

**English excerpt from Julian Pörksen, *Verschwende deine Zeit*.  
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**III  
Wasting Time**

*So I now know, for example, that I didn't understand the meaning of time: 'You have to learn to be punctual. We gave you a watch, and you know how to read it.' All the same, time didn't exist for me. I was late for school, late for meals. I strolled unconcerned through the hospital park, I looked at things and fantasized, and time no longer existed . . ."*

Ingmar Bergman

**The Most Grievous of Sins**

According to the common, negative view, we waste time when when we fail to make profitable use of the time we have at our disposal, when we do not exploit it in a sensible way, when, in other words, we have not derived everything that could have been derived from it. As Max Weber describes it, this represents "the most grievous of sins" (*Protestant Ethic*).

In the first chapter we indicated that this idea of time as credit—a precious commodity in short supply that places us under obligation—can be seen as the result of an economic development whose rationale was gradually internalized. The second chapter dealt with the way the necessary waste that accompanies surplus can be seen as a delicious act of transgression in which individuals give themselves over to a total present, staking their lives and encountering themselves as powerless sovereigns in its uncontrolled currents. Now, in this final chapter, we will investigate and ultimately affirm the wasting of time—the useless waste of a

"precious commodity"—as an act of libidinous insubordination, a technique of generating experiences of discontinuity, and a state of freely chosen passivity. After establishing a general definition of wasting time, we will discuss a few instances of unutilized time and conclude by taking a look at the theater from the same perspective.

## **1. Wasting Time: A Delimitation**

A first, rough definition might be: "Wasting time is an intended act of intentionlessness, a deliberate, delicious suspension of the time-exploitation paradigm in favor of a carefree, wasteful abandonment to the present moment, a libidinous state of come what may."

### *Intended Intentionlessness*

Wasting time is typically understood as a condition of dissatisfied passivity. The negative experience is rooted in the individual subject's assumption that the condition is not really suitable. First, one feels there is something else to do, something better, and, second, one wants that something better. This twofold neglect—of the useful and of the will to choose it—makes wasting time appear as a state of a culpable non-identity with oneself. Lack of discipline, the central reproach goes, creates disharmony with one's own will.

We could however ask with Bataille whether this is not rather a question of a necessary disposal of a surplus, a *too much* of time, which it is not possible to use for productive purposes. In that case, the negatively experienced waste of time would

be what Bataille characterizes as involuntary "catastrophic waste." In the positive view, by contrast, it becomes the acknowledgement of a necessary, nonutilitarian dissipation of surplus, a voluntary act of "glorious waste," in keeping with the subject's will rather than opposed to it. In other words: the positive experience of wasting time comes into play when the subject consciously affirms it. We intend our lack of intention and, in this state of conscious nonproductivity, become capable of a "sovereignty" that can be characterized as the "sovereignty of self-abandon."

*Suspension of the Future: The Carefree State*

Entering this intentionless state requires that we suspend the specific factors of self-regulation associated with the economy of time. The compulsion to "make something" of the present situation, the duty we feel to exhaust its possibilities, is the result of a contradictory—though no less prevalent—idea of the future. The future, understood as total lack of determination, arouses the need to determine it and ourselves along with it (Heidegger, *Concept of Time*). This need entails, on one hand, the freedom to conceive of time as sphere of possibilities into which the subject can project an ideal yield or return—a life project, a self-image, a goal. Yet precisely this ideal compels the subject to work incessantly towards its realization. The indeterminability of the future is confronted with the constitutive illusion that one can master it through specific methods of planning, control, and protection. (The insurance industry and the whole area of political and economic prognosis are an expression of this idea. They pretend that the future can be domesticated by creating a feeling of control over the unknown.) The present thereby becomes the

site of constant concern about the future. Any neglect of present possibilities also represents the neglect of a potentially realizable ideal. Nothing seems more culpable than failure to seize an opportunity. It comes down to a mismanagement of time.

This idea—that our allotted span of life is a conferred credit which therefore entails an obligation—suppresses one elementary fact: that the amount we owe is completely unknown, since the absolute certainty of death is accompanied by an equally absolute uncertainty as to when it will occur. The comprehensive effort to remove death from public view and everyday consciousness leads us to conclude that the fragile concept of a self-determined individuality and a controllable future is in fact an illusion (see Ariès, *Studies on the History of Death in the West*). This is one of Heidegger's central themes, who understands "authentic" temporal existence essentially as living in a "beforehand" (*Vorlauf*) with death, the acceptance of dying in the present. "To have no time means to cast time into the bad present of the everyday" (Heidegger, *Concept of Time*, 14E). What Heidegger calls the "bad present" Montaigne calls the fool's way of life: "The life of a fool is thankless, timorous, and wholly bent upon the future" (*Essays*, XIII "Of Experience": quoting Seneca, Ep. 15: "*Stulti vita ingrata est, trepida est, tota in futurum fertur* [Gutenberg, trans. Charles Cotton]). In this state of permanent unrest—of anxiety about lack of time and the possibility of missing something; of constant efforts to strike a balance between present and future, the present situation and what could, should, or must occur—time, according to Heidegger, is indeed lost: "Precisely that Dasein which reckons with time and lives with a watch in its hand, this same reckoning Dasein is constantly saying, 'I have no time.' Does it not thereby betray itself in what it does

with time, in so far as it itself is in fact time? Losing time and acquiring a clock for this purpose!" (*Concept*, 15E )

When we waste time we temporarily suspend this utilitarian notion of time and cancel the self-understanding based on prognoses and projections, which in turn implies a kind of promissory "agreement" between the present self and its anticipated ideal. In this carefree state we discover the possibility of a different, less confined experience of time and a new perspective on our lives.

### *Passivity*

This voluntary neglect of the present as a sphere of activity that generates the future represents a transgression, a violation of societal norms that have largely been internalized. Thus the allure of wasting time is based in the first instance on the pleasure of breaking a taboo, the pleasure of "suffering" (i.e. experiencing) a loss.

Using Agamben's concept of *profanation*—developed on the basis of Benjamin's idea of capitalism as a totalizing cult in which everything is subsumed into the sphere of the sacred (consumption)—we can say that the act of wasting time frees it of its sacral determination, removes it from the sphere of credit, and restores it to secular usage, precisely because such a use of time has no purpose, is not an investment in transcendence, and ultimately takes place without expectations. It is profaned in a kind of heretical act.

*Expectation* here means anticipating what is to come in a concretely imagined way. Thus lack of expectation does not mean that we anticipate nothing at all, but rather anything and everything. So that abandoning ourselves to the moment

without expectations entails a further pleasure: delight in something new, unforeseen, unimagined. By subversively refusing to be guided by a time-economical stewardship of the moment and assuming a correspondingly passive disposition, the subject voluntarily renounces self-fixation. This imperilment of the subject's identity as decision maker—which Bataille regards as sovereignty—opens up a sort of side stage, an internal space beyond economic compulsions that neither affirms nor denies them, but rather neutralizes them in the act of waste. This position closely resembles Roland Barthes' characterization of the madman: "Perhaps there's no other definition of the madman (the paranoiac excepted) than this: someone who's devoid of all power. Whence his excessive position, excessive because it's neutral: being neither for nor against power (neither master nor slave)" (*How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, NY 2002 ["Marginalities": Session of Mar 23, 1977]).

In this way the subject enters into a passive mode of perception: acting, thinking, feeling, and seeing are no longer bound to specific purposes, but are more or less aimless. For want of order and discipline, all temporarily aimless attention is directed at the first object to come along: it may absorb us completely or hardly affect us, we may pursue it in great detail or drop it almost immediately.

Giving ourselves over to the wasting of time in this passive state does not imply lack of activity. It means rather that we renounce any desire to shape, guide, regulate, or control events. An attentive randomness takes over, a readiness to expose ourselves without reservation to whatever happens, to let whatever happens become our activity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions* describes this state of

undirected preoccupation as *désœuvrement* (here translated as "idleness"): "The idleness I love is not that of an indolent fellow who stands with folded arms in perfect inactivity, and thinks as little as he acts. It is the idleness of a child who is incessantly on the move without ever doing anything, and at the same time it is the idleness of a garrulous old man whose mind wanders while his arms are still. I love to busy myself about trifles, to begin a hundred things and not finish one of them, to come and go as my fancy bids me, to change my plan every moment, to follow a fly in all its circlings, to try and uproot a rock to see what is underneath, eagerly to begin on a ten-years task and to give it up after ten minutes: in short, to fritter away the whole day inconsequentially and inconsistently, and to follow nothing but the whim of the moment" (*Confessions* Penguin, trans. J M Cohen (altered to conform with garrulity). no page numbers in online trans!: middle of two vol ed.).

In this interplay of aimless abandon and extravagance that Rousseau connects with childhood and garrulousness we may see the exhilarating aspect of wasting time: the libidinous affirmation of the uncertainty of one's own life and identity, which latter is no longer claimed but simply occurs. It is put at risk by being abandoned to the "whim of the moment," which applies as much to the extravagancies of the imagination as to abandonment to contemplation. Montaigne warns expressly against this state under the rubric of "idleness": "So it is with human minds, which if not applied to some certain study that may fix and restrain them, run into a thousand extravagances, eternally roving here and there in the vague expanse of the imagination" (trans. Cotton, *Essays*, "Of Idleness").

When we waste time we become passive agents who remove ourselves from society. Our behavior is asocial because we make no effort to synchronize our world with the world of others. We seek, not connection, but exclusion, the experience of discontinuity. This form of discontinuity with the rhythms of the social world often proves itself a mode of especially intense experience both as it is happening and in later recollection—which is clearly due to the appeal of insubordination and the increased pleasure it causes on the one hand, but on the other to an experience of connection to self and the world that could hardly have occurred within the framework of an exploitation of time intent upon action, productivity, and value added.

## **2. Instances**

As a second approach let us now examine several instances of voluntarily wasting time in an ineffective way. This will enable us make finer distinctions among the various experiences that might qualify as voluntary waste of time.

In none of the instances we will be discussing here is there (1) any intended utilization of time or (2) reliance on (self-)discipline. The first characteristic sets them apart from all self-improvement techniques such as yoga, wellness, vacation tours, laughter therapy, ceramics classes, the slow food movement, etc. The second distinguishes them from certain practices of "positive disengagement" that mostly derive from the religious sphere: asceticism, eremitism, meditation, etc. These latter clearly practice voluntary discontinuity, but replace the model of collective discipline with an individual one—in other words they set up a project of self-



discipline that is often as strict as the social demands they have abrogated (see Agamben, *Regel und Leben*).

### ***Idiorrhythmy: Sauntering and Dawdling***

There is a whole range of phenomena that can be seen as belonging to a preliminary or transitional phase of wasting time. They all show conscious or unconscious disdain for a dictated rhythm, for a prescribed duration of ways and movements, mostly in favor of protracting or slowing things down. Often it is impossible to tell whether a decision to alter the tempo was made at the outset or whether an accidental change in the duration of an action brought with it a change of perception, resulting in a subsequent decision.

If this rhythmic displacement takes place consciously, however, it can be experienced as an enjoyable provocation of internal and external laws, as a playing with expectations which are not completely disregarded, but circumvented through asynchronization. We can understand sauntering (the slowing down of walking) and dawdling (the slowing down of action) in this sense as modes of libidinous discrepancy. A physical process is slowed, a gentle belatedness creeps in, the usual durations are protracted or come to a standstill, "you are no longer in step." You only have to stand at a supermarket cash register and bag the groceries, as they slide to the end of the counter, with a certain show of libidinous stolidity to appreciate dawdling's provocation potential. The looks and remarks of the cashier and the people behind you take on an unsuspected sharpness; your tempo is perceived as an affront to the frictionlessness assumed to belong to such a process.

But besides a much celebrated spirit of resistance, sauntering and dawdling can bring something else into play. The change of rhythm can be accompanied by a change of perception, as when the new rhythm is experienced as inherently consistent, when, that is, the asynchronization with the social rhythm leads to a synchronization with oneself, to a personal rhythm, a sudden effortlessness of personal movement, and a thought process that roams here and there without a specific goal.

Roland Barthes, in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (1976–77), discusses this form of personal rhythm as the basis of social coexistence under the rubric of *idiorrhymia*. This is a concept that, interestingly enough, originated in the religious sphere, though Barthes attempts to apply to everyday profane activity. In the monastic community on Mount Athos where it developed, the idiorrhymic way of life depended on an almost complete absence of rules: no obligatory daily schedule; no fixed times for prayer, sleep, or meals; virtually no required assemblies. "The principle: each monk is allowed to follow his own personal rhythm of life" (Barthes, *How to Live Together*). Van Eikels characterizes such organization of social coexistence as follows: "Idiorhythmia is not isolation, but rather the adventitious synchronization of behavioral rhythms that nonetheless remain different. If they synchronize, good: but if not, there's no rule against each individual spending his time alone until they synchronize sometime in the future" (van Eikels, "Meine Trägheit"). Thus instead taking synchronicity as his starting point, Barthes focuses on given instances of asynchronicity. Only for short, random moments does

there occur a consonance of rhythms, which immediately establish their independence again.

Therefore, the positive effect of sauntering and dawdling consists in the experience of a discrepancy with the "rest of the world" that requires no bridging over. We experience time differently, without regard to utility, in a way that allows us to relish the freedom of throwing off dictated rhythms in order to follow our own. We are free to move in the present moment without self-discipline, in a nonchalant and absent-minded way.

### ***Rhythm of Drowsing: The Flaneur***

There are certain overlaps between the just described phenomena and the figure of the *flaneur* whose typology is developed by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* (*Passage Work*). The flaneur also exemplifies a physical asynchronicity with respect to the rhythms of his surroundings, a kind of slowed-down movement that prompts Benjamin to speak of a "tortoise-like style" that spread over Paris in 1839. In his sauntering through the streets of the city, the flaneur is guided solely by his own personal rhythm: "The flaneur's sauntering has the rhythmic quality of drowsing." This already suggests that, unlike the sauntering and dawdling already described, the flaneur's rhythm is not to be taken primarily as a form of opposition to surrounding rhythms, and so represents no aggressive or provocative protraction; rather, it has an unconscious, sleepwalking quality. "He [the flaneur] strolls along the streets as if each of them was a precipitous slope." It is walking without a goal or purpose, an undirected, utterly casual sauntering around in a state of the highest

distraction. In this state, the environment (the city) is not a concrete place, but rather a backdrop, a network of signs and images that deliver cues to an extravagant imagination. "The flaneur's sauntering is a kind of physically performed reading or remembering in a state of distraction. An echo seems to come from an another surface beneath the asphalt touched by his strolling feet. This doubleness arises from the congruence of immediate perception with a hidden otherness, in such a way that perception can only occur as a pervasion of the present by the past in an experience that assumes the form of memory."

The flaneur's presence in the activities of daily life is purely physical; he is not a part of the social process, but rather uses the environment as a means of self-disengagement. In this mode of discontinuity characterized by a spontaneous melange of perception, introspection, and memory, the flaneur has largely "fallen out of time." Its exploitation potential no longer exists for him, but goes to waste in an intoxicating state of desultory consciousness and aimless movement.

### ***Omissions: Procrastination and Truancy***

Besides these mild, gradual deviations from normative rhythms there are practices whose special charm consists in an aggressive refusal of the time-economical standard of value, a deliberate disregard of what it demands.

To skip an event that is in some respect obligatory primarily means to stay away from it and spend the gained time elsewhere in some other way. This does not necessarily have to do with skipping classes—our first association with the idea of truancy—although that is perhaps best suited to the purpose, thanks to the many

legal and familial compulsions connected with attending school. We can play the truant not only with institutionalized obligations, but also those that are socially or even self-generated: plans, appointments, invitations. The delight of truancy consists primarily in doing what is forbidden or at least in neglecting what is desired of us. And here a second pleasure comes to the fore: suddenly, and without great effort on our part, we have at our disposal a interval of time that up to this point has been calendared as unavailable. In my experience, this newly acquired time is experienced as especially enjoyable and remains extraordinarily vivid in the memory precisely when it is not used compensatorily to accomplish something more pressing, some long overdue piece of business, but rather remains unutilized with good conscience, goes wasted in some small, passive dissipation.

This aspect of truancy resembles the theory and practice of procrastination that has been anchored in contemporary discourse by Kathrin Passig and Sascha Lobo (*Dinge geregelt kriegen—ohne einen Funken Selbstdisziplin* [*Get Things under Control—without a Spark of Self-Discipline*]). According to this theory, procrastination means putting off a task that is felt to be unpleasant until an even more unpleasant task enters the picture and, against backdrop of the new dread it occasions, enables us to accomplish the first all but effortlessly. This is the efficient aspect of procrastination, the utilitarian value of lacking self-discipline. But in addition to this "productivity effect" there is something quite different that can come into play. The time we have wrested for ourselves through procrastination can be squandered in a state of inactivity that is entirely uncritical. "I am doing nothing, and there is nothing else happening of any note. I am not doing what I know I need

to do, and it is of no particular consequence either to the world or to myself" (van Eikels). This experience of inconsequence can also be accompanied by a change in perspective: in the state of inactivity and interrupted interaction, there emerges a sudden distance from oneself and the world, a kind of puzzled aerial view of hectic activity, incessant busyness. The productivity paradigm—previously understood as inescapably constituting the subject's identity—is up for renegotiation in such a state of removal. The practiced routine of efficiency-oriented activities and thought processes starts to seem less an inevitability than a sometimes almost bizarre result of personal choice.

The possibility of choosing—and, further, of comprehending inactivity as an option—is carried to its extreme, unsettling conclusion in Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*. Bartleby is employed as a scrivener to copy documents in a lawyer's office. Aloof and taciturn, he initially performs all his assignments, but then one day begins to refuse certain activities with the words, "I would prefer not to." With this ostensibly harmless and polite formula he undermines the worldview of his colleagues, for he sets up a choice where there ostensibly is none and thereby deconstructs unquestioned social and economic norms. Every attempt of his environment to restore him to reason fails, for in the light of his polite refusal reason reveals itself as force and his irrationality as free choice. In the course of the novella Bartleby increasingly rejects the most elementary and obvious principles of common sense: he would prefer not to work, prefer not to look for a new job, prefer not to leave the office, prefer not to explain his behavior. After this social and

economic suicide—which takes him to prison—he finally refuses food and thus also commits physical suicide.

Truancy and procrastination—as temporary refusals to participate in a productivity-oriented society—are miniature versions of Bartleby's behavior: "I have time, but I prefer not to use it to advantage." The possible satisfaction that ensues from wasting time in this way is due not only to the fact that the decision to remain passive is experienced as a sovereign act that defies internalized compulsions to be productive. The surrounding world appears outlandish in its unremitting actionism; self-disengagement creates a distance from which the action of others are perceived as optional rather than a matter of course: it is open to debate. A slight remark or lack thereof and they too might decide to step out of the prevailing rhythm—all they would have to say is, "I would prefer not to."

### ***Waiting: Diversion***

Waiting can be seen as a counterpart to the forms of omission we have just investigated. A person who waits is counting on something, another person, an occurrence. There is some plan, rule, or prediction according to which the other person will arrive or the occurrence take place. Until then one needs to fill a period of time that has no definite character. If the thing we are waiting for dominates our thoughts, the waiting period becomes more and more of a torture. Until the expected happens, we have time to kill, with cellphones, laptops, smartphones, and newspapers as the appropriate weapons. If, to make matters worse, there is a further delay—of train, girlfriend, apocalypse, message, meal—our irritation gets

bottled up, our expectation grows, we become more fixated on whatever we are waiting for, until finally we can think of nothing else. Waiting-rooms foster this feeling as best they can. They are conceived of as way-stations, as transitional spaces. Seats, magazines, a clock—there's little danger of feeling at ease.

Yet waiting becomes interesting once it is freed of expectation. India is very instructive in this regard. A train I wanted to take down to Delhi from the north was delayed. No one really knew when it would come, maybe right away, maybe in a few hours. And it didn't seem all that important. Families, sadhus, and businessmen made themselves comfortable on the platform. Many of them slept, others drank tea, I alone paced around restlessly, as if it would change something. There was nothing serviceable at the small bookstand: religious booklets, a few Bollywood magazines, and a German edition of *Mein Kampf*. After a half-hour I capitulated to the equanimity of my surroundings, sat down on the platform, and drank some tea. Nothing could be changed, and there was nothing to do. From that moment the waiting became pleasant. Around me nothing but miniature scenes, micro-stories, half perceived in a state of the most pleasant diversion. Memories, daydreams, and short conversations became a delightful jumble. The train finally came after an eight-hour delay. A matter of indifference. (I was hardly back in Germany when a delay of five minutes had me rattled again: the latent stress of a stingy economy of time made itself felt immediately.)

This form of waiting without expectation, of diversion, of acquiescence in what is immediately present—without thinking of the future, of plans, duties, and promises—plays a central role in the works of Samuel Beckett. His figures are



stranded in nondescript spaces and periods of time and waiting for something: for Godot, for the end, for some change that doesn't come. But precisely when they give up all hope, when they forget what they are waiting for, and no longer know what they are really there for, they rise to peak form. They fill the void with thought- and language-games, jokes and accusations, profundities and nonsense. This state of no expectations allows precisely that which was previously felt to be trying or irritating—the uselessness of the in-between time, its lack of determined character—to be transformed into an enjoyable self-referential game without consequences.

***Leisure: Delightful Indifference***

The clearest and most decisive form of wasting time is idleness or leisure, a much-invoked praxis of omission in the Romantic period, which oscillates somewhere between a hedonistic *dolce far niente* and an aesthetic state of extravagant reflection and perception, and usually characterizes certain antitypes, figures who reject social norms: the fool, the good-for-nothing, the passive prince. They represent a position of resolute passivity which is explained to a certain extent by etymology: the Latin for 'leisure' is *otium*; *negotium*, by contrast, is the word for 'work'. In other words, work is the negation of leisure, not the other way around.

Leisure is an act of wasting time that is intentional from the outset, in that all productive activity is dismissed with an "I would prefer not to" attitude. The rejection of productivity includes all kinds of planning and goal-directed action in favor of an active aimlessness that can be compared to Rousseau's *désœuvrement*, a

passivity that derives delight from childlike (aimless) and garrulous (extravagant) abandon, an abandon by no means limited to the sphere of fantasies and ideas, as it may just as well include emotions, actions, and observations.

This self-created outsider's position qua intentionally practised, but intentionless discontinuity with the surrounding world and oneself is a central motif in Eichendorff's *Life of a Good-for-Nothing*. "The whole day (I had nothing further to do) I sat on the bench in front of my hut in bathrobe and sleeping cap, smoked my pipe . . . and watched people going to and fro, walking or riding on horsback or in carriages."

The casual shifting of perception rests on the self-confidence with which the good-for-nothing determines that he has "nothing further to do" and his resulting distance from all those who go about their business and—from the good-for-nothing's point of view—would have just as little to do if they wanted. The fascination, among other things, that this figure arouses lies precisely in this attitude to productivity, which regards participation and activity as a factual matter of decision—which it makes in the negative. The Good-for-Nothing has no goals; he pursues, as Rousseau puts it, only the "whim of the moment"; he roams at will. We cannot help seeing his wanderings, which make up the bulk of the novel, as a dilettantish undertaking in the highest degree. His journey has no destination and pursues no purpose; the Good-for-Nothing has no command over the necessary foreign languages, nor has he any money or the ability to manage his livelihood. But it is precisely this nonchalance that opens doors to experience and allows him to stumble from one adventure to another: his abandonment to the moment reveals

itself as a sovereign passivity with respect to a wealth of events that he is capable of experiencing and enjoying precisely because he exposes himself to chance. The paradoxical formula for such behavior might go: "I only want what happens to me."

Another effect of leisure is described in the works of Georg Büchner, especially *Leonce and Lena*. Here too, two good-for-nothings stand at the center of events, two passionate idlers, Prince Leonce and the fool Valerio. The latter declares at the very beginning, "My lord, my primary activity is leisure; I have an uncommon talent for for doing nothing and tremendous stamina when it comes to being lazy." Both figures give ample testimony to this profession of principles in the course of the comedy. Their journey consists essentially of loquacious pauses. But leisure here has another quality; it gives rise to a form of awareness of self and the world that represents what we might term an excessive heightening of what was already suggested by *Life of a Good-for-Nothing*. As they waste time in a state of self-disengagement from their social surroundings the two characters come to see all activities belonging to those surroundings from a distance. This distance depends upon voluntary abandonment of the productivity-based reference system according to which people typically derive their assessment of themselves and others. As a result, the continuity between the inner and outer world is broken; external events no longer have self-evident meaning and, in the perspective set by personal rhythm, personal aimlessness, have the effect of an outlandish automatism.

Practically all Büchner's works contain variations on this motif of exclusion, the isolation of a character and his perception, for whom "everything" (*Alles*)—a typical Büchner word, used excessively and always capitalized—becomes alien and

inaccessible, precisely because this "everything" seems either completely impenetrable and therefore violent (*Woyzeck, Lenz*) or entirely transparent and therefore trivial (*Danton's Death, Leonce and Lena*). In the latter case, there is often talk of marionettes, automata, mechanical movements, determined behavior, and finally of a "world on a wire." In *Leonce and Lena*, however, this relativistic position—which is markedly fatalistic in *Danton's Death*—is actively brought about and affirmed: the very discontinuity between the active environment, with its compulsions and its fixation on exploitation, and the characters' own passive experience creates a certain leeway for disinterested, yet still active observation. In this exclusive space both inner and outer worlds are completely at one's disposal, precisely because one gives up any idea of wresting something useful from it. Here we have a way of experiencing the world that is playful, aimless, yet active and sovereign in its passive self-surrender, an experience aptly characterized by Schiller's notion of "the aesthetic state". "In the aesthetic state, then, man is a nullity, to the extent that one is interested in individual results rather than the whole potential, and takes the lack of any special determination in it into consideration. For this reason one must agree entirely with those who declare beauty and the mood it creates in the mind to be completely indifferent and barren in terms of *knowledge and beliefs*." In this indifference with respect to results, goals, and expectations which is essential to the aesthetic state lies the basis of its value, as Schiller sees it. Man finds there that "the freedom to be what he is supposed to be is fully returned to him." Only by throwing off the "chains of circumstance" and disregarding moral and physical constraints does it become possible for him to

make of himself whatever he wants. The sovereignty of this utopian condition is thus due to voluntary relinquishment of security, subjective identity, and time.

Among the many, sometimes paradoxical peculiarities the aesthetic state brings with it belongs the fact that it is capable of triggering a feeling of timelessness. A complete abandonment to the present moment means nothing less than forgetting the succession of time, losing time-consciousness, and so experiencing the present as eternity (Augustine, *Confessions*). This idea of a permanent state of exception, an abiding obliviousness of time, is a utopian element in the Romantic conception of love. Lovers enter into a condition of complete asynchronicity with the rest of the world: they move only to their own respective rhythms within the shared idiorhythmic exclusivity of their relationship. Leonce formulates an exaggerated version of such utopian obliviousness of time at the end of Büchner's comedy when only he, Valerio, the Governess, and his bride Lena are left on stage: "But I have a better idea; we'll smash all the clocks, ban all calendars, and tell the hours and moons solely by the times things flower, by their blossoms and fruits. And then we'll surround the little land with burning mirrors to put an end to winter and, distilled in constant summer, float down to Ischia and Capri and disappear among the roses and violets, the orange and laurel groves the whole year long."

This tongue-in-cheek hyperbole, which Valerio seconds with the suggestion that they abolish every form of work and immerse themselves entirely in leisure, represents not only a parodistic exaltation of the Romantic conception of love but of the way time is experienced in the state of leisure as well. Concern for the future is

suspended; the present is thus freed of utilitarian obligations and becomes a site of joyous abandon, play, and talk for its own sake. Leonce's fantasy of a universal obliviousness of time—with the whole "little land" surrounded by mirrors—is an example of aimlessly playful loquacity which, though filled with stock ideas of political-utopian discourse, contains no real desire to implement its spoken content, but rather celebrates speaking itself as uninhibited play. Leonce is the recipient of his own passive observations, his own aimless activities, without pursuing profit or advantage beyond the confines of the moment. He himself is a spectator in his own theater—early in the play he prods himself: "Come on, Leonce, deliver me a monologue. I want to hear it!"

### **3. Outlook. Theater, for Example.**

Up to this point we have described wasting time as an individual act of self-removal (in love shared by two individuals). The time-wasting subject breaks with the rhythm of his environment, he no longer takes part in what is happening there, the environment serves merely as material for his thought, a prompter to his imagination. The world in this aesthetic (zero-)state is a realm of signs to be used as he sees fit. An asocial, self-sufficient mode of experience. In our conclusion we shall see whether the theater can be understood as an institution for a communally shared, "glorious" waste of time.

Under the rubric *heterotopia* Foucault has listed a number of places which, though they exist within society, are distinguished by their being subject to other spatial, temporal, and social laws. These are "real places—places that do exist and

that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" ("Of Other Spaces"—online pdf, trans. Jay Miskowiec). Foucault breaks these heterotopias down into two categories that supplement each other like mirror images: the heterotopias of "crisis" and of "deviance." In both cases it is a matter of these "counter-sites" providing a kind of answer to deviations from the norm or the breaking of a taboo. But while heterotopias of deviation are places where deviants are gathered to be disciplined and eventually reintegrated into the prevailing order (psychiatric hospitals, prisons, juvenile centers), crisis heterotopias are places where the forbidden is allowed an autonomous development (theaters, brothels, museums, libraries). In these people can yield to deviant behavior that has no place in the functional spatial framework. What especially distinguishes these spaces, according to Foucault's theory, is that in them a different time and rhythm prevail, that entry into the heterotopia marks a temporal caesura: "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."

What sort of deviation do people give themselves over to in the crisis heterotopia of the theater? In Bataille's sense it would be called the discharge of surplus energy. Theater is incapable of conferring any kind of utilitarian benefit whatsoever; therefore, the idea goes, its social and economic necessity lies rather in its complete uselessness. An institutionalized form of expenditure in which waste is

organized as a social ritual and celebrated in a glorious (voluntary) fashion. In the process, it is not only resources, public funds, and manpower that are wasted, but also, and above all, time. The audience enters into a play space where notions of time-economical value are suspended (ideally they would be handed over along with coats at the checkroom counter), which generates a twofold pleasure. The first arises from the fact that this space has been institutionally set aside for deviation, for ritualized insubordination, the collective breaking of a taboo. The second aspect of this pleasure, however, consists in transforming this suspension of the compulsion to exploit time into an aesthetic state of free and playful contemplation, a mode of being in which nothing is willed, nothing expected. The individual members of the audience who are lost in such contemplation encounter themselves in a mixture of childlike play and garrulousness (Rousseau) and fill the free spaces that have opened up inside them with all kinds of bric-a-brac, with a jumble of useless, self-referential games, observations, thoughts, fantasies, memories, stories, and their fragments without any proposed result or purpose in mind. The game provides them with hints, fleeting suggestions, conditions for achieving this state. We cannot know in advance whether this instance of waste will succeed. And if it succeeds, it will not succeed for everyone, only for the individual. Thus even in this form of organized community the aesthetic experience is asocial. In the best case it is a question of a collectively induced experience of isolation.

In *Passage Work*, Walter Benjamin notes, "One mustn't simply pass time—one must invite time to one's home." Perhaps he is alluding to a similar state, and the dedicated time waster can be seen as time's passive host who is no longer interested



in using time for diversion or profit, but who takes delight in simply experiencing it and in discovering, with respect to the events that occur therein, that their duration and quality are relative and so purely a matter of perception.

A perception of time determined exclusively on an economic basis, by contrast, constricts our awareness both of time and of ourselves, reducing every form of experience to a question of function. Perhaps this is what theater can do as an institution dedicated to the wasting of time: to provide experiences that resist exploitation and so create a gap for other kinds of productive ways of being. Therein—and this is the last of the many paradoxes that have emerged in connection with these lines of thought—lies the advantage of voluntarily wasting time: as an affirmative decision it becomes capable of generating experiences that are precious precisely because they cannot be evaluated.

In this perspective, the present efforts and strategies to market and justify government supported theater—which in many places represent a reaction to shrinking budgets and attendance figures—seem questionable to say the least. Instead of attributing a (rather diffuse) social value to the theater and promoting theatergoing as an efficient consumer experience, in my opinion the better and more interesting way for theater to claim its proper place as an institution for it would be to emphasize its liberating uselessness, the complete openness with respect to outcome, and the opportunity it presents as a place in which to waste one's time.

**Come to the Theater!**

**Waste Your Time!**