

General Movement Teachings

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»Did you expect this?« - graffiti, placed between the Vondelstraat barricades, early March 1980. Time and again, heretics have been surprised to discover that the march of history can be brought to a standstill, releasing an intensity which makes everything else just history, just movement(4 WDS ITAL). More possibilities exist than can fit into our expectations. They exceed our needs without meeting them. It is these moments of metamorphosis which keep the engine of history turning. Revolutions are moments for breathing new life into the course of events. This is interesting to the heretics, but does not impress them. Their fascination is valid at the moment of the event itself, when an extrahistorical space opens and demands exploration. Suddenly you're offered the chance to become someone different from who you've always been. You don't have to go against your mapped-out life path; another way of life turns out to exist parallel to it. Consciousness-expanding substances can serve as an introduction to this space experience, or be used to enhance it. It's no accident that so much drinking, smoking, snorting and gulping goes on in movement circles. But the subtle difference between living parallel and dropping out is still strictly attended to. During an event, you're moving in the transit space of the emptiness. Turning back in time is essential. Because only the blessed are able to hide forever beyond the horizon of history. »Making history is not the mystery.«

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In the beginning was the event. Time was compressed, space concentrated into one point - the metamorphosis took place. The movement is born out of this first impulse. It seeks a way to consolidate the last stage of transformation, to give it substance. The movement knows no stopping now; it is past that point. It expands in order to give the event maximum range and place everything under a common denominator. But it can never carry this totalitarian tendency through to the bitter end, because the movement's internal dynamics inescapably lead to its fragmentation. The original event had an overwhelming density, which the movement later reinterprets in terms of a lost unity. The movement attempts to retrieve this unity by subsuming what energy it has left into a static establishment. Stuck in these mighty ruins, the movement has a tendency to stall. The remains stay populated as long as an internal dynamic between demolition and construction is kept up. But the movement itself lacks the mobility to become something else just like that. It will endlessly branch off, get stuck, scheme internally, sprout over again, be exploited, describe itself, see itself on film. Metamorphosis, however, will remain a mystery, a game of appearance and disappearance which does not let itself continue, which followed a rule which is excluded by the movement's range of standards.

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Why are events followed by a movement? Are they doomed to be incorporated into a history which progresses from past to future? Their abrupt appearances, which make fools out of the great sense-makers of existence, were anxiously secreted away into one continuing story for millenia. The astonishing detail of the story, taken up into a larger context, was drowned out. Currently, however, an opposite strategy for enfeebling the event is being followed. The detail is blown up on the screen and the continuing story is fragmented into items, whereby the mystery of the sudden kindling of the event is made invisible. Neither the media nor History are able to transform the dynamics of the eruption into a story which stands on its own. While the movement is inclined to »go on« in the absurd, the

event is out to recover itself. Its order is that of a cycle. It tries to repeat the moment of its appearance, to rub itself out. The event does not oppose growth or development, but breaks in on it. It follows its own track. But it also invites us to step in; when it is over, you step back outside. There's nothing more to it. It goes without saying that endless enterprises will be started afterward, in order to keep things moving at all costs, but this does not interest the event. However the event is pulled and tugged at, its brilliance remains unscathed.

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Canetti writes somewhere of »the point in time when history stopped being real. Without noticing, all humanity suddenly departed reality; everything that has happened since then is absolutely untrue, but we can't see it.«* This entrance into post-history set in with the freezing of prewar movements by means of the Cold War. The global conflicts which had kept feelings running high for a half-century were made henceforth impossible by the introduction of the Bomb and the deterrent balance. Classical reality was thus left behind in an era to which a return was impossible. This dismissal of previous reality value was compensated for by the wholesale spread of auto and television. The movement was picked off the street and transferred onto the screen or the windshield. You could sit back, relax and watch. Special movement study started here.

History as a movement which propagated itself through causality chains was replaced by a parallel circuit of easily digestible news reports. The media in their constant omnipresence replaced time and space. The media eye shines on everything. The remote and the strange are continuously brought into the living room, causing the place where you are to become suspended. A topographical amnesia: one can be anywhere on earth, but where one's really hanging out, no one remembers.

This permanent timeliness, however, can exist on its own strength even less than can history. Like it, the media have an engine, but no fuel. So the media suck everything and everyone into the picture. They feed off every energy that is invested in their reality. But nothing fits the scale of the media. Anything having substance must be subjected to a revolutionary change. Every object, every situation, every person must radiate significance, which will then be used to report on something different. Where a thing had been, there came information - the fuel which fires the media. And here special movement study stops.

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»Tear down a media.« History was cool, but now there are other things on the agenda. Everything revolves around the media; the extramedial is covered in even the most remote corners. But at the same time, this totalitarian tendency evokes uneasiness in the media. We want something new. So a retro-movement has appeared which plays on our growing need to make history ourselves, alongside work, in a hobbyistic or touristic ambiance. It consciously pushes the media into the shadow of the event, returns for an evening or a weekend to a place before Canetti's point. We don't have time for the media just now. The boundless, the unguarded, calls. Fortified with a helping of media-free relaxation, we can stand it all again for a while after. This healthful therapy aims to cure the medial fatigue in the subject her/himself, but leaves the cause alone, since it has its nice aspects as well.

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Nevertheless, there are individuals who have undergone the extramedial experience and upon return are left with an immense rage. They experience their transformation into information as an assault on their lives. They go on the offensive. The antimedial movement which they unleash fights back hard, but wants nothing to do with powers which oppose the freedom of the press: a hand pushing the camera away, the last picture where the soldier fires at the cameraman, a ban on pictures at the borders...Emotional displays, all too gladly transmitted, because they prove that the media still deserve the support of the democratic community. The antimedials see the conspiracy lurking behind this league of monsters. They demand that democracy's ties with the media be broken. They do their part by literally cutting the connections. No out of fear of contact, but in order to meet someone again.

A 1987 »Theme Proposal« sees a lot of positive sides in the attack on the media: »By isolating and attacking the media we will reach more people.« Sick of the extreme negative portrayal of its resistance, it goes in search of causes: »We are writing this piece because there are still people inside the movement who find it necessary to express their opinion to the press. The time when we could achieve something through the press is long gone.« The antimedial movement would rather have avoided the media, but keeps running up against it and just can't get free of it. Yet that's from a glowing perspective: »We were going to take big steps and this is the biggest. No more press...To begin with, it means a lot less work and ass-kissing. If they aren't up on our activities any more, they can't write negative things about us any more either. You do lose the chance to make your action more important than it actually is, but there's more room to create your own world.«

The antimedials wrestle with the problem of how to meet others without bringing the media into play. Because this has become unimaginable, they seek other paths toward providing the media with content: »Several computer experts are at work trying to break into the Dutch Press Agency telex, the word processors and typesetting computers of the newspapers and the central teletext office.« This strategy aims to fight the enemy with its own methods. But when you launch information, you become information yourself. The theme proposal recognizes this hack-practice dilemma. Therefore, it turns away from the electro-sphere and resorts to bureaucratic jobs. Because the media don't want to hear about their discontent, they are promoted to the status of action object. The antimedial scenes' lightning strikes cause puzzling breaks in the data circuits. They briefly create media-free zones, where meetings suddenly arise between people who suddenly aren't getting a picture and come to ask what's going on. The antimedial arsenal proves unlimited: short-circuiting telephone exchanges, bringing satellites off course, burning down cable boxes, sawing down electric pylons, not paying television and radio fees, sending out fake press releases, getting cameras to show up for nothing, pouring cement into dish antennas, cutting assorted cables, cleaving TV screens in two, painting over security cameras, altering data, installing magnetic fields, implanting and spreading viruses and worms - communicating with the hammer: »Talking back to the media.«

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Recognizing the omnipotence of the media and living with it does not necessarily lead to happy destructivism. And the laborious strategy of antipublicity can be avoided too. Instead of being employed in an alternative way, the media can be taken to ecstatic heights. This supreme self-experience of the media has passed the stage of information absorption and transmission. The point is to cause medial effects without references to an outside world. This is achieved in the sovereign media.

The sovereign media do not bid against reality, but endeavor to make it the exceptional situation. It is not the media which are conquered, but hybrid handiworks from age-old to hypermodern. They irregularly appear in print, on the air, in data networks. The program producers do not show

themselves; they show only their masks, in formats familiar to us. The sovereign media have nothing to do with social developments. They do not emulate the other media in their field. They make up no audiovisual avant-garde and are thus not of this age. They transmit nothing, but simply do their thing. The sovereign media have left the dialectic of goal and method behind them. They do not approach their public as a moldable market segment, but offer it the »royal space« which the other deserves. They invite us to hop on the media bus straight away. »Soon the boat will sail and take us all away.«

The sovereign media dare reality to prove its existence by denying it. They constitute a risky venture which plays with the boundaries of the senses. Yet they are not concerned with heavy themes like waste, excess or the game with death. They want to travel, preferably as far as possible. While the media compress the world and history to screen size, the sovereign media move in the opposite direction. They suck us into a universe to sail the sea of noise and to bring the oceanic feeling up to date. For a moment, only media exist. In this transit space, too, the thing is not to hang around too long so you don't end up in art or politics, for the sovereign media's denial of reality borders on that.

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The extramedial figures regard this all a bit pityingly. When they are asked to participate, they don't answer. They do not wish to be spoken to. Without looking round they keep walking. They appear to live in another universe. They're occupied with all kinds of things, but their purpose remains invisible through the medial lens. They seem never to know what they want. But this dismissive attitude is not merely indifference. They are intently concentrating on the right thing; their silence stems from this. They only answer unasked questions. Their attention is focused on the approach of an event. And when the time comes, they are the ones who move into action without hesitation. When they have accepted the invitation, the event starts to happen. Then they are together in extramedial space. Metamorphosis takes place. Then movement study steps back. On it rests the task of chronicling the stories of those who return.