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Industrialism, Consumerism and Power

Zygmunt Bauman

The self-understanding of our (western, industrial, capitalist etc) society has been given shape by two formidable intellectual traditions. The first acquired its modern form in the work of Max Weber; the second entered the current debate through Sigmund Freud. Max Weber's view of Western civilisation and its inner dynamics is the fullest and most consistent articulation to-date of the legacy of the Enlightenment, as developed theoretically by nineteenth century positivist social philosophy and political economy and forged into informed common sense by the practice of 'Whig historiography'. In this view, modernity is measured by both the extensive and the intensive growth of rationality, and complementary reduction in the frequency of choices which cannot be guided by instrumental reason. Sigmund Freud's view of civilisation drew on the romantic experience of modernity as the tragic fate of the self, squeezed between the anvil of inner drives and the many hammers of social prohibitions, as well as on the post-Hegelian elaboration of the perpetual conflict between the creative urge of life and its fast ossifying products.

On the face of it, the two traditions cannot be more fundamentally opposed. One tells the story of successive triumphs of reason, the other of the growing oppressiveness of the man-made world and the neurotic, rather than rational, grounds of the resulting order. One diagnoses civilisation as a benign, the other as a malignant out-growth of human history. One views the future with optimism, identifying present sufferings with the residues of irrationalism not yet dislodged by advancing science. The other reconciles itself to the permanence of suffering and weighs the possible alleviation of spiritual pain against the bodily price it commands.

Of course, the two traditions cannot co-exist without interacting. From the interaction both emerge with many a sharp edge blunted. The oppositions, so uncompromising between pure models, tend to be incorporated as 'internal contradictions' of one or the other of the opposing traditions. And thus the late Weber laments the suffocation of free spirit in the rationalised world, while Freud celebrates the cleanliness and protection against pain which the oppressive civilisation offers in exchange for the expropriated freedom. Each of the great thinkers seems in consequence somewhat less consistent, but their messages become somewhat less irreconcilable.

Yet apart from *ex post facto* similarities emerged from interaction and mutual accommodation, one could trace a much more essential, primordial affinity between the two traditions: sharing the roots rather than twisting together side offshoots of the initially separate stems. The common root of both traditions is the seventeenth century articulation of the dichotomy, and the conflict, between passion and reason, in its numerous incarnations and applications: the animal and the human, the coarse and refined, the dangerous and the orderly, the savage and the civilised, the ignorant and the enlightened, the bodily and the mental. Ultimately between the natural and the social. It is from this common root that both traditions grew, reaching towards the solution of contradictions visible only from within the initial dichotomy; the dichotomy which supplied simultaneously the purpose of the intellectual effort and the outer boundaries of its possible destinations.

In the social world as seen from within this constitutive dichotomy, the drama of civilisation, or industrialism, or capitalism appeared to be staged at the theatre of mind. Its major characters were attitudes, motives, beliefs and expectations. The moulding of the modern society was

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understood as an operation performed on human spirits: the control of the body by the spirit, postulated in the Age of Reason, was taken for the account of the inner mechanism of social change. New social order meant, first and foremost, a new motivational structure. New principles of social integration and new rules of social reproduction meant, mostly if not exclusively, a new type of legitimation. Whether of new or an old kind, order, integration, change and reproduction were invariably accountable for in terms of transmission and internalisation of values, development or disruption of consensus, the management of attitudes through verbal communication — usually of an asymmetrical, educational structure.

By the same token the body has been eliminated from the social-scientific discourse. The actor of the social world has been reduced to the bundle of beliefs, motives and evaluative preferences. With the social world conceived of as a perpetual teach-in session, only such aspects of the actor have been acknowledged as of interest to the science of society as could be generated and reproduced with the means and the practices of learning and teaching. The rest has been naturally declared out of bounds, as far as the social sciences were concerned. There was no room for the body in social science. Ever present in the background as, alternatively, 'the material substratum' or the 'property' or 'charge' of the actor, the body has not been seen as the subject-matter of social study, as it has not been seen as the object of social management. The body was part of nature, subject to forces not of human making. The barely spoken of fourth side of Parsons' square; the suppressed and incapacitated half of Durkheim's *homo duplex*; the invariable, and hence trivial, condition of decision-making by Weberian actors; the tacitly assumed physical substratum of the social wisdom of Schutzian communal owners of the stock-of-knowledge-at-hand.

One of the rare important sociological studies which delves into the intimate connection between the management of the human body and the advent of modern civilisation is Norbert Elias's (1978) research into the origins of the 'civilising process'. Here, the essence of the civilising effort which had started at the top of the social hierarchy during the fifteenth century and then progressively intensified towards the eighteenth, is shown to be the 'culturalisation' of the natural bodily functions, taming and repressing various manifestations of natural needs, removing from public sight such aspects of the body as evaded cultural regimentation and subjecting the rest to the strict routine of formalised etiquette. Yet the invisible straight-jacket which the rising civilisation imposed upon the human body is portrayed by Elias as woven from the new feelings of shame and disgust. 'Civilising' operated through the re-direction of emotions, turning the natural into shameful, associating the visibility of bodily functions — indeed, the very awareness of their presence — with the sensation of embarrassment and horror. In Elias, the subjection of the body to social control was first and foremost a matter of new sensitivity, diffused by typically educational means.

Michel Foucault's plea on behalf of the human body, evicted from the horizon of social science in the wake of its suppression in the social world, stands out, therefore, as a genuine alternative to the totality of discourse within which the interpretation of modern society has been heretofore confined. When confronted with Foucault's re-writing of the history of industrial civilisation, the otherwise radical controversies between competing interpretive traditions seem considerably less significant than their common assumptions and jointly accepted limits of the cognitively relevant.

As any reader of Foucault knows, the central position in his analysis of modern civilisation, as it gradually evolved in roughly two decades of his work, has been ultimately captured by the category of power, variously described as 'disciplinary', 'surveillance', or 'capillary'. It can be said that each of these names tries to capture another aspect of the complex phenomenon the category connotes in its totality. 'Disciplinary' stands for the function of the power in question: as all discipline, this power consists in rendering the bodily behaviour routine, repetitive, mechanically predictable, subject to invariable rules amenable to codification and hence to 'objective' scrutiny and assessment. 'Surveillance' refers to the method through which such a controlled and controllable conduct is generated: power operates in such a way as to make relevant behaviour visible, transparent, accessible to evaluation and correction from outside; simultaneously, this power is aimed against opacity, for concealment from gaze is tantamount to the preservation of autonomy from controlling power. 'Capillary' stands for the way in which modern power is deployed in society: it is not an object which can be located in one selected spot

(particularly a spatially defined spot), possessed by a specific individual or group of individuals (unlike the 'sovereign' power, property of the prince), expropriated or 'taken over' by another individual or group; the new power is diffused throughout society, deployed in the infinite number of minute institutions and mini-systems of interaction; in a sense, an idea similar to Gramsci's 'civil society', only referring to the tissue of power relations rather than the diffuse folkloristic replica of dominant ideology.

It is such power which in Foucault's view, emerged and spread in Western Europe from the seventeenth century on. It is such power which, in Foucault's view, was capable of achieving what no previous types of social power could — at least on a massive, global-societal scale: the regularising, routinising, 'normalising' the totality of bodily conduct. This was power capable of exercising constant and comprehensive control over the body and, potentially at least, of an unprecedented extension of heteronomous behaviour.

For all we know of past societies, the disciplinary, capillary power-through-surveillance, which Foucault considers the mark of the modern era, could not be an invention of the seventeenth century; it could be only its discovery. A strong case can be made for the assertion that power of exactly the kind described by Foucault was the major tool of social control, integration, and reproduction of society well before the dawn of modernity.

Indeed, for most of their history people lived under close and permanent scrutiny of the collectivities they were born a part of. Village communities were not prominent for their tolerance and normative ambivalence; nor were, for this matter, craftsmen guilds or noblemen courts. The spate of historical studies triggered off by Philippe Ariès has convincingly demonstrated the absence of borderlines between private and public lives which characterised pre-modern communities; the openness of family homes, the street as the principal sites of social intercourse and child education, the absence of enclosed territories reserved for the invited or otherwise selected persons at selected times, all contributed to the high probability of being seen, gazed at, evaluated and censured. Being seen, or being aware (even if only subliminally) of the likelihood of being seen, was a constant factor of life and certainly a crucial determinant of the stable regularity of conduct. Universality of surveillance was reflected in the universality of enforced uniformity. Indeed, if the kind of diffuse communal power responsible for the behavioural routine of the members of the pre-modern community differed from disciplinary power typical of industrial society, it did so above all by its ubiquity and comprehensiveness no later power would be able to match.

One can say that the social reproduction of the mode of life which constituted the pre-modern (traditional, pre-industrial, etc.) society was accomplished by a kind of power which in most important respects answered the description reserved by Foucault for the modern society only. Did, therefore, the nature of power remain unchanged? Did anything at all happen in this field in the seventeenth century? If something did, what?

Three things did.

First, communal control, however wide-ranging and uncompromising, was exercised in a diffused way, matter-of-factly, with the participation of few if any explicitly specialised agencies, and hence unobtrusively. In Heidegger's words, we become aware what the world is when something goes wrong. As long as the capacity of communal surveillance roughly corresponded with the prerequisites of the smooth reproduction of social order — the awareness of the presence and exact nature of the means with which this balance was achieved had little chance to appear. Disciplinary power, though present and active, was not noticed; still less was it problematised, forged into an issue, a task, a matter of conscious design. It dissolved in the totality of daily routine, as an integral attribute of the life-world distinguishable only through theoretical analysis armed with retrospective wisdom.

The idea of secular power, under the circumstances, could be easily monopolised by its 'sovereign' variety: the power of the King, the Noble, the Bishop to appropriate a part of other people's surplus in the form of a levy, a tax, or a tithe. Unlike the disciplinary power, the sovereign power was visible. It arrived periodically from outside the realm of daily life to execute its demands, poorly incorporated in the rhythm of quotidianity. Even given this handicap, however,

the sovereign power would remain hidden, 'unseen', if not for the periodic disturbance of the habitual rules of the game. Time and again, more and more often the closer the dawn of the modern age, people had to defend their *Rechtsgewohnheiten* against the rising appetites of their lords and princes. It was this contest which brought the phenomenon of power into relief and made its articulation, as a concept, possible.

No wonder the attention of the enlightened opinion of the time was focussed undivided on the 'sovereign power'. It was then that the idea of power as an object which can be appropriated and expropriated, transferred from King to people etc., and mostly as a negative faculty, i.e., the ability to prevent others from doing what they would wish to do, or to force them to do what they would not wish, was conceptualised in the emerging political science, where it was destined to remain virtually unchanged for two centuries or more.

From the seventeenth century on, however, the most pronounced and threatening disturbances of the social order evolved around the regulation and reproduction of quotidianity — functions with which the 'sovereign power' was never intended, nor armed, to cope. The power crisis resulted from inadequacy of the communal framework for the deployment of 'disciplinary power'. For once local powers were progressively eroded with the growth of the centralised state. More importantly, demographic expansion, which the existing mode of production could not absorb, resulted in a large, excessive, economically redundant population, which exploded the finite potential of communal tutorship. This process reached its peak, throughout Western Europe, towards the end of the eighteenth century. It was perceived from the contemporary perspective as, first and foremost, a problem of law and order: the emergence of dangerous classes, rabble, riff-raff, the crowd, the mob — uncontrolled, unpredictable, subject to no rules, supervised by none of the existing authorities. Legally and politically, these proto-masses were defined as vagrants or vagabonds; this definition grasped the routes of the threat the 'dangerous classes' presented: they were unattached, belonged nowhere, were mobile, and hence they escaped the pervasive surveillance — thus far exercised only within, and by, local community. The 'dangerous classes' were dangerous because they were the first to live under conditions where probability of 'being seen' was low. The communal principle of the deployment of 'disciplinary power' had an in-built limit of application and could not be extended to absorb the new phenomenon (though the legislators for many decades tried in vain to achieve just that, decreeing for instance a forceful return of the vagabonds to their native parishes and declaring vagabondage itself a crime). The sovereign power, armed only with coercive agencies specialised in preventing resistance against the expropriation of surplus, was organically unfit for positive action, i.e. generation of a comprehensive totality of behaviour. The result was a power void.

This was to be filled by a two-fold process of redeployment of disciplinary power and a radical extension of the scope of the sovereign one.

What did happen in the seventeenth century, in other words, was not the birth of disciplinary power, as Foucault's analysis would imply, but 'problematization' of this power, both in political and social practices and in their intellectual reflections. Formerly an aspect of communal life blended fully into the totality of life process, it had now brought into the field of vision as a method in search of its institutional tools. What used to be accomplished matter-of-factly without ever surfacing at the level of conscious political practice had now become a matter of conscious design, planning, and legislation. In its institutional re-deployment, the state had to play the decisive role.

Secondly, the transfer of disciplinary power from its former communal setting to deliberately constructed institutions brought to life and supported (or at least launched) by the state, meant the separation of bodily control from the other aspects of the traditional mode of life with which it was previously blended. Bodily drill which disciplinary power necessarily entailed was now not only seen as such and perceived as a consciously constructed condition, but also as one uncompensated for by, say, reciprocity of rights and duties or, in general, communal, parish, or manorial tutelage. This circumstance made salient the externality of discipline, and served as an epistemological premiss for the articulation of the autonomy/heteronomy opposition. It also exposed the essential asymmetry of disciplinary power and thus cast it as an object of contest and as a negative aspect of the human condition which is not naturally balanced by tied benefits.

Thirdly, from the seventeenth century on, disciplinary power moved into the space of inter-class relations. For the first time reproduction of the social order at the grass-roots level became the concern, and then responsibility of the dominant classes. In the traditional society, they rarely, if ever, interfered with the daily occupations of their subjects. In particular, they did not consider the production of surplus their responsibility, fully satisfied as they were with the enforcement of its repartition. They left folk culture to its own resources and its own developmental logic; when they noticed differences between their own way of life and those of the lower ranks, they would hardly consider it as a problem calling for action. Interaction between coexisting class cultures, located on different levels of the social hierarchy, was not one of *Kulturkampf*, cultural crusade, civilising, educating, humanising, or whatever the name capturing the gist of later one-way action coinciding with the modern era. In the traditional society, the dominant class ruled, but they did not teach or proselytise.

Now the situation changed radically. The dominant classes stepped into the role of collective teacher. The subordinate classes, 'the people', were cast in the roles of pupils, and it became the duties of the dominant classes not just to punish their mischiefs and so prevent departures from the 'natural' way of life proper for them; or rather to prompt 'the people' to learn and to observe the one way of life considered properly human or 'civilised'.

The traditional imagery of the continuous 'chain of being', in which for everybody there is an interconnected, but nevertheless separate and different type, was now gradually replaced by another, dichotomous and dynamic image of one truly human, or civilised, or rational pattern of life. It confronted many imperfect forms of life which it was called to extirpate, amend or banish: the ignorant, the superstitious, the emotion-ridden, the beastly. Alternative ways of life, and above all the popular cultures, were now redefined as cruel, crude, beastly inhuman, a target for incessant and radical proselytising crusade.

'Being human', instead of remaining a natural condition enjoyed by all though in many alternative forms, became now a skill to be learned, an end to a tortuous effort, which everyone had the duty to undertake, but few only were able to accomplish unassisted. The necessary complement of the dichotomous imagery and proselytising practice was, therefore, a 'tutelage complex' (Donzelot's term) which simultaneously interpreted society in the light of a school metaphor, and asserted the permanence of asymmetrical school roles.

The result was a total re-definition of the relationship between the top and lower regions of the social hierarchy. If the dominant function of the traditional hierarchy was, so to speak, to assure the upward flow of the surplus resulting from an essentially autonomous productive activity, the function of the new hierarchy was more than anything else to assure the reproduction of a form of life compatible with the continuation of hierarchical order. This 'disciplinary power' was accordingly deployed in the service of this function.

What has happened from the seventeenth century on, in other words, was the shift of disciplinary power from the area of community reproduction into that of the reproduction of class hierarchy.

II

The reproduction of social hierarchy (perceived, at that time as at any other time, as the preservation of social order) was first and most directly threatened by the appearance of 'dangerous classes' exempt for the time being from any institutionalised form of surveillance and hence bodily control. It was to the refractory and scattered gangs of vagabonds and itinerant poor that the state-operated disciplinary power was first applied. In the effort to contain the overflow of social structure, to erect artificial dams and dykes where the ditches in the care of parishes and manors proved too shallow to hold the gathering waves — new, consciously designed techniques of supervision were developed. These developments took place simultaneously in a number of areas, apparently distant from each other and unconnected; and yet they showed amazing similarity of means and purpose. There was, as Michel Foucault convincingly demonstrated, an essential unity of method and effects between hospitals, mental clinics, prisons, poor houses, workhouses, military barracks which all appeared on a grand, unprecedented scale approximately at the same time in all areas of Western Europe. All of them were means of social control; all of them exercised control through deployment of surveillance

power; all of them made the deployment of surveillance viable by confining their charges to a limited, easily supervised space — by transforming the charges into inmates (consider, for instance, the nearly total abolition of out-door assistance to the poor); and they used surveillance to regiment the totality of inmates' conduct in its most minute detail, to impose well-nigh complete heteronomy of the body. In one sense the massive total institutions were merely about reconstructing the conditions of deploying disciplinary power, practiced on a large scale by local communities, for the categories of population which evaded communal control. In another sense, however, the fact that disciplinary power in the total institutions was now a matter of a functionally differentiated design, that it was prised off from other customarily connected dimensions of social interaction, and that it entailed a permanent and unremediable asymmetry of power positions, made the newly developed technique of bodily control an entirely new phenomenon. For once, this technique had a potential of almost infinite extension, which its diffuse communal proto-form demonstrably did not.

The category of disciplinary power, and re-structuring of social control at the dawn of the modern era which this category helps to bring into the open, can therefore serve as a pivot in the new model of modern (industrial) society and its origins, which Foucault's analysis suggests: a model called to replace the understanding of modernity as, above all, a novel attitudinal syndrome formed first among the extant or aspiring elites and then trickling down, through education, ideological pressure and a complex of positive and negative sanctions, to the rest of the population, particularly to the 'pre-industrial poor, now to be transformed into factory labour. The new model, built around the re-deployment of disciplinary power and the re-arrangement of social control in general, substitutes an essentially political concern with public order and the task of containing 'dangerous classes' for the puritan concern with earthly success as the symptom of spiritual salvation. This model also assigns centrality to the political, rather than economic interests of the elites, at least in the triggering off of the chain of transformations which led to the establishment of the 'mature' industrial society.

The story of the first factories can be then re-read as just one chapter, or rather one theme, of a much larger history of the containment of the new poor, uncontrolled and hence re-defined as dangerous classes. The possibility (indeed, the plausibility) of such an interpretation has been overlooked presumably because of the different structure of research relevancies induced by the theories of economy-led or attitude-led changes.

There is more than sufficient evidence (I have indicated some, related mostly to Britain in my **Memories of Class**), that the first factories were perceived by the contemporaries as another variety of poor-or work-houses, and their owners as sui-generis agents of authorities, making the communal task of the care for material and spiritual welfare of the poor their responsibility, and thereby simultaneously relieving the local tax-payer from an excessive financial burden and promising to secure the sought-after control over the bodies of potential rebels as well as morally regenerate their souls. Labourers of the first factories (in most cases women and children) were more often than not delivered to the willing entrepreneurs direct from the parish-supported poor houses, and kept there by force by the same guardians of order whose task it was to chase and capture run-away inmates of workhouses. Gains in productivity (indeed, the productivity activity itself) made possible thanks to subjecting a large number of labourers to the uniform rhythm of bodily action were, in public view at least, secondary to the direct gain in the efficiency of control achieved thanks to the close supervision and minute regimentation of life-processes in the factories and attached dormitories. Attentive reading of the factory rules of this period shows an extremely tenuous link between most of the prohibitions and stipulations, and demands of economic effectivity. Pernickety, often contradictory rules, prohibiting whistling or singing, setting penalties for having dirty hands but also for washing them etc. make sense only when seen as an aid to drilling factory labourers into complete submission to their supervisors, and to extirpating the last shreds of the autonomy of the labourer's body.

In other words, the emergence of the industrial system followed a political logic, rather than the logic of technology. Rather than training the pre-industrial poor into the new habits of regular work required by new technology, entrepreneurs were prompted to accept technological contraptions because the use of them had now become possible thanks to the availability of large numbers of well drilled potential factory hands and of the means to exercise an effective control over their bodies.

The factory hands meeting these conditions most fully came from the ranks of the homeless and the destitute already processed through the exacting regimes of poor houses. By the nature of their drill they were fit to operate only the simplest technology, which called for no autonomy of judgement and no individual discretion. Such technology was quite early available for the least skilled aspects of production. Long into the industrial era such technology was not available to the craftsman type of work; man-based, rather than machine-based skills, for many decades remained an indispensable complement of the industrial process. Factory regime was made possible thanks to the effectivity of surveillance power applied to an unskilled labour force crowded together inside mill enclosures; but factory type of production could not function unless the cooperation of skilled workers was enlisted and assured on a regular basis.

Such skilled workers were not to be found within the walls of poor houses. They could be drawn only from the artisan workshops, where the tradition of autonomy and disciplinary power, both tightly wrapped into a dense tissue of multidimensional reciprocity, was only relatively slightly dented by social translocations elsewhere. Set against this tradition, bare bodily control and unconcealed asymmetry of power identified with the new factory system must have appeared to the craftsmen strange and repulsive. Expectedly, the advances of the factory system met with the fierce resistance of the craftsmen. This resistance against factory order constituted the major plank of all workers' protest movements, conspiracies, and their ideological platforms throughout the first half of the nineteenth century (from a much later and distorted perspective, these movements will go down in interpreted history as the utopian, petty-bourgeois and otherwise immature, pre-historical stage of the 'true' working-class movement).

Partly because of the freshness of their autonomous tradition and the resulting strength of their resistance, partly because of the nature of the functions they were called to perform, the skilled workers could not be fastened to the factory system with the same bolts of naked disciplinary power as their unskilled predecessors.

The first factories applied, therefore, double standards. Unadorned disciplinary power was deemed both appropriate and sufficient for exacting unskilled labour. With the small, but indispensable contingent of skilled workers the entrepreneurs had to settle for less. For several decades, until 'skilled' machines sapped the indispensability of skilled labour, the skilled part of the factory labour retained most of the autonomy and self-rule typical of the craftsman workshop. In a great number of cases the craftsmen were drawn into the productive process in the role of sub-contractors, controlled more by the rules of market exchange than by any direct supervision of their work.

Compliance of such workers with the demands of factory production had to be bargained for. It had to be bought tit for tat, more money for more discipline. Within the frame of reference of factory labour, skilled craftsmen appeared as a 'labour aristocracy'. What set them apart from the rest of labour was not, however, merely the difference of income. More than anything else, the peculiarity of their position was grounded on their freedom, for the time being, from the most obtrusive excesses of disciplinary power. Their gradual surrender of one aspect of the craftsman's tradition — self-management — had to be obtained through the boosting of another aspect: market orientation and self-interest.

In other words, the conflict over **control**, triggered by the attempt to extend over the skilled part of factory labour the disciplinary forces developed in dealing with the unskilled part (or the fear of such an extension), was displaced and shifted into the sphere of surplus distribution. Legitimation of the new structure of power and control was obtained through the delegitimation of the division of the surplus — the one thing which the 'sovereign power' in pre-industrial society sought to keep clear from contest.

This fateful process of displacement I propose to call 'economisation of power conflict'. From the perspective of its ultimate consequences, it may be depicted as the trade-off between the acceptance of the stable asymmetry of power and heteronomy inside the productive activity, and the rendering of the share in surplus open to contest. Money becomes a makeshift power substituted for the one surrendered in the sphere of production; while the experience of unfreedom generated by the conditions in the workplace is re-projected upon the universe of commodities. Correspondingly, the search for freedom is re-interpreted as the effort to satisfy consumer needs through appropriation of marketable goods.

As the latter is only a displaced effect of the experience independent from, and unaffected by, its progress — it is unlikely that the emancipatory urge, originated and perpetually re-fuelled by the heteronomy of productive activity, will be ever quenched by a success, however spectacular, of its surrogate form. It seems on the other hand, that the unsatisfied need of autonomy puts constant pressure on the consumer urge, as successively higher levels of consumption become disqualified and discredited for not bringing the hoped-for alleviation of stress. This stress is a virtual time-bomb lodged in industrial society from its very inception; and the inescapable, though unanticipated, effect of disciplinary power deployed to control the producer's body. It is perhaps the major fly-wheel of industrial society and the source of its irresistible dynamism: it makes industrial society the only one in human history which experiences stability as crisis rather than bliss. By the same token, it is the major structural fault generative of an ever increasing scale of contradictions which ultimately this kind of society is incapable of solving.

III

The most powerful minds of the early modern era (Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, James and John Stuart Mill, W Nassau Senior among others) never counted 'economic growth' among the attributes of industrial economy. They welcomed advancing capitalism as the way to improve the general welfare of society. They praised free trade for its tendency to decrease the toll necessary for decent life and bring into balance the needs and the productive capacity of man. They would not trust the market with accomplishing this task alone, though; if production, in their view, was ruled by natural laws, and all interference with its course could bring more harm than benefit (a fair reflection of the 'naturalisation' of productive relations perpetrated by the growing heteronomy of producers), distribution called for some corrective interference by the state (again a fair anticipation of the needs arising from the 'opening up' of the division of surplus to non-economic forces). This corrective interference, as they envisaged it, would be confined, however, within the total volume of goods the 'natural laws' would make possible to produce. This volume, they believed, was finite and fairly limited. Social welfare would arrive, in their view, within the 'stationary state' of the economy, which was just round the corner.

It was not to be as they believed it would. Incessant economic growth proved to be if not the undetachable attribute of industrial society, then certainly a *sine qua non* condition of its survival. Being the condition of its survival, but not a feature guaranteed by the inner logic of industrial economy, economic growth — as a postulate more than as the reality of economic life — turned gradually into a major factor in shaping the system, its contradictions, and the way of coping with contradictions, of a society based on an industrial mode of production.

Ever growing consumer pressure renders the balancing of industrial output impossible; it can be satisfied only on condition of an equally intense increase in industrial output. With satisfaction being the function of growing appropriation of consumer goods, production must grow — only to keep satisfaction of its present level and prevent the feeling of 'outraged justice' (Barrington Moore Jr.) from emerging. Moreover, virtual demand for consumer goods tends to outstrip what economists call the 'effective demand' (demand backed by monetary resources and hence able to clear the existing market supply simply as an effect of buyers' decisions); the gap between the two cannot be bridged by 'natural laws' of the economy, and hence becomes a political issue, which leads to the growing functionality of state intervention within the system of industrial society. Ultimately, the state is forced to switch its attention from 'correcting the distribution' to stimulating, if not directing, the production of surplus itself.

In the long run, this new role of the state entails the likelihood of a 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas). Perpetuation of economic growth becomes now the main measure of state's performance, by which the governments and parties are judged, win, or suffer defeat. Given, however, that gains in the share of surplus are, for industrial society, the only token with which the asymmetry of power can be retained and compliance bought — the state must go about the task of continuing economic growth, and for this purpose apply means which, at least in the longer run, must undermine the chances of the task being performed. There seems to be an insoluble contradiction between the need to compensate for the lasting asymmetry of power with a visibility of constantly improving welfare defined in consumption terms, and the ability of the productive process, operated by disciplinary power, to turn out a surplus large enough to

balance the intensity of tension this power continues to generate. The final outcome of the original sin of economisation of the essentially political conflict is politicisation of economics.

The early economisation of power conflict gave the initial push to the re-orientation of life interests from the reproduction of subsistence to its traditional form to the improvement of living standards, i.e., to the increasing consumption. This new and unprecedented attitude, gestated and continuously reinforced by the blocked power relations in the productive sphere, were destined to bring in the end an enormous pressure upon production which the system of power responsible for its original success would not be able to sustain. First, however, the reorientation toward consumption and life improvement in general opened up before industry, unheard of prospects of expansion. It did not take long for merchandising firms to start to compete with each other for the greater share of the generalised 'readiness to buy'. Without visible help from the experts in psychology, the competitors soon realised that with the field of productive expression tightly fenced and unencroachable, the potential customers seek in the commodity market the means to mend their somewhat incomplete or scarred identity and to make up for the injured self-dignity. The aggressive advertising, which took off towards the end of the nineteenth century, set about linking this urge with specific goods the market had to offer; giving a tangible and purchasable content to compensatory dreams. This concentrated effort helped to harness the energy of the power conflict, already channelled into the contest over distribution, to the commodity market. Consumerism was born as a twice removed offshoot of the frustrated resistance against disciplinary power which penetrated, and finally conquered the field of productive activity.

Disciplinary power, as we remember, was first and foremost about bodily control. It was the human body which for the first time in history was made, on such a massive scale, an object of drill and regimentation. Later consumerism was a product of failed resistance to such a drill and regimentation. But what was negated, could not but determine the substance and the form of its negation.

The origin left three salient birthmarks on its offspring.

First, disciplinary power in the form in which it was re-deployed from the seventeenth century on, produced the body as an object of conscious attention, as a receptacle of potential powers which, to materialise, must be selectively developed and properly channelled — as, in short, a thing incomplete in itself, underdetermined, needing cultivation towards an ideal which would not be attained without a conscious and consistent effort. This power produced body consisting of two parts of unequal value and different relation to the ideal; a part to be suppressed, tamed, hidden, and preferably eradicated, and a part to be tended to, cared for, brought into full fruition.

Much in the same way as Rod Steiger's **pawnbroker** manifested his liberation from concentration camp slavery in **choosing** the non-interference with evil into which he was **forced** by his camp guards, consumerism as a compensatory reaction to **heteronomous** bodily drill selects an **autonomous** bodily drill as its principal target. Consumerism is not about the emancipation of the body from control; it is about the joy of controlling the body of one's own will, with the help of sophisticated products of technology which offer all the visibility of the formidable power of one's controlling agency. The body is subjected to, say, the uncompromising drill of slimming or jogging discipline, applied against the body's natural drives and wants, but this time administered by the body's own master. Consumerist freedom drags behind it a huge shadow of its slave origin. To satisfy itself it does not need to break the manacles. It satisfies itself by locking the manacles with its own key.

Second, the bodily training associated with the disciplinary power in its production setting, failed to develop some attributes of the body which under conditions of consumerism acquire particular significance. Growing consumption is a novel task, to which the body must be prepared as it was prepared in the past to accomplish tasks. It must be **made fit** to absorb an ever growing number of sensations the commodities offer or promise. Once again the body is to be trained, but this time its capacity as a 'receptacle of sensations' is the training target. It is a condition **sine qua non** of consumerism that the body becomes richer, and life is fuller, depending on the ubiquity and comprehensiveness of its training. Often there is little to distinguish between developing a capacity to absorb new (or more) sensations, and the more traditional forms of bodily drill. The objective, for instance, is not to train the capacity to enjoy

music, but to make the body capable to withstand a permanent exposure to the flow of sometimes deafening, sometimes barely discernible sounds. The objective is not to teach appreciation of dramatic plot, but to drill the body into a need to be exposed again and again to unfamiliar and familiar plots alike, in slow motion or reverse order — a need into which the contraption of video-recorder fits like hand into glove. The objective is not to develop the suppressed capacity of erotic sensuality, but to drill a body into the capacity of going over and over again the codified routine of sexual acts. Orgasm is just one of the many promised prizes, calculated to prompt willing embracement of 'do-it-yourself' or 'teach yourself' drill. They retain their attraction in as far as the elusive bodily sensation is translated into 'objectified' indices of the observable routine, and hence the relevance is shifted from the outcome to the bodily drill itself. On the whole, it is a condition of consumerism that the body is trained into a capacity to will and absorb more marketable goods, and that routines are instilled, through a self inflicted drill, which make possible just that.

Third, the body, this object of loving care, has retained its central defining features as articulated and imputed during the dawn of disciplinary power: it has remained first and foremost the paramount source of evil and suffering, and as such it cannot be left unattended: the care of the body as the crucial time — and money-consuming activity of the denizens of consumer society is an uneasy, poorly balanced mixture of love and horror (which renders the body not unlike the divine objects of religious fervour of the past.) As before, the body is charged with the responsibility for success and failure in earthly endeavours, and the urge 'to do something about my life' it is most eagerly translated into a precept 'to do something about my body'. For many years now the two kinds of books most likely to win a place on the bestsellers list in USA have been cookbooks, including the most eerie and exotic ones (the idea that the body could miss any of the experiences available to other bodies is terrifying), and diet books, prohibiting the consumption of practically everything the first category of books recommends. Cookbooks offer the images of things which diet books order to deprive the body of: the body must remain an object of constraint and drill however much it consumes, surrendering to the barrage of marketing allurements; and so there is a need of a constant supply of new, applied or imagined, instruments of torture and punishment.

Most importantly, real problems people experience in their life-in-society tend to be well-nigh automatically, though not without eager assistance of the advertising media, translated into the need of possessing some purchasable tools of bodily training, bodily adornments or other goods defined first and foremost as extensions of, or adjuncts to, the body. The tremendous preoccupation with fashion — such a salient characteristic of the consumer era — is the most obvious example (Roland Barthes defined fashion as a discourse **on** and **about** the body). But the privilege accorded to the body in the consumeristic hermeneutics of human fate does not stop here. The underpaid, withered, unfriended girl from the typing pool is advised to buy a new brand of perfume as a way to force handsome and well-dressed men to pay attention to her, smile and bring flowers. With a husband preoccupied with his job and adolescent children about to abandon their family nest, the ageing, bored and god-and-people-forsaken housewife is recommended to buy a bottle of tissue-softening liquid — the gentle, feminine courting of the body 'they' will surely notice. An office clerk rudely dressed down by his harpy boss is suggested to treat his body to the exquisite pleasures of cigar smoke. As it has been produced by the consumer society, the body is assigned the ambiguous role of a condition of worldly success and a recompense for the lack of it.

As we saw before, the consumer drive is unlikely to be ever satiated, as it leaves unscathed the basic structures which make this drive the only outlet for the tensions they generate. Neither is the consumer drive likely to peter out as the result of self-discreditation, or broken promises, frustrated hopes since the technique of the bodily drill, in which it partakes, has no obvious limits of its extension, apart from the duration of bodily life.

As we see now, consumerism does not mark any significant departure from the kind of society which emerged in Western Europe with the advent of Industrialism. On the contrary, it seems to signify a fullest deployment to-date of the techniques of power which brought industrialism into existence. It seems to be continuous with the pre-consumerist phase of industrial society through the mediation of the unresolved power conflict. And it seems to represent the phase in

the history of industrial society in which the chosen strategy of conflict-resolution (or, rather, conflict-displacement) reached the point when its further applications sap the effectivity and the viability of its principle.

Consumerism draws its life-blood from the intense preoccupation with the body. It also creates conditions under which the bodily obsession self-perpetuates and self-intensifies, taxing ever more the accommodating capacity of the social system of reproduction. Its roots, however, do not lie in the cultural shift from the public to the private, from the puritan to the narcissistic attitude, or in any other 'cultural resolution' often constructed as an explanation of the apparently novel life patterns. The roots of the consumer society remain firmly in the same soil from which industrial society sprouted: in the techniques of disciplinary power, as re-deployed and perfected from the seventeenth century on. The successive emancipations which punctuate the short history of consumerist era help the adjustment and survival of the principle of bodily control safely anchored in the routinised rhythm of the industrial organisation of social reproduction. In other words, consumerism is not a dawn of a new historical era. It is, instead, the last, most paradoxical and absurd, stage of the old one; its, perhaps, life after death.

In a sense, consumerism is a last-ditch effort to salvage the industrial society from the consequences of the asymmetry of power it has chosen as the paradigm of its reproduction. But this asymmetry of power, anchored first and foremost in the job situation, is fast becoming inadequate to the task, much like communally-based surveillance power at the dawn of the modern era. Once again, perhaps without yet seeing it clearly, we live through a new power crisis, and a Foucault of the twenty-second century will discover in our time another production of the seventeenth century drama.

More and more people spend more and more of their time outside the job situation. Many consider seriously, or abandon themselves to, the possibility of a jobless life. These are, in many respects, the modern equivalents of those 'vagabonds' and 'dangerous classes' of past centuries who forced the re-articulation of the problem of social reproduction as one of 'law and order'. Then, in the past, the re-deployment of disciplinary power solved the 'problem of law and order' the superfluous into labour force. But the logic of industrial production so grounded has made labour force superfluous again. The old problem is with us again, with vengeance. It is difficult to see how the solution to the conflicts generated by the industrial episode can be anything else than a radical re-deployment of social power.

This adds another, yet more sinister, dimension to constraints imposed on the viability of consumerism by its own intrinsic antinomies. This other dimension stems from the dependency of the consumerist solution on the plausibility of the incessant and accelerating growth of output — an increasingly doubtful prospect (for a more detailed discussion, see my *Memories of Class*). Perhaps more importantly still, the plausibility of consumerism as an effective outlet of the endemic power conflict depends on the continuous bodily training organised around the producer role within the framework of industrial system. This, in turn, requires that the bulk of society is at some crucial stage processed through the system. This is not, however, a case today and is unlikely to become the case again in the future. More and more people are socially produced in the role of consumers while being denied access to the producer role. Such people are organically incapable to perform the consumer role adequately — as well as deprived of the means which an adequate performance would require. Against this background, the 1981 British inner city riots could be seen as the modern equivalent of the machine-breaking of the early industrial era. The desperate adolescent unemployed played the role of the Luddites of consumer society. Their rage was turned against consumerist instruments of oppression: the goodies displayed in the windows of the inner-city department stores.

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Note

For the comprehensive bibliography of the topic see:-

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