

## It Is Our Desire That Makes Revolution

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'Die, ye old forms and ideas!  
Slave-born, awake, awake!  
The world is driven by new forces,  
Desire has touched us!'

*From The International – in the Dutch version*

For those who wish to learn about human desires, whether in the domain of art, the domain of sex, or any other domain, the experiment is an indispensable tool for gathering data on the objective and the source of our aspirations, on their possibilities and their limitations. One might wonder what purpose is served by following man from one extreme to the other, and being unafraid of flouting the norms set by ethics, by aesthetics, by philosophy in doing so. Why is it that we feel the need to break the bonds that have held us within a social system for dozens of centuries and thanks to which we have remained capable of thinking, of living, of creating? Does our culture no longer have a future, will it be impossible to satisfy our deepest desires within the confines of this culture?

In reality no human desire has ever been satisfied within the confines of this culture, no more in the case of a slave than in the case of a master, for all that the latter may have fancied himself happy in luxury and in a lust with which he believed he was exploiting all the creative potential of man to the full.

So when we people of the twentieth century speak of human desire, we are actually speaking of something unknown. After all, all we know of that immeasurable realm of our actual desires is merely this: that all these desires converge into a single overriding desire for freedom. To gain access to this unknown world in which our desires can be satisfied, and in which all the cultural aspects of our lives as well as the relationships among all of our lives can acquire higher value, we must first liberate our social life – we consider this our first and most elementary task.

The only way to know thoroughly a desire is to satisfy it, and the satisfaction of our most essential desire is revolution. The true creative activity – the culture – of our time is based on revolution. Only through revolutionary activity can we learn about the desires that slumber within the human being of NOW, of 1949. No formulation can take the place of our revolutionary experience.

Dialectical materialism has taught us that our consciousness is dependent on the social conditions we are living in. If, however, these conditions are such that satisfaction of our essential desires must be deemed impossible, we feel the need to explore that which we desire. This need gave birth to the experiment, the means to develop the knowledge of the desires that slumber within us.

The experiment, however, is not simply a means to expand our knowledge. From the moment we are forced to acknowledge that our needs are not compatible with the cultural norms that are meant to channel our desires, the experiment becomes the very prerequisite for knowledge. One might then wonder what forms the basis of the experiment itself.

Since our desires are largely unknown to us, the experiment can have no other starting point than the knowledge present within us at any given time. What we know, at any moment, is the material with which we continue building. And with the new application of this material begins the phase in which we become able to cultivate new realms, realms we cannot yet imagine.

With these facts in mind, the artists of today have activated themselves to rediscover the creativity that has been suppressed and smothered since the beginning of our current culture. Creativity is the way to knowledge, the pre-eminent means to conquer our freedom, the best weapon of the revolution.

The current, individualistic culture has substituted artistic production for creativity. Yet what has been produced are merely the tragic symbols of impotence, the rare cries of desperation of a shackled individual, constrained by aesthetic taboos. Creating means making something hitherto unknown, and the unknown strikes fear in the hearts of people who believe they have something to preserve or to protect. We, however, who have nothing to lose but our chains, are not afraid of the adventure. The only risk we run consists of the loss of a rather sterile virginity, the virginity of abstracts. We must soil the virginal purity of Mondrian, be it merely with our misery. Is misery not preferable to death, at least for those who are strong enough to fight? The enemy has forced us to become partisans and to join the resistance, and while he may have discipline, we have courage, and in the end it is not discipline but courage that determines victory.

This is our answer to the abstract artists, whether they claim spontaneity or not. Their 'spontaneity' is that of a rebellious child, who does not know what it really wants, who wants to be free but is unable to achieve it outside the protection of its parents.

To be free one must be strong: freedom can only exist in creativity or in struggle, which actually share the same objective: the fulfilment of our life.

CREATIVITY IS WHAT LIFE DEMANDS OF US; BEAUTY IS LIFE.

So when we witness society turning against us and against our works, and accusing us of being 'undefinable' or 'incomprehensible', we reply:

1. That human beings in 1949 are incapable of understanding anything except the necessary struggle for their liberation.
2. That we do not seek to be 'understood' – we too want to be liberated – and that WE ARE COMPELLED TO EXPERIMENT BY THE SAME FORCES THAT FORCE THE WORLD TO FIGHT.
3. That we could not be creative in a world that is passive and that OUR CREATIVITY IS SUSTAINED BY THE CURRENT SOCIAL STRUGGLE.
4. And finally, that humanity, once it begins to live creatively, will automatically cease to need aesthetic or ethical norms, which have never been intended for anything other than to constrain creativity and which are now the cause of the general lack of understanding for our experiments. Understanding, after all, is nothing more than recreating something based on a shared desire. Humanity, including us, is on a quest to explore its own desires. We shall reveal these desires by satisfying them.

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The typed manuscript in Dutch is in the Constant archive at the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD).