

PREHENSILE TAIL No 4 - March 2007

now detached from the MANTICORE and distributed freely on an irregular basis.

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*His charred snout was last seen disappearing
down the gullet of Martin Trippett.
Some pigs have been deeply offended by
André Breton's remark.*

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R.I.P.



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PREHENSILE TAIL

March 2007

Free Distribution



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*an occasional newsletter issued by
Leeds Surrealist Group*

TO HAVE DONE WITH THE SPECTRE OF GOD



After the Second World War, throughout the economically developed world, religion, especially Roman Catholicism, had to abate its centuries-old claim to direct people's inner lives, their sexuality, their social and moral existence. A large portion of humanity thus reaped the fruits of the long anti-Christian struggles of the eighteenth century, initiated by the bourgeoisie and pursued even more vigorously by the labour movement, one of whose most valuable legacies was secularisation and the relegation of religion to the private sphere. The air we breathed was all the healthier, in that the age-old messianic strain that had permeated Christianity, having completely deserted the churches and abandoned transcendence, nourished all the utopian currents of the 1960s, hated so fiercely today by those who wield hegemonic power. In addition, the device of recruiting the imaginary, which for over a thousand years had been the monopoly of Christianity, was largely overtaken in its means and methods by the society of the spectacle that was coming

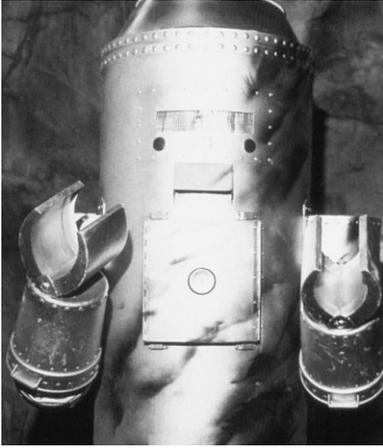
into being. To some extent, the spectacle, which is essentially the profane realization of religion, took great care not to finish off its work of overtaking the religious; rather than doing away with religion, it kept it in its repertoire in the form of historical drama. It is this drama that it is presenting again today.

With the fall of Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe and the collapse of revolutionary ideologies that had been so useful in keeping the social system in equilibrium, capitalism ended up in a blind-alley of its own success, facing only itself. The more it unifies the planet through the relentless penetration of the commodity, the more it relies on false divisions to divert from their attempts directly to confront it those whom it exploits and whose lives it destroys. Of course, it does not create these divisions from scratch, and no conspiracy theory is needed to explain this process; it is its own historical movement – including its false trails (such as strengthening radical Islamism in order to weaken Soviet state capitalism) – that employs and amplifies pre-existing racial, ethical, sexual, religious and social divisions. That is why today we are witnessing the artificial resurgence of historic antagonisms between Christianity and Islam; of their old power only the ideological core of the religion survives, together with some set rituals that ensure the greater or lesser subservience of minds and bodies, especially where the religious can lean on the secular arm for support. Some people think they have discovered a clash of civilisations, whereas in today's world there is only the single barbarism of the hamburger and the mobile phone. Others (representatives of a frustrated Muslim bourgeoisie that would like to enjoy its share of the capitalist pie) think they're experiencing a re-run of the Crusades. And superimposed on this deadly mug's game is the reactivated confrontation between Western democracy and totalitarianism that had made the system work so well for more than half a century. Let us add, however, that in emphasising all these false oppositions, we are not over-stepping the mark by creating an equivalence between perceived everyday situations that cannot be compared. Just as during the Cold War it was preferable for everyone, proletarians included, to live in the so-called free world rather than in the so-called Communist world, one would have to be in particularly bad faith if one did not admit that in an Islamic society people's lives are even worse than just about anywhere else, even if they are not women, homosexuals or atheists, simply because they have to conform to the outrageous prohibitions and prescriptions of public morality.

In this equally tragic replay, the same situations are producing the same resort to nauseating tactical alliances; just as in the era of triumphant Stalinism appalling agreements such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany were made against what was even then called liberalism, today similar alliances are formed between the licensed critics of a liberalism once again wrongly described as extreme, and the worst Islamist regimes or organisations. What is in play when these deals are struck is still the abandonment of any kind of moral scruple, leading to the worst of confusions. Let us then spit on the inept Chávez, who shows no hesitation in supporting the criminal Ahmadinejad while at the same time taking himself for the executor of the will of God; let's spit on those European leftists who, confusing, as is their wont, an oppressed population and its alienated representation, offer their ridiculous support to the ultra-reactionaries of Hamas; let's spit on those British Trotskyists who make common cause with Islamo-fascists at local elections; let's spit on all those who, under the pretext of fighting imperialism, appear not to feel in their bones everything that is repugnant and unworthy in offering their hand to some proponent or other of religious dogmatism.

Our atheism is not a philosophical or logical position. It is, like the atheism of de Sade, the tone of a way of life, the palpable fluid in which we can breathe and in which our imaginary can enjoy its powers. The atheism of the positivists and other anti-clericals who pile up proofs of the non-existence of God appear to us like a fruit incompletely detached from the tree of a monotheism

RUNNING ON EMPTY



It seems to be generally agreed that there will be no more Great Ideas. Whether it is the postmodern abandonment of so-called grand narratives or Fukuyama's claim that the history of ideas is now over and 'Liberal Democracy' has emerged globally triumphant, this seems to be the prevailing consensus. Now, I don't recall any democratic 'debate' having reached such conclusions, nor can this collapse of intellectual self-confidence be explained as the result of some development internal to intellectual history as such (as Hegel would have had it). Rather it is that intellectuals in the western world have accommodated themselves with the prevailing social order. Capitulation would not be too strong a word for it.

What is meant is clearly that no new ideas *critical* of the social order will be allowed to be discussed. That this is meant can be demonstrated empirically whenever any intellectual discussion gets even near to 'questioning' the capitalist system. It is pretty soon made clear that this is *off* everyone's agenda. Suddenly the level of discussion descends to the most elementary of received popular clichés, (which on any other issue would be treated as embarrassingly naïve). It is not that nobody has any ideas anymore – the 'exhaustion' version of postmodernism – but that intellectuals have abandoned the search for new ideas on the subject of capitalism for fear they might give rise to criticism. This abandonment is tangible – a palpable constraint on the imagination. This abandonment of new ideas is even treated as being a New Idea.

Of course there are any number of new ideas on every subject under the sun – on condition that they are *not* about capitalism and *not* socially critical. So, the idea of 'Great Ideas' is endlessly scorned as part of the hubris of 'Western Reason' or logocentrism (or some other such ersatz idea-substitute) and the assumptions on which this sweeping claim is based are kept unexamined and undiscussed.

GLOBAL VILLAGE IDIOCY

The illusion of distance on which intellectuals used to pride themselves was at least better than the illusion of familiarity created by television. People watch a five-minute clip about the Yanomamo and think they now *know* something about them. They honestly seem to believe the media provide them with 'knowledge' of the outside world. This is so frightening, it would be better if they really knew that they know nothing. The fact that television shows us these pictures means such 'exotic' societies are as good as gone - or at least their externality has disappeared. There is no longer any outside world - and nothing to be deceived about any more. Now the world is One, we know nothing about any of it. And we still have the gall to imagine that people 'in olden times' were more ignorant and insular than ourselves. They at least, even if they didn't know it, had different realities waiting to teach them something.



MIKE PETERS
from the unpublished collection, *Anathemas*