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DRAFT

VIOLENCE IN THE OFFICE

Every summer our cities are burning, the smoke is already seeping into our offices. How long will it be, before violence comes into our offices?

Hidden away behind tinted glass, nearly impenetrable to the rays of the changing sun, - hermetically closed off from the outside and supplied only by a specially filtered supply of outside air, our offices are a world all by itself. According to neatly defined traditions people are bound together in an arbitrarily structured hierarchy. Strict priorities govern their actions; goals seem surprisingly clear. Man's efforts never have created a more independently perfect world. Centuries of thinking and ages of pain have sculptured a model of effective functionality. To translate facts, people and actions into a manageable set of figures, and to use unflinching methods to shape them, this has always been the task of an office.

Since the old kings, appointed some of their officers to act as administrators, all powerful men have copied their efforts to direct their fortunes from a desk. What did it matter, how truly just all assumptions were, as long as one could build a strikingly stable set of values? Who

cared, how fundamentally unreal the system would become, as long as it would perpetuate itself smoothly and grow rapidly? Why bother to look for a changed meaning, as long as the old forms resound powerful in an updated translation?

And here we are: with our office world growing to the largest size in history, we see it chained to a structure more historic than alive. Sometimes during the lives of our bearded greatgrandfathers its leadership fossilized into a stylized pyramid. Something used at work by our vested grandfathers gilded its accountability with formalized holdings. Somewhere during their travels our speeding fathers extended its influence by means of all of the all involving paper. Somehow, by their studies, our older brothers secured its righteousness by unflinching electronics.

Here it is, ours to behold: A world created by man. Not just boxes of steel and glass, but a theater for our actions: a full house, an archaic stage, an ever repeating script. Behind the masks of bureaucracy, the officers hide their love of power. The lights are on them, while they kill each other off on a little common ground, patiently the crowd follows, lending a hand at every other turn. They are familiar with the whole story, but where else could they go for a bit of air conditioned fun?

Why do we all come to our offices? Every week it pays less and less, but our chairs are getting softer and softer. Every month they change the routine, but work remains as meaningless as before. Every year we get promoted a bit closer to where the heads roll. But after all, it is a nice little world: Up there in the blue skies above downtown, out there beyond the green lawns of suburbia, or - at worst - in there, far inside the sandstone façades where warm light and soft music lull us into submission.

And then we have to work in the office to be able to afford to live in the kind of world our offices have shaped. Of course, our world is n't quite as nice as our offices. In our offices we keep a neat and clean picture of the world, and official map - so many pins stuck in where we

improved matters. Put all the holes together, and what have we got: where they are orderly spaced - a sieve for the ambitions of our technocracy; where they are too crowded, a bottomless hole; and all too often a big wasteland all around.

We have to work in our offices in order to be able to run away every evening from the cities which they have created, and in which they are located. In their offices our greatgrandfathers, our grandfathers, our fathers and our older brothers have shaped our country and all our cities to their own vision.-- or shall we call it their blindness. We see our cities today sprawling, decaying, burning: their phantom values reduced to smoke by violence. Neither functional ideologies nor formalized structures of the past are a safe haven from the attack by wilful force of the present.

For a long time we could not, or did not want to comprehend violence; some of us even went so far as to dismiss it as inhuman. We did not conceive of a world for all humans to interact and we did not understand the interaction of all human capabilities. Man has his mind, his heart and his hands. By thinking or reasoning he can find just, right, and even equitable solutions; he can desegregate the functions and the reasons for doing something. Today we are rejecting the thought of an emotional implication in the determination of our actions, and the right of other people to thusly determine theirs. Well, when man sees that by application of reason - and a reason so well founded that it cannot be contradicted, and integrated so strongly in a total structure of value systems that it cannot be eradicated - his feelings as means for a solution are rejected and ridiculed, then man has no other capability than the resort to force. And force applied onto others is the essence of violence.

It has not been long since violence came to the streets of our cities, and already we have been able to grasp its form and meaning. And most importantly we have found its origin: the lacking balance in individual

human capabilities and the lacking capacity of a systematic social balance.

It's a nasty complex world out there in our cities. And we do not pretend to know how to stop them from burning up. As we are sitting in the soft wombs of our chairs and facing the neatly divided papers on our clean desks, we do not all feel responsible for what is happening out there. As we look through the rigid blinds, none of us can really see what is happening down there. But as we gaze past our precious doors into the inner office, we sense trouble in the air. Is it the smoke that burned outside, or that of fires that are going to burn in here? Or is the office just the setting for any unpredictable happening? Is our little world fully under control?

Behind two automatically closing tempered glass doors and a long cold lobby stand a row of electronically controlled, corrosion resistant steel elevator doors; and gorgeous females in our reception rooms could allay even those hardy intruders that venture so far.

We are not afraid of the printed word from the other world, that squeezes in through the mails; all words from our world come from P.R., and all are good. Do we feel so good? Can anyone of us really say, that it is not only the style of our offices, but their essence that is being challenged? Can some of us really account for the leadership they hold? Can most of us really follow to the full extent our far reaching mutual influence? Can all of us really be sure that our office world, stable in the past, is secure in the future?

Our world was created by robed men of the past, neat and clean to correspond to their reasonable abstractions. An ancient ideology, if not idolatry, has produced the set of functions and structures which we call an office today. Today's use of yesterday's symbols does violence to the future.

Since instantaneous remote control becomes tantamount to action, the scope of our work shifts from controlling command to productive task. A celibacy from the world does not correspond to such generative involvement; persisting in it, we violate a factual commitment. In Real Time, the remote influence on the state of affairs subsides to the actual change in direction of reality. Abstraction from life becomes unreal at such speed; persisting in it, we violate a common trust. Through complex systems a balanced involvement of all intellectual, physical and psychical potentialities of the individual optimizes his own as well as the total systems gain and stability. Subordination of man to machine becomes uneconomic; persisting in it, we violate a social obligation. Maybe the violence to factual commitment, common trust and social obligation in the office does not smell quite real. I wonder how real it will be, when violence is returned upon the office.

How ? When? That's not important, as long as we become afraid of it, afraid enough to think of it seriously. The essence of violence is always the same. The wilful application of power onto others in the furtherance of one's own benefits. Just like this it does not sound too ugly. But let it flare up, as policy, individual or group action, and it is out of control.

In each of us, there is a bit of violence, after all it's human. In our offices there is probably a little violence done every day. Violence of one sort or another is here, among us, in the office. We do not have to wait for a big happening. But we can start to transform our office world from a paper setting for symbolic pretension to a live platform for human engagement.

Yesterday's office is not a secure haven. It is infested with men of today: men fully trained in the use of their reason, men totally abject to the influence of feelings, men thoroughly conditioned to the exercise of power. The few who are sitting on soft carpets surrounded by screens

displaying distant consequences and the many who are stalking the hard floors between closely spaced consoles - they are all men of our time caught in a dream of the past. Not fossilized but ambivalent, not gilded, but raw, not extended but profound, not secure but striving - and when all of them shall come alive the friction in the office will cause fires.

Can we abandon our dreams and take a nightmare for real? Can we treat our clean offices as seriously as our burning towns? Can we change dead functional structures into live systems of balanced human involvement?

Let's share a feeling of guilt, a feeling of hope and a feeling of exhilaration as we smell the smoke. The fires around us may well light our way to the future.

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