

# Against Realism & its Cause

George Washington Rat (Pat Halley)

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It is estimated by reputable quacks in the American Medical Association that at least one out of five people in the U.S. has some problem with mental illness. (Are the rest pretending?) It appears, surely, that there is no shortage of fools. Surely, should a swelling quantity of grads high-hurdle over the artificially maintained barriers of the psycho-therapeutic industry, thereby driving down rates through an overabundance of shrinks, the AMA will announce peculiarly that there is an alarming amount of oddballs, neurotic, and misanthropes.

The point I am trying feverishly to make is that the main cause of insanity is alarmingly apparent—it is reality! Like honesty or modesty, reality has long since receded from a domain to become, instead, an event, though its presence at all still presents an intolerable nuisance as well as an obstacle to the realization of what is desirable in human life.

This brings me to the point of a delicious confession that I have been dying to make for several years now; that I hate almost every novel, short story, film, (movies, whether “avant garde-experimental” or Hollywood), newspapers, magazines (including the *Fifth Estate!*), Television, record, radio station, as well as most conversation. Not wanting to be labeled as elitist or nit-picky, I will admit a few exceptions that go against the grain, which I will mention later. The reason I despise most media and conversation, and I suspect many people also do secretly or unconsciously, is because they are entangled in the webs of realism, post-realism, or other variations of the same thing and perpetuate—worse, they flaunt—that despicable mother of convention: reality.

Of course, the most superficial reaction to this statement is that it is fashionable to be a “non-conformist” or a calculated weirdo. But that only touches the surface of the problem. Realism is built into the times; it occupies lurid space in the mind; it has weapons all its own which operate with mechanical efficiency.

The effects of realism are so pervasive as to appear and assume environmental proportions. Every television show or movie of this nature, and that includes almost all of them, tends to reinforce the illusion of a continuity of the present society. (Some recent authors commenting on the dangers of television warned that-the tube tends to-create a pseudo-hypnosis, or that its danger lies in its highly centralized control; but this criticism misses the main problem.) This situation cannot be remedied by reading novels or magazines, because each contains that same element of realism which tends to create, automatically, an assumption in the mind that “reality” is somehow relegated to the particular appearances that are available in this moribund existence.

Of course media dealing with ancient times, science fiction or fantasy take us away from this world and show possibilities for other kinds of existence, but usually the monsters are destroyed due to some miracle of science, the Indians are pacified, the Roman army subdues the barbarians, or the good guys with “the force” maintain bourgeois law and order in the universe. The conditioned reflex is the mechanism which, like inertia, reduces phenomena to what is, and automatically spells doom for anything else. Daily we are subjected to constant defeat of forces that go against the grain, for that is the mission of the media.

In the event of progressive projects (take the *Fifth Estate*, for example) realism in the form of pragmatic or empirical discourse dominates. While the content of this project tries to project a better world, or demolish the old, the structure of the content tends to reduce perceptions to its immediate boundaries of logic or reason.

The secret weapon is the unfettered imagination. Unless individuals at each meaningful act confront directly the conditioned reflex, they are doomed to recreate the present world and every repressive measure which inhabits this ingrained perceptual mode that is designated reality.

## **Realism is Born and Conquers**

In the world of thought it was realism that ushered in the modern era and dialectically gained prominence with the industrial revolution. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, August Comte, in his positivist philosophy, argued that “the great task of the age is the application of precise observation, hypothesis, and analysis to social phenomena.”

Comte articulated the mechanization of human thought and the increasing compartmentalization and alienation that are the hallmark of the present epoch.

While these bourgeois theoreticians did much to rock the pedestals of religion and much common ignorance, their over-reaction has replaced common superstition with a chronic cynicism, erotic impotence (the war against nature) and a whole new set of demigods in the form of specialists, bureaucrats and loathsome educators who have a shameful and mindless aura of respectability and authority which they inherited from the priests and nobility.

The whole notion of progress (marvelously deflated by Camatte) which is so pervasive today in the minds of Joe and Betty Citizen is purely an example of cultural Darwinism. The idea of inevitable progress was an important ingredient in the widespread optimism about the abilities of science. Reinforced by technological “achievements,” Darwin’s simple biological speculations have been ipso facto applied to culture and swallowed whole with little chewing. The idea that nature progresses from simplicity to complexity on a (mechanically-) causal basis makes it seem as if our present society is practically predestined!

Spreading like a film of oil over a clear spring pond, the scientific view presumed to reduce phenomena to categories that were validated by demonstrable evidence. Pragmatism and empiricism abounds, and anything that can’t fit the tracks of the high-rolling locomotive of science must either be adjusted (whether if be human, vegetable or inorganic) or removed as bowlers to progress. The values and methodology of EMPIR(E)ical science, particularly the rabid school that is rationalism, were incorporated in art and literature as realism.

The first conscious movement toward realism appeared in France. It was in 1856 that periodicals marking its advent (*Realisme*, *Le Present*, *L'Artiste*, *La Revue de Paris*, and *Le Figaro*) rose out of the cinders of romantic thought. The advocates of realism agreed on the following points: 1) realism provides a truthful representation of the real world; 2) it is based upon direct observation of contemporary life and manners; and 3) the author must be impersonal in his attitude toward his subject matter.

Already realism was faced with opponents who criticized it for emphasizing external detail only and for being completely materialistic by its ignoring the passion and the pantheistic relation between humans and nature. Although similar to the early Luddites who opposed widespread technology, opponents of realism have obviously succumbed. (We can understand more clearly, then, the significance of Poe, Shelley and company whose arcane, highly passionate and sensual works such as *Frankenstein* and *The House of Usher* clearly stand out above the industrial scum who have dominated literature ever since.) Of course, the surrealists, dadaists and impressionists have since attempted to battle realism, but they too have succumbed to the “human being lawnmower” (as the MC5 used to call progress). They have been misunderstood, shunned, censored, or worse, categorized (containment, in other words) and given a place in the tomb of museum life.

Indeed, the museums and the publishers, the pompous little art councils that each State prattles about when they need a moral laxative, all the czars of literature, and of course Hollywood, are in fact big industries with their assholes and eyelids cemented to the industrial ethic, and hence empirical, pragmatism, necrophilia’ realism.

## Symptoms of a War against Nature

The surrealists, starting with Andre Breton, knew this though it is unclear by their methods and some of their blundering movements to what extent they succeeded in liberating their own minds. Surrealism, apart from being a movement in the arts, is a sensibility, a way of confronting perception, and hence, existence. In the same way that as workers or managers, people reproduce through their activity the very conditions of their captivity, they also reproduce constantly the perception—the reality—that is the primary aspect of their captivity and domestication!

Consciousness is under the domination of the ego, or rational Mind, in the same grip that the centralized state has over the people. They lend it energy. The logical mind being that aspect of consciousness that categorizes phenomena, makes choices, is only the tip of the iceberg of incorporated repression. Through habit, through behavioral modification that is the crux of socialization, the mind is split against itself. Even as pragmatism defeated the imagination historically with the industrial revolution and civilized progress before that, reality defeats desire, playfulness, and dreams in our daily activity.

The solution to the unconscious mechanisms which force us to reproduce reality (while you look in their face, they steal out your eyes) is the problem. We must not only sabotage the existing order, we must sabotage the existing perceptions, including our own prefabricated game. Of course, there are drugs, and erotic activity which coupled with music can cut you loose. Ultimately, though, all individuals must find the erotic source within themselves which they refuse to believe in rules of order, cosmologies, definitions, scientific principles, everything or anything that they do not want to invade their consciousness. That is a basis for war against reality. Maybe you have your own.

# fifth Estate

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