

We have a tendency, (directly inherited from the nineteenth century, and indirectly from the Christian concept of history as a salvation process,) to admire what we call "the evolution of nature". We tend, for instance, to suppose that there is some sort of wisdom that informs the process by which the various species of living things come into being. This tendency of ours is surprising for various reasons. One of the reasons has to do with the fact that, ever since the nineteenth century, we know of the second principle of thermo-dynamics, and should therefore consider all natural processes more like decays than like evolutions. We should therefore agree more with the ancient sages than with modern progressives in this matter. Another reason concerns the fact that the method of the life evolution, (what we call "natural selection"), is an obviously wasteful, brutal and irrational method. We should in consequence agree more with those who believe that to oppose nature and its methods is the dignity of human spirit, than with those who tend to admire nature. A third reason has to do with the fact that natural evolution has resulted, so far, in living things that do not seem to be constructed in a way that is very clever. Even we, with our admittedly limited capacities, can in some aspects radically improve on their organisation. An obvious example of this is the fact that nature did not evolve the wheel as a means of locomotion. The explanation of this our surprising tendency to admire the evolution of nature is the fact that we consider ourselves to be a result of that evolution. And our tendency to admire ourselves is, inspite of all evidence to the contrary, overwhelming.

Now the wheel as a means of locomotion is a remarkable instrument for various reasons. Firstly because it does not simulate, like most other instruments do, an organ of our body. It seems to simulate rather unhuman phenomena like rolling pebbles and tree trunks and like revolving celestial bodies. Secondly because, although it is very ancient in our culture, it is not, like most instruments are, common to all so-called "high civilizations". The Andean civilization is an example of a wheel-less culture. Thirdly because the wheel, unlike most instruments, although it is very ancient, seems to have been applied to its full potentiality only very lately. Such, (and similar), considerations should be borne in mind when we speak of our present society as of "a society on wheels", and when we try to analyse our situation from this aspect. Something unhuman, regional and specifically modern clings to the wheel as a dominant instrument, and it is in this sense that the motor car occupies a special place amidst the things that surround us.

The unhuman, (say: inorganic), character of the motor car is being carefully, (though unconsciously), covered up by those who design it. On the contrary: its design tries to evoke animal, even human, associations. It has a face with two eyes, a nose and a mouth full of teeth, it has a body and a tail, it drinks and it excretes, (thereby polluting the air we are breathing). The only thing that does not fit into this organomorphic design is the fact that

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it has wheels, not legs, and that it rolls instead of walking. We try to cover up even this by saying of the motor car that it "runs", but we are not very successful in this, because it is the wheels of the car that are its phenomenological essence. But in another sense the organomorphic masquerade is very successful. It achieves a relationship between motor car and owner that merits closer examination.

When Heidegger discusses the ~~the~~ problem of care, ("Sorge"), he distinguishes between various forms of it, two of which are of importance in the present context. One he calls "Vorsorge", (something like taking care or precaution), and it concerns the future. The other he calls ("Fuersorge", (something like catering or ~~taking~~ caring for somebody), and it concerns the present. Now what characterizes the future is that it is composed of problems, that is of things we must learn how to handle. Therefore "Vorsorge" is the climate which governs our learning of things that surround us. And what characterizes the present is the fact that we do not stand alone in it, but that there are always others with us. Therefore "Fuersorge" is the climate that governs our relationship to others, and it is very close to "love" in this sense. Now the relationship between owner and car is very often bathed in the climate of "Fuersorge", as we can clearly see if we observe how some owners care for their cars by cleaning them, polishing them, crawling under them and watching with care for any symptom that might reveal some "illness". It may be said that theirs is a case of unhappy love, unhappy because unresponded.

It is commonplace to say that an aspect of our situation is the fact that we tend to reify others. That we do not see them as others at all, but as problems. We commit by this an ontological error, (or sin), by trying to understand and handle people as if they were things, and the anthropological sciences, (like psychology, sociology, economics and so forth), are powerful weapons for this error. But what characterizes our situation equally well is the opposite tendency to "alterify" things, to relate ~~to~~ things as if they were others. This is an error, (or sin), well known to theology, and it is called "idolatry" in such context. This alterification or idolatry can be observed in many directions. Examples are the sentimental commitments to an institution, (like an army or a business corporation), to a country, (like patriotism) or to an idea, (like political commitments). The idolatrous error is always the establishment of a relationship to a thing, (an institution, a country, an idea), as if it were not a thing but another person. But sentimental commitments to motor cars are virulent examples of idolatry, because they show in the materially concrete the sinfulness and stupidity of corporate fidelity, patriotism and political commitment.

I suggested above that a symptom of this sinfulness and stupidity is the fact that such "love" is necessarily unhappy. We may invest a thing with as much emotional charge we will, it will never respond, because it will re-

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main a thing, i.e. an unresponding and irresponsible resistance. But there is more to it. Although the thing, (for instance the motor car), does not respond, it reacts, and its reaction is its mute perfidious, (to speak with Marx), resistance to our efforts to change it into another person. And this reaction, again, affects us. And in the end of this diabolical feed back we become reified by the thing we wanted to alterify, we become things of the thing we wanted to transform into our other in the first place. We become instruments of the corporation, or the country, or the idea, or the motor car which we love, and thus our original sin holds its own punishment within itself. We become functions of a thing, ("fonctionnaires"), and if we are fonctionnaires of a motor car, we can sense very well the uncanny climate of such a sort of alienation.

No longer, therefore, the oppression of man by man, but of man by thing, is our problem. And the classically Marxist analysis of the problem will no longer help us. It does not much help to say that the thing that dominates us belongs to some men, (as the machines in nineteenth century factories did), and that therefore the thing is only a means by which we are dominated by others. The motor car disproves this classically Marxist thesis. It is we ourselves who own it, and it oppresses us because it is we ourselves who allow it to do so. We allow it to do so by masquing the fact that it is fundamentally inhuman, and the wheels it stands and rolls on prove it. Because of its wheels it is even more unhuman than most other instruments are, and possibly this is the dialectical reason why we tend to anthropomorphize it. Thus phenomenological analysis may complete the Marxist one fruitfully in some cases. Let us therefore try and reveal the essence of motor cars, (which is the wheel), in order to free ourselves from them.

The regional, (one is tended to say: the "Western") character of the motor car can best be felt, if we ask ourselves what makes of the wheel an instrument of locomotion within our culture. A wheel, of course, is a turning circle, and what characterizes it is not locomotion, but the eternal return. This aspect of the wheel is what underlies the Indian concept of "sam sara", to mention only one of the ways in which the wheel is a model for the idea of eternal return. This may explain the fascination circles exerted on Greek thought, ("kyklos tēs geneseos" and the circle as a perfect figure), this may explain why for the Greeks the squaring of the circle and the number Pi were such problems, and this may explain why we, heirs of the Greeks, tend to explain processes in cycles. In order to become an instrument for locomotion, the wheel must be freed of its eternally returning character and seen an epicycle rolling on a straight line. This is a very difficult abstraction, and the Peruvian culture mentioned may never have achieved it. But if achieved, it changes radically the human outlook on the world. It dynamizes and historicizes it. Now this radical change characterizes the West, and it does

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so fully only lately. In fact, it is only when Nietzsche says that the eternal return and the will to power are the same thing, and that to think that is the most difficult of thoughts, only then is the wheel as an instrument for locomotion fully understood. But, of course, to understand this is a very slow process, and the wheel can be used for locomotion even in its beginnings. This explains why the wheel is so ancient, and why its full potentialities have come to be utilized so lately.

In pre-motor car times, (and everywhere outside the West where wheels were used for locomotion), cars on wheels were pushed by animals or men, and thus were forced from outside and by living bodies to perform a motion which was not considered to be inherent in them. Of course, no such external force was observable in the case of rolling stones, but it was postulated. (For instance Aristotelian justice or Galilean gravitation.) But in motor cars, although there still is such an external force, (the explosion of gasoline, for instance), it is no longer felt to force the wheels to perform a motion which is inappropriate to them, but on the contrary to motivate the wheels for a motion which is inherent in them. In other words: motor cars are instruments which show, in their construction and in their function, the dynamic and historical structure of Western thought, which has now become fully conscious of its own structure. This explains why, quite correctly, the motor car is considered the characteristic instrument of Western civilization by many. It shows, better than most other instruments do, that for us "reality" is a process that moves ahead in epicycles.

But it also shows that the moment Western thought becomes fully aware of its own structure, this very structure becomes problematic. (This is the reason why Nietzsche is thought by many to be the last of Occidental thinkers.) Because the motor car shows that as a means for locomotion it may be self-defeating. We need not think, in this, of the obvious fact that traffic jams force many of us to the archaic means of locomotion, to walking. It is sufficient to think of the fact that riding a car is, in a sense, no true locomotion. If we go by car from home to office, we do not, existentially speaking, move from one place to another. We build a tunnel, (the car), that welds home and office into one single unity, and there is no existential place, (no street nor town), between them. In other words: although the car seems to project us from the private realm into the public one, in reality it encloses us even more forcefully within the private realm in a way old forms of locomotion and the modern subway does not. Therefore the whole idea of locomotion, (of progress), may be felt to be an illusion, and the sacrifices we are obliged to make it, (like traffic jams and air pollution), come to be felt as silly. Thus motor cars come to be instruments characteristic of the West in the sense that they show well the problematicity of the structure of Western thought and of the resulting civilization.

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Let us now turn our attention to that aspect of motor cars that was called the "specific modern one" in the introduction to this paper. If we name our society "a society on wheels", we do not mean that it is a society in which a new and pernicious idolatry is rampant, nor do we mean a society in which the motor car illustrates the structure of Western thought and its inherent perils. (Although the term "society on wheels" does imply those two aspects, it does not make them explicit.) What the term expressly means is a society that has somehow lost its "pied-à-terre", and is rolling about in a fluid manner. And this is what is specifically "modern" about it.

In order to understand this change that is occurring at present, let us compare the more or less natural locomotion of man, (and many animals), with wheeled locomotion. There are various differences, but one of them is pertinent to the present considerations. It is that in walking a surface, (the foot), is in contact with the earth, and in rolling it is theoretically a point which is in contact. Therein lies one of the advantages of wheels over feet as means of locomotion: less friction. Now it is curious to observe in this context that the walking of men differs from that of most other mammals in that human feet offer a relatively larger surface to earth than for instance do the hoofs of horses. This is the reason why men run slower than horses, who walk on tip toes. Thus man is a mammal which, though it has lifted its forelimbs from earth and freed them for anti-earthly activities, nonetheless has a relatively firm holding on the earth that supports him. He is in this sense a being between heaven and earth: a culture-producing being. But now that he is beginning to roll on wheels, now that he is forming a "society on wheels", he is beginning to lose his foot-hold. No elaborate tyre design, intended to minimize friction and still prevent slipping, can change this. An even superficial consideration of our scene can prove it.

In all previous societies man had what students of animal behavior call a "territory", a geographical place to defend, to breed in, to sleep in, and which forms the center of the world. The motor car has diluted all territories in this sense. A good example for this are political frontiers. For a long time they were limits of adjoining territories, and were fiercely guarded on both sides. They have now become archaic obstacles to the flow of motor car traffic. There can be no doubt that motor cars are at least partly responsible for the efforts to do away with frontiers, like the Common Market. Now this has a whole series of consequences, some of which can be as yet merely guessed at. A few of these will now be mentioned.

The relative immobility of previous societies, which confined men to limited geographical experience, had for a result that men had a feeling of belonging. The motor car has vastly enlarged the geographic horizon of men, and thus lessened the feeling of belonging. The positive aspects of that belonging were an intimate familiarity with the culture of the immediate surroundings. Th

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negative aspects of it were the ignorance, and therefore fear, ~~with~~^{of} outside cultures. The motor car is a potent weapon for peace, in that it does away with the ignorance and fear that is the psychological root of warfare. But it is a potent instrument for alienation, in that it furnishes a distance from which to question the culture which should sustain us.

The relative immobility of previous societies gave a geographic dimension to the world of experience, (to what Husserl calls the "Lebenswelt"), of those who participated in them. In other words: geographically farther and nearer also meant existentially less and more interesting. And by doing so, previous societies furnished measures, (norms), not only for interests, but also for the commitments to these interests, and that again means that they furnished values. The motor car has taken away, to a great extent, the ancient geographical measures and measurements, and is thus contributing powerfully to what is called "the crisis of values".

The relative immobility of previous societies, which relied, to a great extent, on walking as means of locomotion, supplied their participants with a neat distinction between the realm of the private, (the house in which I dwell and the realm of the public, (the market place into which I walk in order to publish the goods I privately manufactured, and in order to communicate with my neighbours). The motor car has taken away this neat distinction between what the Greeks called "oiké" and "polis", and it is thus economizing politics and politicizing economics in a way that has not yet been grasped fully. Of course, it can be said on one hand that the motor car is a private instrument, and that, as a consequence, it represents an invasion of the ~~public~~^{private} sphere into the public one to such an extent that we can now speak of total de-politisation. But, on the other hand, it can also be said that the motor car is a powerful means of communication and that, to the extent to which we now dwell in motor cars, (to the extent to which we defend them, breed in them and sleep in them), that to that extent we now dwell within communication, which again means that we dwell in the public and are losing privacy altogether.

The relative immobility of previous societies, which was achieved by agriculture at the beginning of the Neolithic Age, evolved into a specific social structure, loosely called the "patriarchal structure". This implied not only a specific kind of family, but also of Government, religion, ideology and science. The motor car is nomadizing society again, but not in the Paleolithic sense of the term. (By the way, if one expects TV to result in a cosmic village, one is mistaken. The motor car will prevent any kind of village.) Modern nomadizing is unlike the Paleolithic one in that the hunter followed animals, and the tourist's rolling along is aimless. Therefore tourist campings do not provide, like the hunters' campings do, a true meaning to human endeavors. The social revolutions now in the making, (and which were provoked, to a great extent, by motor cars), are therefore not a return to

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what is called "matriarchal structures". Therefore we cannot foresee, in spite of "women's lib", "fraternities", "gay power" and so on, how the family will be restructured, and even less what sort of government, religion, ideology and science a "society on wheels" will evolve in the future.

No doubt: the loss of "territory" brought about by the motor car will have even more radical consequences than the ones mentioned. The loss of foot hold, the minimization of friction through elaborate tyre design, the aimless rolling along, and all the other aspects of the mobility the motor car provides, will no doubt result in a new sort of man, in a true transfiguration. In the apocalyptic vision "A trumpet shall sound and we shall be changed" the word "trumpet" should be substituted by "horn". It thus becomes clear that the "modern" aspect of motor cars has a neat apocalyptic flavor.

This paper has considered only three sides of motor cars: what it called its "unhuman", "regional (Western)" and "modern" aspects. This admittedly limited approach has revealed the idolatrous, historical and apocalyptical potentialities dormant in the motor car, and it has done so because the wheel, in its inorganic, rolling and point-contact character, was considered to be the "motor-car-aided". There are as many approaches to motor cars as there are points of view, and from each point of view the motor car will reveal an essential aspect. The only point of view that will reveal nothing essential is the one from which we approach it if we step into it and drive it. Let us try to start out from any other point of view than that, if we want to understand, through the motor car, who we are, where we are, and where we are going, (or driving, or rolling).