

# The Ecstatic Culture

Europe '66

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Translated by Bernardo Bova and Peggy Edmonds

“God sent to earth an animal to tell men that they are immortal, and the animal, either through stupidity or forgetfulness, told them that they must die.”

—St. Augustine

We need a third sex to touch the ecstatic culture. The Europe of 1966 is still sterilized by war, its seminal reservoirs dried up by fascism and the search for an ecstatic culture is its first possibility of refinding its fertility.

At the end of 1965 for the first time I saw the makings of a suicide. It was the birthday of Nelo Lucchiani, the Italian painter who painted “Four hundred metaphorphoses of an apple at the dawn of fascism” (*Festival of Venice*, 1964). His birthday had gathered together at this house, Via Em. Filiberto, in Rome, five guys and three girls.

Everyone was seated on the floor writing poems for Nelo. He was drinking cognac, standing up by the window, reading the poems we handed him. A.G.'s poem began with the line “Nelo, Nelo, Tu es Dieu, Tu es vide, Tu es le neant, Gloria in excelsis.” (Nelo, Nelo, you are God, you are emptiness, you are nothingness, Gloria in excelsis.) Suddenly Nelo attempted to throw himself out the window—it was the seventh floor. Fortunately someone held him back. It was four a.m. in Rome.

But the image of his body leaning out of the window obsesses me. Nelo was saved, but in his place on the window hangs all Western Europe.

A week later, almost the entire group that had been present at Nelo's decided to publish an experimental magazine, make films, do some theater, and have exhibitions. All the activity centered on only one idea: to take an object, an ashtray, for example, and exhaust it on all possible levels: symbolic, daily, etc. The same with animals: work one month at poems, paintings, essays, to make visible by exhaustion the structure and place of an object or animal in our world and more important, its culminating point, its exstatic POINT, where its animal and utilitarian function stops, to become a human function. The meeting of this ecstatic point in man must provoke an ejaculation, an exchange of fertilities. This is the meaning of the third sex.

The name of the magazine, “Ma,” was chosen because in most European languages the word death starts with M, and A is naturally the letter of resurrections, of life: Alef. Under this childish symbol we did completely different things. The first issue of the magazine was organized on the idea of “stone.” We wrote poems on stones, we talked about stonelove, of the “cornerstone” (i.e. Christ), and we even solicited four scientists to sketch their scientific vision of stone.

Parallel with the publication of the magazine we organized an exposition of paintings on stones and some sculptures that tried in other materials to imitate the effects of stone. we also made a film in which two perspectives confronted each other; and first, that of a man enclosed between two blocks of stone which slowly close upon him, thus condemning him to a slow death, and the second, of the same blocks of stone being transformed into a statue by a man. If, on the outside, the man were to finish the statue on time, the other man would not die. But... it seems to me that this first experience could have led to extraordinary things, if we had continued with more and

more insignificant objects or animals (shoe, lotion, fly, dish, etc.), but the success we had in the bourgeois press made us forget our initial objective, and the second issue was organized on the pretentious, ridiculous and baroque idea of "space." We wrote poems on paper, metal, rags from convicts' uniforms, on vegetables, etc. (Violent poem written on a page from the Bible; violating sacred space; poems written in margin of a page; un-exhaustibility of space; poem written on an apple; perishability of food-giving space.) The magazine had the shape of a box out of which anyone could haphazardly pull his destiny of space. Both the Catholic and the Communist press attacked the magazine with the same voice (the two can be mistaken for each other in Italy, so that one doesn't know if l'Unita (a Communist paper) has become the voice of the Vatican, or if...Marcel Rayez and I answered them so strongly that the result was Marcel's return to France, to escape from the police.

In France I rebuilt the group with Yvonne Arche and David Deustein, painters, and Antoinette Sourat and Alexandre Pieyre, actor and stage designer. The film that we made in two months is called "Le Point," and tells of two men and a woman living in Hitler's stomach. During the war they do nothing but measure: his intestines, volume of gastric secretions, etc. Only at the end of the war do they realize that they haven't lived, and make a desperate attempt to make love. But it is too late; Hitler kills himself, and they don't even succeed in touching each other.

Most conscious of the three is the woman, who tries several times to show her beautiful legs to the men, but they are so devoted to the holy intestines that they don't see anything else, and if they do, are afraid to abandon their execrable measuring instruments.

We had two private showings of the film, in Paris and in Rome, and all those who saw it were excited by its artistic quality. However, Antoinette Sourat succeeded in convincing me that our film as well as our poems and everything we had produced suffered from an extraordinary LACK OF YOUTH; from a LACK OF LOVE. Then we tried to find the points of ecstasy in our world by a literary prism, with instruments already built by Surrealism. She even dared to toss away Surrealism into the same pot as Catholicism. We had been talking about the ecstatic point of an object WITHOUT LIVING THE OBJECT.

She told me to renounce literature completely and to try to live one day with the obsession of an object until I had a real ejaculation. That was the beginning of 1966, and I have found that Antoinette's idea is right and that it has a completely justifiable philosophical foundation.

If I am free, as I think I am, thanks to existentialism, I must exploit my possibility of choice. I must create a personality of choice. Furthermore, I can exhaust this existence by the exhaustion of the object itself, and by the choice of another object I can live several existences. And it may be that the multitudes of choices made is the meaning of immortality in pre-Christian religions.

Antoinette and I have decided to find some hell place in the mountains and live in the realm of daily choice.

In another issue of the Fifth Estate, I will tell that experience and what it changed.

# fifth Estate

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