

Picaresques and Cybernetics

The New Balance

allégorie

The parasite is invited to the *table d'hôte*; in return, he must regale the other diners with his stories and his mirth. To be exact, he exchanges good talk for good food; he buys his dinner, paying for it in words. It is the oldest profession in the world. Traces of it are found in the oldest documents. There are a thousand known variations on this law of justice—rarely simple and often complicated—practiced in social, friendly, tribal, and familial everyday life, just like in the oldest comedy or the most recondite story. For example, the sponger pays in morals and the host gives, filled with guilt by this great yet imaginary duty. The moral is one discourse among many, some sort of specie that is legal tender. Each society allows a linguistic specie that can be exchanged advantageously for food. Influential and powerful groups are able to diffuse a forced lexicon in that way. Today it is economic, just as it was humanist not long ago, Voltairean before that, and religious a long time ago.

A vagrant, dying of hunger, found himself one evening at the kitchen window of a well-known restaurant. The aromas were delicious. He filled himself on them and that calmed his hunger pangs a bit. One of the scullions discovered the trick and, quickly coming outside, demanded money for what could be called the service rendered. The passer-by and the scullion were about to fight over their disagreement when a third person came by who offered to settle the matter. Give me a coin, he said. The wretch did so, frowning. He put the coin down on the sidewalk and with the heel of his shoe made it ring a bit. This noise, he said, giving his decision, is pay enough for the aroma of the tasty

dishes. The roast is the thing eaten, and an aroma comes from it. The coin is the thing exchanged, and a sound comes from it. If the coin is worth the roast, then the sound of the coin is worth the aroma of the food. And he returned the coin to the passer-by. Justice is done.

An old tale that demonstrates a wise bit of knowledge. We are hollow and empty; we cannot fill ourselves with air and with sound. We need something substantial to mend us. Two positions and two orders: substances and solids here, and there air and sound. According to this bit of wisdom, if there is to be an exchange, it must be of the same order. That is philosophy, the justice of the stomach. Solid for solid, substance for substance, and meal for coin of the realm; elsewhere, air for sound and vice versa. There are infrastructures—a serious matter—and there are superstructures where hot air is sold. The consistent and the diffuse. Every author and every language notes this division in its own way. And the heavy philosophers consecrate it.

The parasite invents something new. Since he does not eat like everyone else, he builds a new logic. He crosses the exchange, makes it into a diagonal. He does not barter; he exchanges money. He wants to give his voice for matter, (hot) air for solid, superstructure for infrastructure. People laugh, the parasite is expelled, he is made fun of, he is beaten, he cheats us; but he invents anew. This novelty must be analyzed. This sound, this aroma, passing for money or roast.

A paralytic was crawling about on hands and knees. Was it our athlete, wounded? A few steps away from a sumptuous repast, Tantalus, you can die of hunger if you are unable to move. He was collapsing in misery, rotting away in a black corner. One fine day, he saw a blind man who was bumping into a thousand obstacles and who thereby almost broke his neck. He could die by falling into a well if its lip were low and seemed to be a step and if his outstretched arms only touched the air. The paralytic calls him and offers to strike a bargain. The blind man will carry him and the cripple will be the guide. The two of them form one normal person.

An old tale that pushes the wise bit of knowledge out. You laughed at the parasite, but you do not laugh at the exchange of legs for eyes. Nevertheless: The blind man gives solidity, force, transportation, power that can be calculated in calories produced by such and such a food from a meal. In other words, energy on the normal scale. What does the cripple give in exchange in this new picture? He speaks, and that is that. He announces obstacles, he watches, he proposes a direction. Perched on the shoulders of a black force, he clarifies it and illuminates it. Soon we will have to say that he directs it, that he gives the force orders. After all, the contract he proposed to the blind man was a

parasitic pact. For he pays in information, in energy on the microscopic level. He offers words for the force—yes, his voice, air, for a solid substance. Worse yet, he takes control and governs.

The parasite invents something new. He obtains energy and pays for it in information. He obtains the roast and pays for it with stories. Two ways of writing the new contract. He establishes an unjust pact; relative to the old type of balance, he builds a new one. He speaks in a logic-considered irrational up to now, a new epistemology and a new theory of equilibrium. He makes the order of things as well as the states of things—solid and gas—into diagonals. He evaluates information. Even better: he discovers information in his voice and good words; he discovers the Spirit in the wind and the breath of air. He invents cybernetics. The blind man and the cripple are a crossed association of the material and the logical, an exchange of the solid for a voice—that is the oldest story of the rudder [*gouvernail*]. And if the bolt of lightning governs the universe, here it is the look and the invitation to create a slant. The person who limps is the inclination. He is the difference, and he says so.

There are several fine balances in this. First of all, not all voices bear information; not all winds bear tidings. Not all smooth talkers are invited to dine: good *raconteurs* are distinguished from tiresome brag-garts and from stubborn cavillers. The king of Prussia could choose; he preferred Voltaire, and the tsarina, Diderot. They would not have invited the ridiculous Jean-François Rameau. There is a market for good words, sometimes at a fixed price. Bad money often chases out the good. But this balance is evolved, sophisticated; it is useless at first.

Let us return to the paralytic, that is to say, to the governor. The one with energy, the producer of movement, can sometimes distinguish the useful message in the voices of the wind. Yet his blindness forbids him from ever regulating the message's usefulness. The cripple, perched atop his blind stare, could make him fall into a ditch. The blind man must trust the cripple. And the latter could be anyone. For the blind man cannot choose his mahout. Of course, he can distinguish messages from noise, but his lack of control allows him to be lied to. I shall warn you about all obstacles, and I shall lead you where you want to go. And so he goes quite like a sheep.

From that point on, anyone who wants to sit on the shoulders of an athlete does not want him to see well. He who likes to command can do so, but on one condition: the eyes of the producers, of the energetic and the strong, have to be poked out. Those who have energy necessarily cannot have information; thus, those with information can do without energy. Information is as precious as it is rare. Thus this

rarity has to be provoked. The blind man and the paralytic already established these theorems and the new balance as well. They began with symbiosis, but that did not last very long. The parasite came back.

The balance of rarity functions perfectly in a space or an environment without information. Here the first signal that appears is worth all the money in the world, is worth life itself. The first bolt of lightning that inclines in chaos. The first olive branch in the beak of the dove on the flooded plains. Afterwards follows all the meaning. And history itself is derived from this spark. Begin with the black box, night, blindness.

Thus you have to begin by removing all sources of information for the workers and producers. Horses are trained by putting blinders on them. Calves and chickens are placed in the dark, in school, as if they were simple, small men. You have to begin by dividing the work. The manual laborer has to be blind in relation to the paralyzed intellectual. The helmsman has no porthole; he hears his master's voice, he listens, he repeats, and he obeys. Just like the blind man a while back, who followed a voice. One furnishes energy; the other, information. One gives the force to work; the other, the directions. Matter and voice. Again this is an iniquitous exchange, but it works in history and not only in comedy. They must have found the parasitic diagonal very serious. They must have found the new balance intelligent. For the division surges up and makes a system very quickly: the intellectual producer is blind relative to the administrative paralytic and blinded by him, and so forth. This cybernetics gets more and more complicated, makes a chain, then a network. Yet it is founded on the theft of information, quite a simple thing. It is merely necessary to edit the laws and to withdraw knowledge from the greatest number. In the end, power is nothing else. It is measured on this balance. It is the relation and literally the balance beam between the loci in which information is stocked and those from which it is withdrawn. Who put out whose eyes? Where is knowledge located, and from what space is it absent? It is true enough that the division of manual and intellectual functions more or less matches the old relation of city and country, for example; this is what the rats show us.

This power, which could be called bureaucratic, seems to me to be stronger and stabler than that of force, which is never strong enough, or that of law, which is never just enough. It is based on knowledge, and worse yet, on information, on the signal, almost at the level of a reflex. Yet its genesis is paradoxical. That of strong powers is simple: it is a question of violence and death, warfare, muscles, and strategy. That of just powers is simple as well: it is a question of faith and of sacrifices, of martyrs and fanatics. Nothing out of the ordinary, nothing rare,

nothing rare, nothing ridiculous. Here, the ancestor is a parasite. He is ridiculous, a joke. He claims to exchange his daring words for good food. But he is the only one we hear at the table. He is the only one we see on stage in Plautus. Him and his loud voice. Everyone laughs. By what miracle does everyone suddenly cry then? In the meanwhile, the master has lost the power to exclude him. He is there, well entrenched. Ruins the father, screws the mother, leads the children, runs the household. We can no longer do without him; he is our system itself: he commands, he has the power, his voice has become that of the master, he speaks so he is heard everywhere, no one else can talk. From the *table d'hôte* to the table of Orion—now he is on the shoulders, the master, Zeus-like. How could this have happened? How could the producers have suddenly been blinded? What hit them?

The producer plays the contents, the parasite, the position. The one who plays the position will always beat the one who plays the contents. The latter is simple and naive; the former is complex and mediated. The parasite always beats the producer. The producer, always attentive to the game of the things themselves, supposes that the other does not cheat, since the things themselves are fine but loyal, as physicists say.

The one who plays the contents plays the object. He is an artisan; he is a scientist as well, but it is only the mastery of the world, subtle, wily, but not cheating. The one who plays the position plays the relations between subjects; thus, he masters men. And the master of men is the master of the masters of the world.

Some are of fire and some of location. Some whose word is of fire and some whose word is location. Those of location without fire are the masters—the cold ones. Those of fire without location burn madly, so strongly that around them, objects change as if in a furnace or near a forge. Flame of fire in the wind; the wind comes from where it will, blows where it will to stir up the fire. They are not the masters; they can be the slaves, but they are the beginnings. They are the noise of the world, the sounds of birth and of transformations.

To play the position or to play the location is to dominate the relation. It is to have a relation only with the relation itself. Never with the stations from which it comes, to which it goes, and by which it passes. Never to the things as such and, undoubtedly, never to subjects as such. Or rather, to those points as operators, as sources of relations. And that is the meaning of the prefix *para-* in the word *parasite*: it is on the side, next to, shifted; it is not on the thing, but on its relation. It has relations, as they say, and makes a system of them. It is always mediate and

never immediate. It has a relation to the relation, a tie to the tie; it branches onto the canal.

There are those of sources and those of canals.

The whole question of the system now is to analyze what a point, a being, and a station are. They are crossed by a network of relations; they are crossroads, interchanges, sorters. But is that not analysis itself: saying that this thing is at the intersection of several series. From then on, the thing is nothing else but a center of relations, crossroads or passages. It is nothing but a position or situation. And the parasite has won.