ONE

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATION IN A WORLD-CHANGING REVOLUTION

JORGE M. C. ALMEIDA E PINHO. CETAPS
(CENTRE FOR ENGLISH, TRANSLATION, AND ANGLO-PORTUGUESE STUDIES); ESE/IPP (ESCOLA SUPERIOR DE EDUCAÇÃO/INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DO PORTO)

Introduction

The Revolution of Everyday Life (*Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*) published in 1967, by Gallimard, is a famous book by Raoul Vaneigem (1934-). According to the author, this work intended to mark the emergency, within a world in decline, of a radically new era. In its pages, Vaneigem challenged what he called "passive nihilism," the passive acceptance of the absurdities of modernism which he considered "an overture to conformism."[1]

Vaneigem is a Belgian author,[2] born in 1934, and is a native of Lessines (Hainaut), a small town famous for the production of paving

[1] Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), http://www.gallimard.fr/Catalogue/GALLIMARD/Blanche/Traite-de-savoir-vivre-a-l-usage-des-jeunes-generations# (accessed March 3, 2020).

[2] Works by Raoul Vaneigem: *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, 1967; *Le livre des plaisirs*, 1979; *L'Ile aux delices*, 1979; *Le mouvement du libre-esprit*, 1986; *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne et l'opportunité de s'en défaire,* 1990; *Lettre de Staline à ses enfants enfin réconciliés de l'Est et de l'Ouest*, 1992; *La résistance au christianisme. Les hérésies des origines au XVIIIe siècle,* 1993*; Les hérésies*, 1994; *Avertissement aux écoliers et lycéens*, 1995; *Nous qui désirons sans fin*, 1996; *La Paresse*, 1996; *Notes sans portée*, 1997; *Dictionnaire de citations pour servir au divertissement et à l'intelligence du temps*, 1998; *Déclaration des droits de l'être humain. De la*

stones, but which in the twentieth century also produced the Surrealist painter René Magritte and the Surrealist poet Louis Scutenaire.

Vaneigem grew up in the wake of World War II within a working-class, socialist and anticlerical atmosphere. He studied Romance philology at the Free University of Brussels and embarked on a teaching career that he later abandoned in favour of writing.

In late 1960 Vaneigem was introduced to Guy Debord by Henri Lefebvre, and soon after he joined the Situationist International, which Debord and his colleagues had founded not long before, becoming one of its most prominent members between 1961 and 1970. Debord was more objective and Vaneigem more subjective, a kind of Marxism versus anarchism, or, following the titles of their books, *The Society of the Spectacle* versus *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. In fact, Vaneigem and Guy Debord were two of the main theorists of the Situationist movement and Vaneigem's slogans were frequently used on the walls of Paris during the May 1968 uprisings.

The Situationist International was an international organization of social revolutionaries and it was made up of avant-garde artists, intellectuals, and political theorists, relevant at that time in Europe. This organization was created in 1957 and would be dissolved in 1972.

The intellectual foundations of the Situationist International derived primarily from anti-authoritarian Marxism and avant-garde art movements of the early 20th century, particularly Dada and Surrealism. The main aspects of the situationist theory represented an attempt to synthesize a modern and comprehensive critique of mid-20th century advanced capitalism.

Thus, the Situationists recognized that capitalism had changed since Marx's initial writings but maintained that his analysis of the capitalist mode of production remained fundamentally correct. Their interpretation of Marxist theory asserted that the misery of social alienation and commodity fetishism were no longer limited to the fundamental components of capitalist society but in advanced capitalism had spread themselves to every other aspect of life and culture. They also rejected the idea that advanced capitalism's apparent successes–such as technological advancement, increased income, and increased leisure–could outweigh the

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souveraineté de la vie comme dépassement des droits de le l'homme, 2001; *Pour une internationale du genre humain*, 2001; *Salut à Rabelais! Une lecture au présent*, 2003; *Rien n'est sacré, tout peut se dire. Réflexions sur la liberté d'expression*, 2003; *Le Chevalier, la Dame, le Diable et la Mort*, 2003; *Banalités de base*, 2004; *Modestes propositions aux grévistes*, 2004; *Journal imaginaire*, 2005; *Entre le deuil du monde et la joie de vivre*, 2008.

social dysfunction and degradation of everyday life it simultaneously inflicted.

After leaving the Situationist International, Vaneigem wrote a series of polemical books defending the idea of a free and self-regulating social order. He frequently made use of pseudonyms, like "Julienne de Cherisy," "Robert Desessarts," "Jules-François Dupuis," "Tristan Hannaniel," "Anne de Launay," "Ratgeb" and "Michel Thorgal."

Recently he has advocated a new type of strike, in which service and transportation workers should provide services for free and refuse to collect payment or fares.

The Revolution of Everyday Life

Originally published a few months before the May 1968 uprisings in France, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* features a lyrical and aphoristic critique of the "society of the spectacle" from the point of view of an individual experience. Whereas Debord's analysis of the new historical conditions that triggered the uprisings of the 1960s armed the revolutionaries of that time with theory, Vaneigem's book referred to their feelings of desperation, and armed them with weapons that were, in his own words, "formulations capable of firing point-blank on our enemies."[3] In fact, Vaneigem writes in the Introduction:

> I realise that I have given subjective will an easy time in this book, but let no one reproach me for this without first considering the extent to which the objective conditions of the contemporary world advance the cause of subjectivity day after day. Everything starts from subjectivity, but nothing stays there. Today less than ever.[4]

In the pages of the book, he names and defines some important alienating features of everyday life in his time consumer society: survival rather than life, the call to sacrifice, the cultivation of false needs, the dictatorship of the commodity, subjection to social roles, and, above all, the replacement of God by the Economy.

Some of the chapters in the book have appealing and enlightening titles concerning the above references, such as:

Chapter Five "The Decline and Fall of Work"
Chapter Seven "The Age of Happiness"

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[3] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press, 2001), 17.
[4] Ibid. 17-8.

Chapter Nine “Technology and Its Mediated use”
Chapter Ten “Down Quantity Street”
Chapter Eleven “Mediated Abstraction and Abstract Mediation”
Chapter Fourteen “The Organization of Appearances”
Chapter Sixteen “The Fascination of Time”
Chapter Seventeen “Survival Sickness”
Chapters Eighteen & Nineteen “Spurious Opposition” Parts 1 & 2
Chapters Twenty-One & Twenty-Two “Masters Without Slaves” Parts 1 & 2
Chapters Twenty-Two & Twenty-Three “The Space-Time of Lived Experience” Parts 1 & 2
Chapter Twenty-Five “You’re Fucking Around with Us? - Not for Long!”

The main aspects referred to by Vaneigem and the Situationists were not just about material conditions, which in the rich industrialized countries took the proletariat beyond the struggle of survival, but also the poverty of everyday life, the poverty of choice offered by a shallow consumer society, the lack of imagination and the alienation:

> People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints—such people have a corpse in their mouth.[5]

According to Vaneigem, people should be well past the struggle of survival, as in many parts of the world they had achieved a decent enough standard of material well-being. Thus, people would “want to live, not just survive.”[6] He loathed the work-ethic that was associated to the right-to-work campaigns and simplistic narrowing of class struggle to wage-bargaining.

He even reminded people that: “The Latin word *labor* means ‘suffering’. We are unwise to forget this origin of the words ‘travail’ and ‘labour.’”[7]

Vaneigem reinforced this idea by stating: “Nowadays ambition and the love of a job well done are the indelible mark of defeat and of the most mindless submission.”[8]

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[5] Ibid. 26.
[6] Ibid. 53.
[7] Ibid. 53.
[8] Ibid. 54.

It is easy to notice how all of this looked appealing, since the poverty of daily lives made people want to rebel and throw bricks at the cops, and Vaneigem insisted on giving free reign to subjectivity, to anyone's individual desire to live intensely, namely when he solemnly declares:

> I want to exchange nothing—not for a thing, not for the past, not for the future. I want to live intensely, for myself, grasping every pleasure firm in the knowledge that what is radically good for me will be good for everyone. And above all I would promote this one watchword: "Act as though there were no tomorrow."[9]

In the book there are also many insightful conceptualizations of roles, specialists, stereotypes and power, such as in the following examples, about Man:

> So, just like mythic sacrifice, roles have been democratised. Inauthenticity is a right of man; such, in a word, is the triumph of socialism. Take a thirty-five year-old man. Each morning he starts his car, drives to the office, pushes papers, has lunch in town, plays pool, pushes more papers, leaves work, has a couple of drinks, goes home, greets his wife kisses his children, eats his steak in front of the TV, goes to bed, makes love and falls asleep. Who reduces a man's life to this pathetic sequence of clichés? A journalist? A cop? A market researcher? A socialist-realist author? Not at all. He does it himself, breaking his day down into a series of poses chosen more or less unconsciously from the range of dominant stereotypes.[10]

Or:

> Thus the satisfaction derived from a well-played role is in direct proportion to his distance from himself, to his self-negation and self-sacrifice.[11]

Or others about power:

> The man who is walled up alive has nothing to lose; the prisoner still has hope. Hope is the leash of submission.[12]

And also:

> Slaves are not willing slaves for long if they are not compensated for their submission by a shred of power: all subjection entails the right to a

[9] Ibid. 116.
[10] Ibid. 133.
[11] Ibid. 133.
[12] Ibid. 58.

> measure of power, and there is no such thing as power that does not embody a degree of submission. This is why some agree so readily to be governed. Wherever it is exercised, on every rung of the ladder, power is partial, not absolute. It is thus ubiquitous, but ever open to challenge.[13]

In the second part of his book, named "Reversal of Perspective," Vaneigem explores the countervailing impulses that, in a true dialectical format, persist within the deepest alienation: creativity, spontaneity, poetry, and the path from isolation to communication and participation. His ideal was that everyone's harmonized individual perspectives would serve to "successfully construct a coherent and collective world."[14]

But how would people get there? Vaneigem anticipated that people were fed up and would soon collectively live out their subjectivity:

> To reverse perspective is to stop seeing things through the eyes of the community, of ideology, of the family, of other people. To grasp hold of oneself as of something solid, to take oneself as starting point and centre. To base everything on subjectivity and to follow one's subjective will to be everything.[15]

In the several above examples, it is easily seen that there are many parts of this book that exhibit a vast array of highly quotable sentences. This is one rather peculiar characteristic of the whole book's register and style: its quotability and possible usage for an easy-going form of dissemination of its content.

Those ready-made and easy-to-use quotations could be turned and used as slogans in a speedy and quite understandable shape. The masses would promptly embrace such phrases and would brand them in every demonstration, or simply on the walls of Paris, and other cities, all around the world.

In fact, the Portuguese bookshop and publisher, Livraria Letra Livre, used a translation by José Carlos Marques, from 1975, included a translation to the "Author's Preface to the New Portuguese Edition," by another translator, Júlio Henriques, in 2014, and produced a back cover that aims to illustrate the importance of such aphorisms, since it is filled with such phrases.

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[13] Ibid. 132.
[14] Ibid. 187.
[15] Ibid. 187.

Vaneigem's work importance

The importance of Vaneigem's work was mostly implicit in the three ways that, according to him, could be used to assist and serve revolutionaries and their fellow countrymen in securing their own freedom. Curiously, those ways were named by Vaneigem as "weapons," which is a funny choice of words considering the later context of a revolution…

For simple rhetorical reasons, which will become apparent later, this short analysis will start by his third strategy, according to which Vaneigem tried to make people aware that they should be able to use sensual speech to make themselves understandable. As such, he wrote the following:

> What Jakob Boehme called "sensual speech" (*sensualische Sprache*), because it was a clear mirror of the senses. And the author of the Way to God elaborates: "In sensual speech all spirits converse directly, and have no need of any language, because theirs is the language of nature." In the context of what I have called the re-creation of nature, the language Boehme talks about dearly becomes the language of spontaneity, of "doing," of individual and collective poetry; language centred on the project of realisation, leading lived experience out of the cave of history. This is also connected with what Paul Brousse and Ravachol meant by "propaganda by the deed."[16]

This is the last of his strategies, as stated earlier, through which he seems to favour the language of public speech, of the poetry use and spontaneity. It is a natural (in its most strict sense pertaining to "nature"…) speech, to express spontaneous and sensical ideas.

But Vaneigem also advocates the need of "doing," the accomplishment, i.e. the actual deed. After exchanging ideas with a clear and frank state of mind ("sensual," i.e. of the senses), he says it is crucial to embrace a practical attitude, devoted to acts and to real life.

The second strategy mentioned by Vaneigem is mostly concerned with creating the conditions for an open dialogue to occur. This means that the conversation should be promoted and all forms of public discussion aiming at a spectacle-like moment ought to be rejected, or, in his own words: "Open dialogue, the language of the dialectic; conversation, and all forms of non-spectacular discussion."[17]

This promoting of conversation and dialogue in a public atmosphere was, first of all, demonstrative of how Vaneigem considered that information needed to be shared and how he saw that its widespread

[16] Ibid. 103.
[17] Ibid. 103.