

While writing this, I am being informed over the radio and through the press of the efforts which have now gone on for weeks to keep the Generalissimo alive. The information I am getting is typical for mass media: sensationalistic, superficial and meant to provoke specific behavior patterns in the receiver. Still: it is possible, as it is with information of this type to decodify the message to some extent and thus get a glim vision of the situation. This is the way I decodify the message: Franco was dying. For various motives, (which were probably to some extent contradictory), some persons were interested in postponing the death of Franco. Which does not imply necessarily that they were also interested in prolonging his life. It only implies that they were interested in prolonging his dying. These people had access to the most advanced techniques of medicine and to the most sophisticated apparatus. They were thus in a position to substitute the dying organs and functions of Franco's "natural" body by "artificial" organs and functions. His lungs, his stomach and his kidneys were substituted by corresponding gadgets, his blood was repeatedly substituted by the blood of anonymous "donors", his heart was kept beating by artificial devices, and the circulatory system in his extremities was being subject to external control and interference. And while I am writing this, the process of changing Franco's "natural" body into a work of art is still in progress. This is the way love conquers death in an advanced technological civilisation.

The information I am getting seems to suggest that Franco has what is called "lucid moments" in the course of this process. He seems to have wept when kissing some miraculous coat which belonged to some catholic saint and which was offered him as an additional method to prolong his dying. A proof, by the way, that the methods of technology do not necessarily prevent the technicians and technocrats to take recourse to some more traditional methods. The fact that Franco wept at that opportunity seems to show, if it is true, that he was indeed "lucid". His entire life, as far as we know it, was dedicated to the defence of the faith, and "lucidity" is consistency with one's life project. Indeed: so lucid has been his defence of the catholic faith, that he had about 250.000 people massacred after the end of the civil war, because they were a danger to faith, and that the last act of his public life was to have executed three young men who participated in a leftist masonic and jewish conspiracy against the Divine order which he represented. The kissing of the coat and the weeping, if true, are thus a proof that Franco, although his body be changing into a work of art, is still Franco. This is the way love conquers death for a true believer.

The radio and the press inform me, simultaneously, of a legal process somewhere in the United States, which concerns a girl which has been in a coma for various months, and had been kept alive through methods not dissimilar, though less elaborate, from those that keep alive Franco. There

killed any-

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some differences, however. The girl does not seem to have <sup>11</sup> killed any- and is thus far less important than Franco. The expenses involved in transformation into an artifact are not, therefore, as easily justified for the loving republic which pays them. The girl does not have any bad moments comparable to Franco's weeping, but is in the condition of a stable. And her family is not interested in prolonging her dying like Franco's, but wants to end it by having the apparatus disconnected. The age, representing the loving republic, has decided against the murderous wish of the girl's family and in favor of the girl's continued dying. This is the way love conquers death in a liberal, democratic civilisation.

I shall not go, in this essay, into the problem which these two messages obviously raise: the problem of euthanasia. Had that problem not been so barbarously misused and transformed into its contrary by the Nazis, it would now stand undoubtedly in the center of public discussion. The accent of the present essay will be on a different problem raised by those two events, whose coincidence is not accidental. I mean the problem of art, of technique, in dying. It is, of course, a very ancient problem, at least as ancient as is the problem of the opposition between art and truth, or between art and nature. In fact: the problem of art in dying may be at the bottom of these two, and many similar, oppositions. Still: the glorious point which we have now reached in the course of the progress of the arts, and more especially of the art of medicine, reveals a totally new and hitherto unsuspected aspect of the problem of art in dying. I believe that this new aspect will become ever more important, indeed existentially decisive, in the near future. Futurology, if it is not mere playing with numbers and curves, should concentrate upon it. Because our future is death, and futurology is thus the discipline concerned with dying.

It seems that in the so-called "primitive" societies the very idea of "natural" death is unknown. To die is to be killed by some human or superhuman, (which means: man-like), agent. The "enemy" kills, be it a wild beast, (which is of course a "spirit"), or a human foe, or some disease altogether provoked by some spell put upon the dying man through malevolent magic. Obviously there can be no "natural" death within a cosmology which contains no nature in our sense of that term. In a world ordered by retribution every death is necessarily a crime to be avenged to restore order. Thus to die is to be the object of somebody else's art, and the technique of dying is the technique of killing. Now "primitive" cosmology is not only the ideology of societies long past or living at the border of history, but it is also our own way of experiencing the world, thinly covered up with more recent ideologies, but still very much effective. If we say of a friend that he was "called by the Lord", this is not merely a façon de parler, nor is it the expression of submission to His will, but at bottom the experience of a superhuman, man-like, killer.

Later, as retribution and causality begin to be separated, and as art begins to be felt the human attitude in opposition to nature, "natural" death begins to be distinguished from death "tout court", though this distinction is not very rigid. One might say that death is felt to be "natural", if it is felt to be necessary within the natural order. This is the so-called death "of old age", or, as some would now say, death as a critical point in the necessary process of entropic/disorganisation in the body. All other types of death, be they caused by other persons, by the person it self, or by "accident", namely by disease or disaster, are felt not to have been necessary, and therefore not in the natural order. In such a context the problem of art in dying acquires two entirely different aspects. On the one hand it is the art to avoid unnecessary death, and its methods are medical and legal in a very broad sense of those terms. On the other hand it is the art of dying well the necessary death, what the medievals called "ars moriendi". In this second sense the art in dying was long considered to be the supreme art. Socrates and the Jewish prophets taught it, the Stoics elaborated its methods, and the Church brought those methods to almost perfection. At present it may be considered a lost art.

The reason for its loss is that we, like the "primitives", do not believe that death is necessary, and that there is such a thing as "natural" death in that sense. We believe that the tendency toward entropy is only one of the structures of nature, that it may be reversed, and that, as a thesis death may always be avoided. In praxis, however, we are only beginning to elaborate methods for arresting the entropic tendency, and methods for its reversal cannot yet be even imagined. Which means that although death may be avoided, it is impossible to avoid dying. We cannot make an old body young but we can, at least as a thesis, avoid that an old body continue in the process of dis-information beyond the critical point called "death". Thus the art in dying has become for us a problem which is the other side of the medal as it presented itself to the "primitives": for them, it was the art of violently killing, for us it has become the art of violently preventing the death of the other person. Although, of course, the medal is the same ancient one, namely the problem of art as a violence, it still shows an entirely new aspect at present. As a thesis, we are now in a position to transform humanity into a society of indefinitely dying bodies, and what prevents us from doing so are economic, not artistic, (technical), considerations. In this sense Franco is the man of the future.

It may seem that, in these considerations, I have been abusing the verb "to die", and, in fact, I am ready to substitute it for a better verb to express my meaning. The verb "to die" is very badly defined: on one extreme it means that moment at which the body reaches that critical point called "death", at the other it means the process through which the body ap

approaches that crisis. In the strict sense it thus means one instant, in the broad sense it means every instant. In the strict sense, "to die" is not to be alive any more, in the broad sense it is almost synonymous to living. In its colloquial use, the meaning of "to die" stands somewhere between the two extremes, and designates that part of life which consists only of suffering and excludes any possibility of acting. It is in this colloquial sense that it fills us with terror. The Czech poet Wolker expresses it well: "Smrt není zlá, já bojím se jen umírání", (death is not bad, I am afraid of dying only). It is in this intermediate sense that I want the verb to be understood in my considerations. But since I admit its ambiguity, I propose to substitute it by the verb "to survive". What I was talking about when speaking of the art in dying, is the technique of survival.

Now that I have defined the term, I must re-state my considerations. To survive, (or: to die), is to live on passively as an object of the art of other persons. Franco is such an art object. The parents of the American girl wanted to liberate their daughter from being such an object. For the "primitives" killing was the art of transforming others into objects. For our tradition medicine and law were methods to transform others into objects with the hope that they might thus become better subjects. And for our tradition "ars moriendi" was a method to avoid ever becoming an object. In our present situation, however, the art of surviving is a method to transform others into permanent objects. A permanent, indefinite killing. The unsatisfactory thing about the art of killing in "primitive" societies is that it is quickly over. We have improved on this. We can now kill everybody for as long as we are ready to pay for it. We are now in a position to maintain everybody in that stage of life which fills us with terror. And thus to transform society into one of survivors.

The difficulty in this is of course what I called "Franco's lucid moments". Moments in which he becomes a subject, capable, at least as a thesis, of acting. Now the professed aim of the art of survival is of course not to prolong suffering, but to allow the appearance of just such moments, to prolong "living". It may be shown, I believe, that the professed aim is a pretense, a lip service to traditional and no longer operative values, and that the true aim of the art of survival is not life, but survival. Still: the difficulty is there: Franco has his lucid moments, and the art of survival is not perfect. I suggest, however, that those moments do not allow Franco to act, only to know that he suffers. He does not become a subject of the world, only a subject of his own being an object. Thus the very imperfection of the art of survival is its beauty: on the one hand it provides it with excuses, (because the murdered person is sometimes lucid, to murder him is to prolong his life), and on the other hand it provides it with a noble purpose, (because the murdered person know he is being murdered indefinitely, to murder him is to "save" him).

It is very characteristic of our times that the purgatory no longer terrifies us in the sense in which it terrified our fathers. What terrifies us instead is dying, (or, as I should now say: surviving). This is characteristic of our radical immanentisation. Purgatory, for our fathers, was that process of indefinite dying, or surviving, through suffering in the "other world". Dying, or surviving, for us, is that process of now indefinite suffering, of purgatory in this world. Seen thus, the art of survival is the method of establishing purgatory in the world, of purging men and thus "saving" them through indefinitely prolonged murder. Now longer is paradise the model of the society of the living. Now purgatory is the model of the society of the surviving. Instead of the paradise of the workers and peasants, it is the purgatory of the functionaires which is the model of the technocrats, (who are, of course, among other things, the artists of survival).

Now in the case of Franco, that man of the future, some might be inclined to accept his technological "auto da fè" without much misgivings. In his lucid moments, they may hold, he is now paying for what he was doing. But it is of course not the purpose of Franco's technological devils, judges or whatever, to re-insert Franco into an ethical order. And, anyhow, Franco's case is special. He is a Generalissimo, a very general criminal, while the crimes of most of us others seem, by comparison, less apocalyptic. The purgatory which technology by its art of survival is preparing for us does not seem to be in proportion with what we are doing. The idea that we should live for a few tens of years, and then go on surviving for maybe hundreds of years, strikes us as unjust. Now it must be confessed that utopies have always been the motives of human commitment. Purgatory is the utopy of technocratic systems. Because the art of survival is the supreme "techné" for such a system. Survival, for such a system, is the Ersatz for immortality in more traditional systems. I believe that we should realize this, and Franco's death helps us to do so. The purgatory as an utopy should help us to commit ourselves against technocratic systems.