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Analysis of a Naked Existence

(Monologue)

I

Mr. Brecher? Yes, of course! I'm on my way. I've grown two legs exclusively to serve you, Director Sir, and my eyes are on the lookout to read your every wish from your lips, which I previously whispered into your ear. Since you love to think independently, on occasion with the ideas of your subordinates, you will hopefully be prepared to hold them responsible for matters in which you failed. What a position! Before you know it, you turn into the person with as many faces as demands being made and as many alternate agendas as required subterfuges. It's easy to forget yourself, you turn into a remote-controlled marionette. And yet, doesn't the question of the month yawn at the end of all questions: what now? For some questions are irksome and are still below those that have the privilege of being called a problem. They are no longer a problem, they are too weak for that, and so they remain, for those who would be concerned with them, something of a nuisance. How make a living? What now? I have been rewarded, I have been isolated, and now I enjoy the privilege of being allowed to look this soothsayer directly in the eye, to be blinded by his grace. His face gleams round like a million, and his ears carry a bright red, almost transparent. I thank you for this enlightenment! It's so pure. Why people dare set up purity as an ideal, I understand even less. I always thought that purity was self-soiling. Excuse me, Director Sir! I guess I'm mistaken. But that comes from staring people in the face so long until the reflection of their mask becomes visible and one gets to feel what has haunted me all my life: the trepidation of the naked existence.

Why do people travel to admire the glaciers, why do they chase the kilometers down the throat of the distance covered, why this expenditure of energy? Step up closer, ladies and gentlemen, you too, my child, to see the last mythic remains: a director! I promise all the titillation and sensation in the world.

People always make confident faces, hiding behind their achievements, or they raise their head and listen around the corner for the siren of the rescue squad on its way, or that decision which carries us away, another step higher. But where does it land us? To make sketches! Director Sir is in a grumpy mood? Then I'll explain it to you. We sketch and sketch – now I presume you've understood this, right? Ua-Ua comes in and asks: "What's that supposed to be?" – then you give him a fawning look and ask: "What can I do for you?" On this basis you come to an agreement. You apportion your steps as in a dancing lesson, sketching figures of agreement on your own face. You're a dud who deciphers sketches with the question in your head: what now?

May those who go and eat their buttered bread or shoot their father or get married better off than someone who thinks – but what pleasure would be left to me if it wasn't for the luxury of this parallel action? My suit is not of as great a cut as this. That you must admit, Director, Sir. Perhaps, if the legs could do without knees! These knees, you see, spoil everything for me, they've trembled too much in my life, they had to drag along an existence. What? You don't know anything about this? That's a pity. Then you've missed a lot. What one needs is a double pants seat, that's the most urgent matter, Sir, so that the opportunity remains to sit on one and to go out walking with the other in order to regulate the workforce.

I'm not a human being here, who lives, who ramifies his life into the most minute divisions, I'm a human being with life as an attraction. Do you understand this? I'm an existence. The ground on which I stand is debatable, the world that remains to me consists of fixed ideas, illusions, and projects. Yes, I'm often seized by the merciless sense, here on the gray line of the pavement, as if we lived as far as the

reach of our shadow. We're being berated, do you understand? For we made the mistake at one point in our lives to have mustered more courage through an unexpected discovery than we can bear in the long run. How often did I call out: I'll not even be good enough in the eyes of this high and might world to be sold as chopped meat, twenty-five cents the quarter pound!

Overcoming everything, yes, Director, Sir, and in the shortest of time. Consider it done, Director, Sir. Then to exclaim inconsolably at the sight of each table swept clean: what now? To stand there, after all, only to run away from one's shadow during an unguarded moment. That's right, Director, Sir. We'll take care of this to your satisfaction.

My stomach is a cesspool, but in my brain, there dance the highest circles of society. What do you say to that? One day one of those mirrored gentlemen called out to me that I was the protégé of my intellect? Not everybody has such an experience and I can assure you how much such a compliment delighted me. I tell myself softly: protégé of your own intellect. This gives me a lift when I'm feeling down. While the peas with bacon in my stomach give their last until they are digested, reigns in my upper spheres idle conviviality and ingenuity. Should you have a recommendation, Director, Sir, I might be able to finagle an invitation for you, but as long as you're being looked at in this area over the shoulders, I don't think it's advisable. It would be too embarrassing. You must remember that I'm alone. I walk down the Linden incognito and nobody bats an eye because of it. I'm afraid they might be ready or callous enough to give me a quarter if I positioned myself, together with my entire venerable company, to panhandle.

But they are millions. Millions are alone. Millions dance on the dance floor of their consciousness. They are seen sitting in trains, the newspaper in front of their eyes as a never-ending panorama, a panorama from which the characters change over into their own misery. Aah, how things can be set right by reading about them! Willingly, I testify to that, and every day they arrive, for millions are waiting for it to

spoon it up. To eat up an earthquake, the murder of a female office worker – sela. This is easily slurped down, on a par with their own imagination, more on a par at any rate than that kowtowing with which they wear out their boots. Never is life more distant, never does it work out better. This cleanliness, Director, Sir, it's especially the cleanliness that impresses me. Imagine this: over the peas with bacon runs the blood of the murdered char woman. Isn't it terrible this lack of conscience? No. It's cleanliness incarnate. It's entertaining. Nobody sends around furtive glances, nobody, for fear of being accused of perverse desires, keeps his consumption of corpses, blood, government politics, and strangulation marks a secret. It must be a mistake that the reader hides behind the newspaper. Please! The reader is pure and doesn't need to hide.

Will you believe this, Director, Sir? Here I encountered, blinded by a crack, I say, here I encountered your esteemed appearance. I saw the events driven to form herds, I saw how you labored to finally create an event after you had aroused the need. Arousing needs, shouldn't that be enough? Talking people into having needs which they don't have, that's propaganda. You don't think much of your babbling, do you? You take this to be a business secret? No need to worry! Nobody will take our childish slogans as damaging, they are as harmless as the smile they evoke. If there weren't . . . you mean to say, I'd better not think any further? Wouldn't there be, this is now my opinion, a fatal kind of harmlessness, which has a dulling effect and which leaves behind at least one thing, a certain dubiousness. I say no more. But it has been aggrieving me for a long time that the best propaganda can be made for a cause that is good as well as for one that is bad. It doesn't affect the propaganda in anyway that it is outside the boundaries of morality. Yes, what is there to do? It always reminds me of the military. In the old days, the slogan was: for God, King, and Fatherland! But that time goes back a few train stations and the entire trinity was discredited by the course of history – by history, not by me, Director, Sir. Nowadays everything that calls itself military serves with a weapon in hand, with a club on the hip, it serves . . . ,

yes, if I only knew whom. For the shooting of human beings can take place under any type of flag. In this, I say now, but you don't have to believe it, at most pay, the military resembles a propagandist. Lord, who would have thought! If the military consisted only of military music, it would be a lively fresco, a parade, a counterpart to the revues of dancing girls. But this is already vain propaganda. That's why I say: we are a military division, even if we sell cheese.

Excuse me, what did I do? It seems to me that I aroused your displeasure? All my uniform legs are, of course, at your disposal, Director, Sir, they are standing rank and file, and the fact that my thoughts sometimes get away from me is a sickness, falling sickness or something like that. Be patient, please, just for one second more! For you see, it's history that gives the best examples of the immorality of propaganda. Isn't it true that items are constantly being advertised which have become long obsolete? You mean to say there's nothing obsolete here? But then you are contradicting yourself. Wasn't it you who said: "Get this matter finally behind you?" Propaganda for Christianity, propaganda for parliament, propaganda for that gleaming tank, behind which – Mr. Kleist told me the story of King Guiskard – the plague is raging! It's a joke, dear Director. Have you heard it? The joke lies in seducing people into believing in a certain cause. The normal seducer, until now, lured away from the faith; however, we are seducers in disguise, we lead toward a faith. If that isn't a joke!

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II

"Mr. Brecher?" Öften had replied to a modest question from Mucki. "I don't know where he comes from. I also don't know how he lives otherwise. His past doesn't exist, in contrast to his strange friend, the doctor, who has already presented us with a few brothers and hereditary defects too many. Or have you ever heard Brecher say a word about his family? I haven't."

“Perhaps that’s his vulnerable spot.”

“I don’t think so. Objects and people, including his own life, have no meaning for him. He could be illegitimate, born in the middle of Potsdam Square or in a garbage can. But what do we know? Here we are sitting together; on the one hand we know each other, and on the other hand we are strangers. To my mind this is a breakdown, a breakdown of all of us. He has the talkativeness of cinder and dust, and the reason why he argues all the time is that he has to dig himself out. I was wrong to believe that a higher position would give him an impetus. You understand, don’t you?”

“Oh yes,” Mucki had said.

“That’s why I forgive him. I make an exception. By the way, I give him much credit for never being vulgar despite all his sarcasm. But otherwise? Should we care about him?”

“The way I know him, he would rebuff it.”

“You know him then? Well, well!”

“Of course not like that. From the first day, I had a bit of fear and respect for him, in spite of everything.”

“We all feel that. This is the unfathomable part of it – with regard to this picture, I almost said, this picture of misery, that he presents. He can’t rely on his legs. Do you understand? He doesn’t trust the ground anymore. Only his head gives him support, only his head is erect and moves. Actually quite weird.”

With this unexpected briefing in mind, Mucki took the next opportunity to sneak up on Mr. Brecher in the hallway, while he, pretending to be in a hurry and holding a newspaper in his hand, was two steps ahead of her. Nothing about her he deemed worthy of his special attention even though she was wearing a new dress, not paid for yet by the way, but a dress that looked extremely good on her. It bothered her a bit while she was following his ill-fitting pants. Thinking back to the day she started, she could say now: Coty and Doctor Geist, very simple accounts; but from

this Mr. Brecher she had actually expected something and, admittedly, something more than proof of his uselessness. He was a man who should have a surprise in store. His face, observed at times from her work place, showed a certain, though not altogether unharmonious, dissoluteness of the mind, a distinctiveness in sharp contrast to the freshness of his years. In moments of weariness, his face could call to mind the mask, with make-up removed, of a character actor about to end in a delirium. Thus arose a simultaneously blinded and inquisitive attitude, which still reacted to orders with a transparent question. Its after tremor was apparently still sunning itself for a while in some meadows or recesses of consciousness. Brecher, becoming aware of this peculiarity, didn't particularly like to follow up on it, but he is said to have remarked jokingly to colleagues he trusted, he didn't like making a point; a point was like a shot, too final.

“Your handwriting has such strange curves,” Coty is supposed to have said. “See here the lowercase f. Do you have an inclination to hang yourself?” – “It's supposed to be a sexual pleasure,” Brecher is said to have answered.

Mucki thought about this as Brecher walked ahead, only to disappear into a niche of which there were several. These were places where secretaries were being kissed.

“What are we going to do with this?” he said now, waving the newspaper, the actual delict.

He was talking about a fundamental mistake which Ua-Ua perpetrated in the humaneness article and which had been overlooked in proofreading, which of late was the responsibility of the academic section of Division Propaganda, much to the amusement of the competition. Mucki had read the proofs, she was responsible. While Brecher was thinking how to break it to her gently, she looked at him, more curious about what was to come than about what had happened. “The German people stand dead at the bier of his corpse,” Ua-Ua had written, and Brecher asked:

“What are we going to do about it?”

“Nothing at all.” Then Mucki complained: “If you correct him, he’s insulted; if you do nothing, he’s too. Let him lie there as a corpse.”

“He doesn’t give up easily, Mucki. It’s too much tragedy all at once. To be a corpse and dead on top is already superhuman. One can’t place such a burden on any nation in the world. But to stand next to one’s own corpse and being dead – what are we going to do about that?”

“He doesn’t even know German, this director,” Mucki exclaimed. “Why doesn’t he keep his hands off?”

“It was supposed to be especially beautiful, I guess. It’s customary to make the worst mistakes in the course of such efforts. Besides, he has models, highly regarded models. Wilhelm II composed the Song to Aegir. Although it’s being said that Hindenburg never read a book, Stresemann mulled around with Goethe. Models, Mucki!

“But the wrong ones.”

“To decide that is beyond my purview,” said Brecher with an exaggeratedly courteous bow. “Not our concern, milady.”

Mucki presented a helpless picture, she sulked, and if Doctor Geist had been in Brecher’s place, he would have covered her with kisses without much ado. Although Brecher noticed it, something burned in him that was more urgent and went beyond this miniature.

“You could have a better job too,” says Mucki, but so directly that Brecher twitched before he replies softly:

“Not so easy in Berlin.”

“Then some place else.”

Brecher looked at his colleague, who had a wonderful way of postponing what was most urgent as if it would regulate itself there. He liked her. She apparently saw a friend in him. He was already familiar with that, for he always got with all women

into such a mostly devotional relationship. Even in his youth – but never mind. He now had a reliable lover so to say: Berlin.

“And Paris?” Mucki asks naively.

“One is generally in love with one’s fate. Tell me, did you ever enjoy stories of the sea? They usually deal with the kind of men who withstand exterior power, a storm, but also illness and mutual suspicions. And all that for what? They couldn’t say even if pressed closely for an answer. But they have an incorruptible excuse: the ship. The ship represents, I don’t want to say replaces, a mistress as much as possible. They rave about her, praising her strengths and weaknesses, but she always remains their one and only. The ship! I feel the same way about Berlin. This city, and no other, is my fate. Can you – of course, you can; I mean, do you want to understand that?”

“As a favor to you.”

“That’s kind. It shows that I’m not such a ridiculous zero as it often seems. Because you are standing in front of it as a One, right?”

They both laughed. This Brecher, he was a man, original and always anchored with his whole being, despite his addiction for excessive mind games. By the way, his hands were in scandalous condition. He was biting his nails; he was unable to kick that bad habit. A lover? Hardly! A friend? More likely. There’s probably a cogwheel going over his head, thought Mucki as she looked into his wandering eyes.

“What are we going to do about it?” he asked again.

“I don’t care, Brecher.”

“You, not I.”

Since time was pressing on, they had to steal away, always on guard. Maybe they were already being missed? Maybe secretariat Seiferth was on the phone and the spinster had a coughing fit? But then again, maybe they weren’t being missed? That’s how senseless were possibilities and coincidences.

“Since when do you have this thing about Berlin?” asks Mucki as if asking about an illness.

“Since childhood. The thought of Berlin had an effect on me as light on moths. Basically I have no idea what is keeping me here. It’s no fun getting singled. I don’t know. When I was a boy, I dreamed of trains running along the sky and of the ice train in the summertime, later it was public opinion, the phantom of it. What do I know? But such promises latch on to you, they hold you for life.”

“Like convicted criminals – sit.”

“Yes, and like employees. On ne peut penser qu’assis, says Flaubert. We have to sit in order to think. But Nietzsche cried out: there I got you, you nihilist! Only thoughts that come to you in the course of a walk are of any value. – If I may add something for my part as an answer to you: promises that hold you already carry the seed of crime and in your thinking as well as. Thinking allows everything.”

Why is he telling me this? thinks Mucki and says nothing.

“Berlin! A classmate had an uncle in Berlin. He liked to talk about him, he said he rode around in a four-horse coach as in the circus. Lies, nothing but lies. But I saw immediately the bridles of four white-foaming white horses. The mother of this friend often put this uncle down when she spoke about him. He went through everything, like all Berliners. Also, he didn’t take care of his children. His wife, a woman from Berlin, was his ruin. That was the woman from Berlin for me.”

Mucki laughed from the bottom of her heart; she turned to Mr. Brecher with an unusually open look, before she said in jest:

“If he hadn’t had one, he wouldn’t have had a care.”

“You mean children? You, Mucki, I guess you don’t want any?”

“I’d rather have a young dog than a baby.”

“Ah, that sounds so sympatico. Congratulations,” says Brecher and gives her his hands. Later he thinks it over and says: “Usually it’s fourteen-year-old brats who say that marriage is a crime. Then at seventeen, they are married. But it’s good that some remain steadfast and don’t blow the attitudes of their youth so quickly into the wind. To toss and turn sleeplessly through the night . . .”

“Do you have trouble sleeping?”

“Excellent. I just said this so.”

“Ah,”

Here then, she thought, is his boundary. She gloated over her conquest like a child. She almost forgot about her dead man, who still stood at the bier of his corpse. Let him rise from the dead for all I care! The business of resurrection at the Umac still functioned in every way. But suddenly she remembered something, and she said, lowering her voice: “Could I borrow ten marks, Mr. Brecher? My dress . . .”

There he saw for the first time that she was wearing a new dress and, of course, he helped her out. It was high time for them to get back. Almost skipping, Mucki disappeared around the corner, taking that spot with the sign: *Watch your step!* in one leap. This time she jumped down the step. Brecher followed slowly behind.

“That about the corpse, I’ll take the blame,” he had said, and he was ready to keep his promise.

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