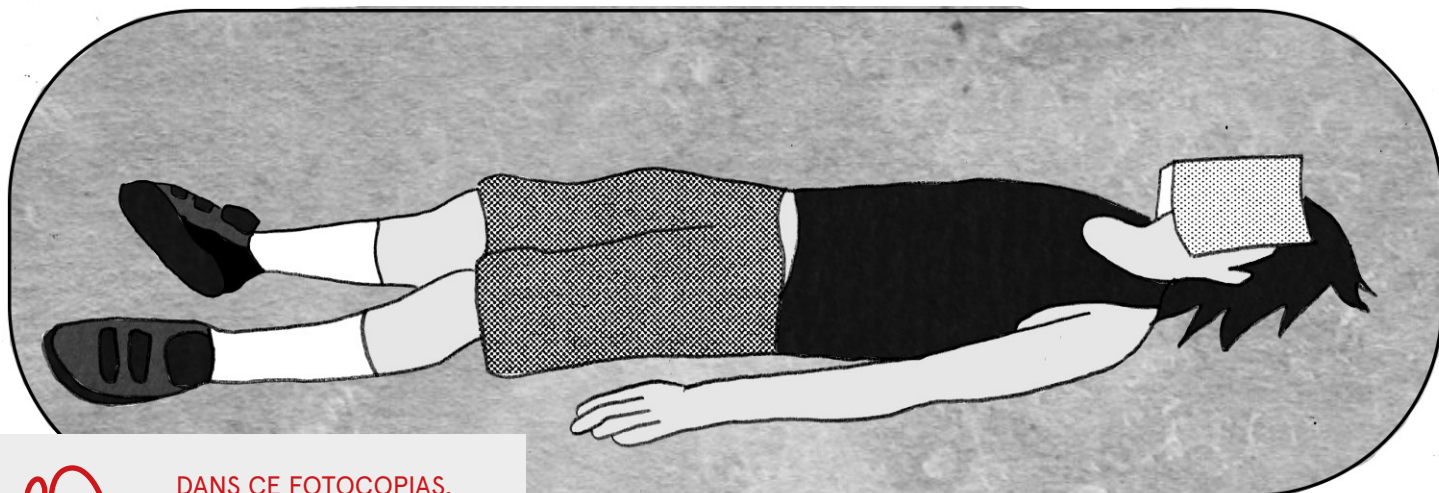


# Fotocopias

par Clélia Guy

21

été 2024



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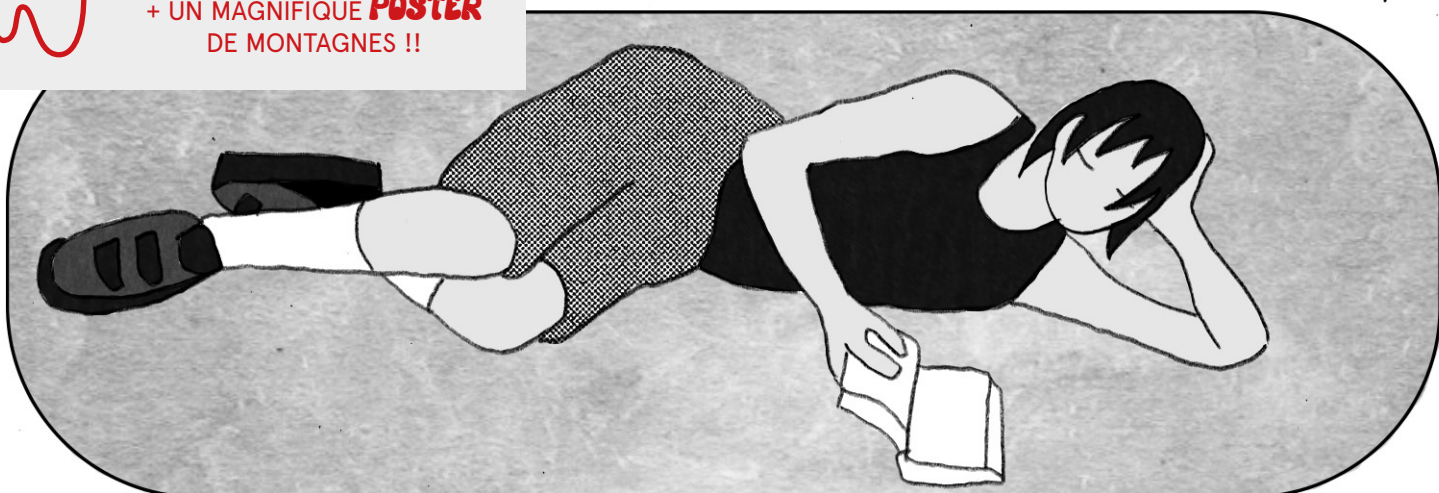
**THE WEIRDEST PEOPLE  
IN THE WORLD**

How the West became  
psychologically peculiar  
and particularly prosperous  
JOSEPH HEINRICH

**L'AMÉRIQUE  
AU JOUR LE JOUR**

1947  
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

+ UN MAGNIFIQUE **POSTER**  
DE MONTAGNES !!



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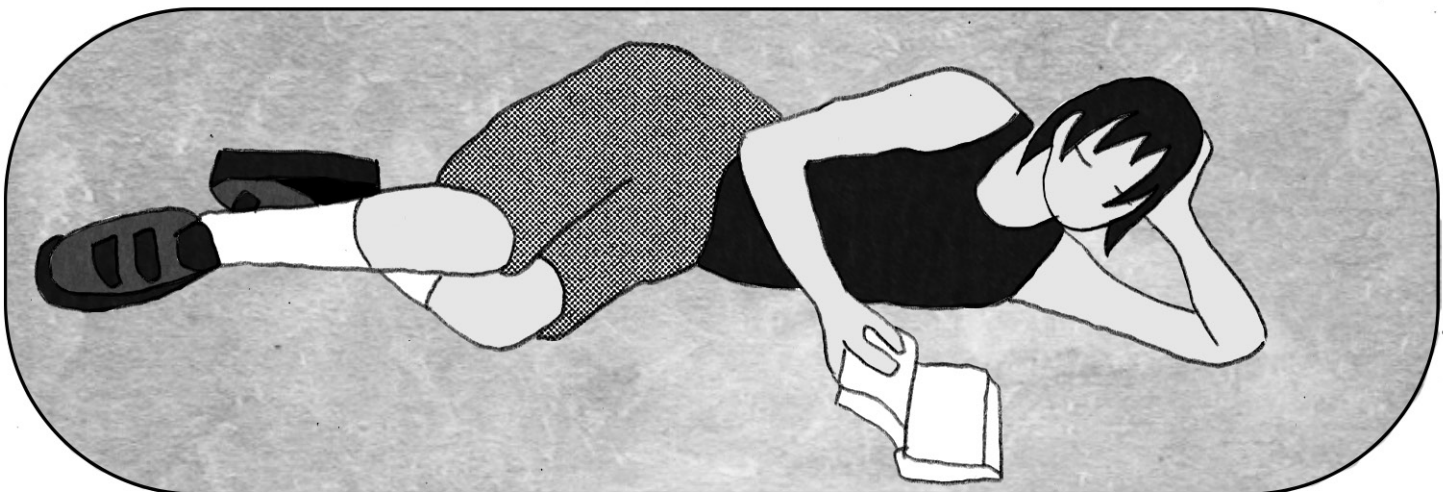
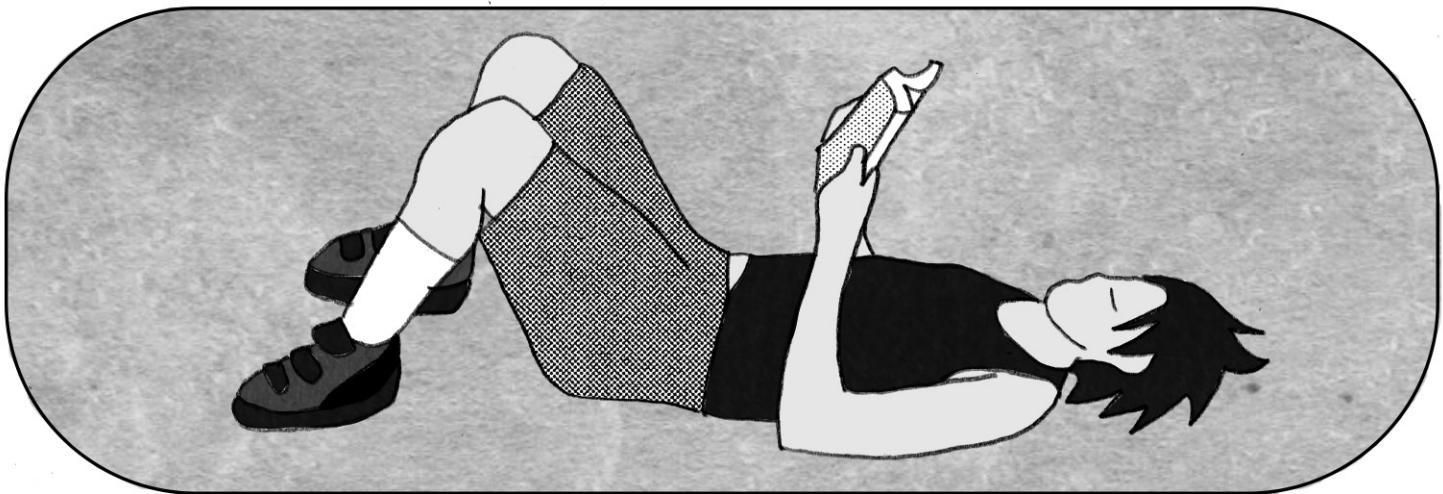
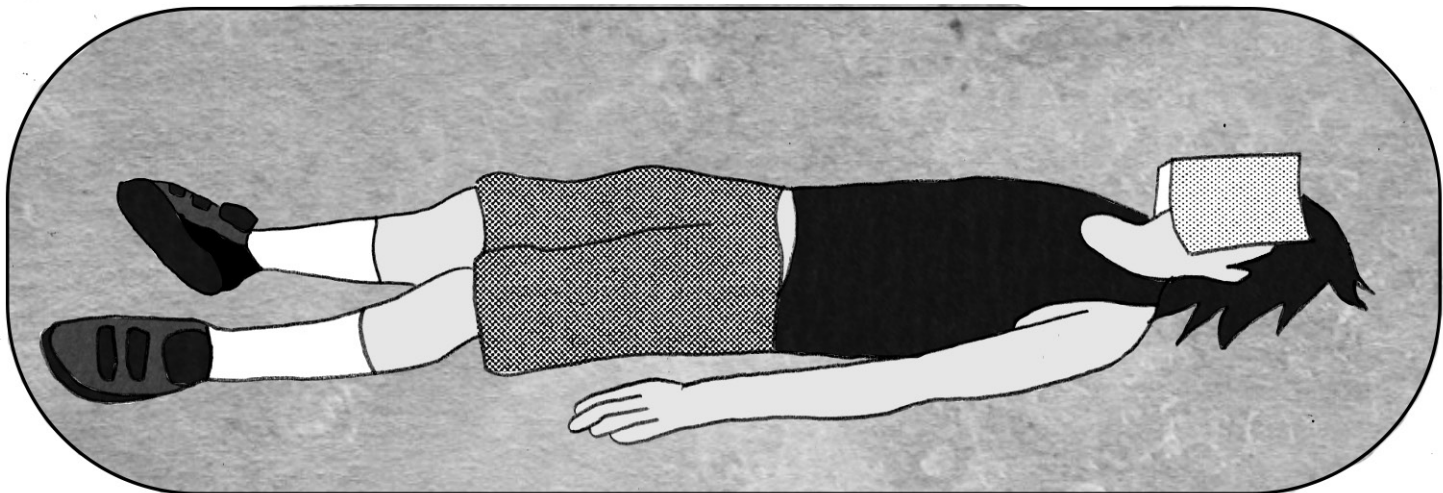
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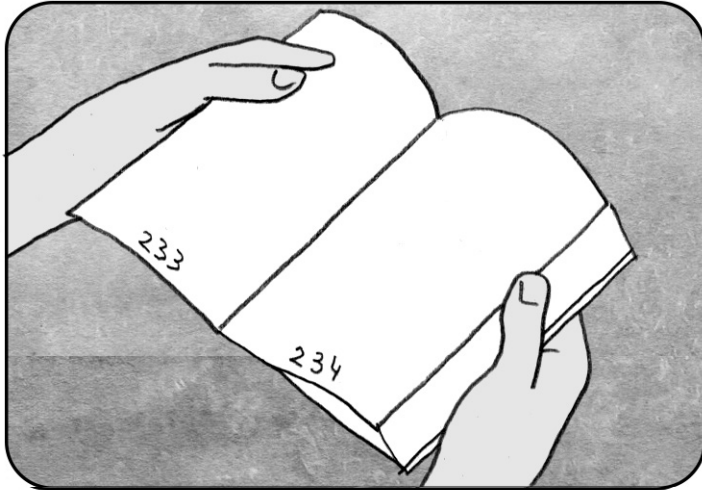
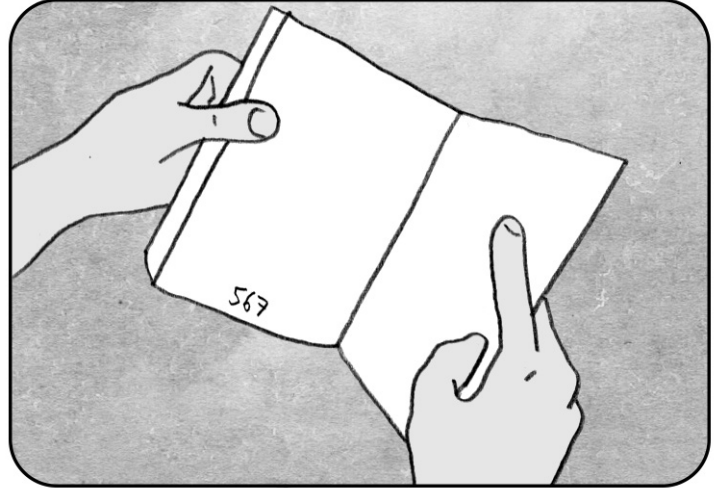
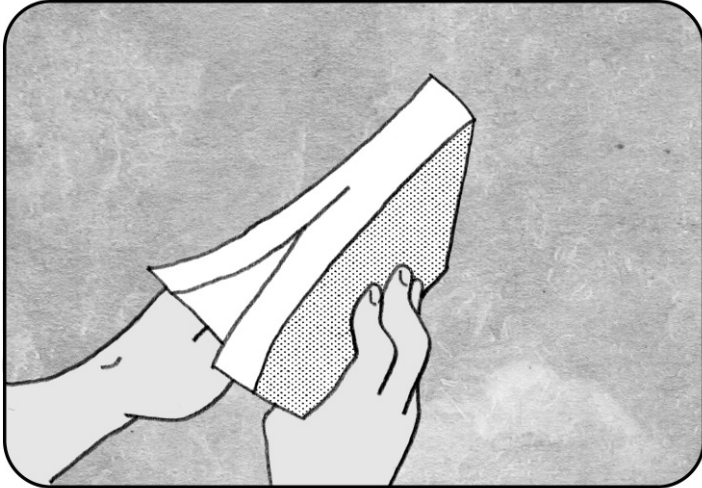
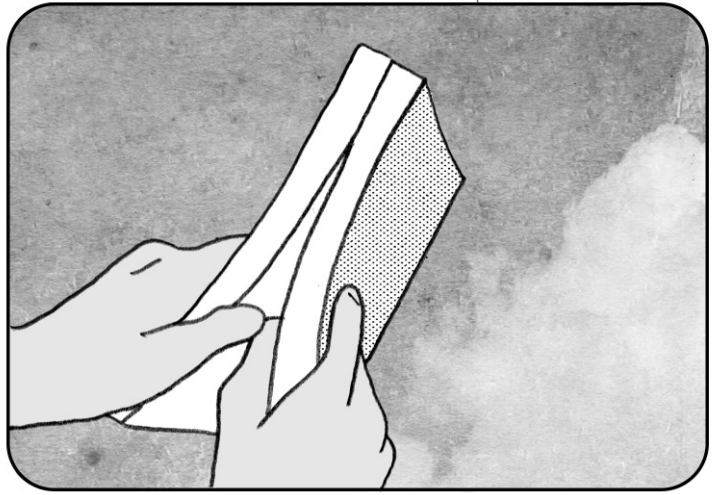
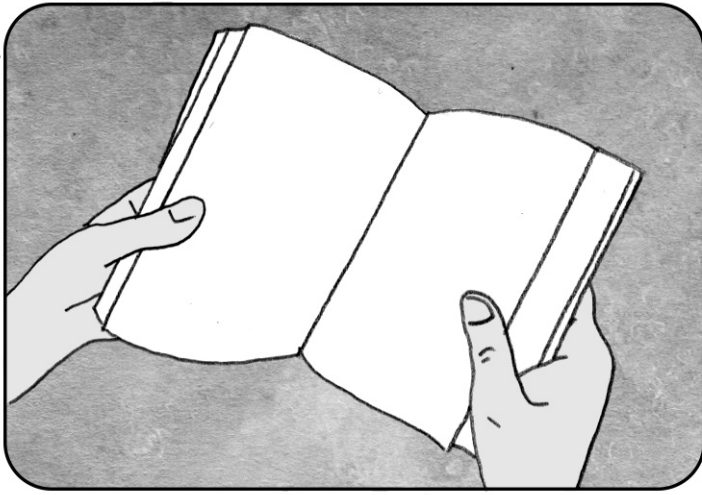
# Fotocopies

par Clélia Guy

21

été 2024





$567 - 234 = 333$



Plus que 333 pages...

# THE WEIRDEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

Joseph Henrich

How the West became psychologically peculiar and particularly prosperous

## Preface

[...] The populations so commonly used in psychological and behavioral experiments are « W.E.I.R.D. » because they come from societies that are Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.

## Prelude: Your Brain Has Been Modified

[...] In highly literate populations, psychologists like to flash words at experimental participants so quickly that they don't consciously realize that they have just seen a word. Yet we know that they not only saw the flashed words but all read it, because its meaning subtly influences their brain activation and behavior. Such subliminal priming demonstrates both our inability to switch off our reading circuitry and the fact that we don't even know it when we are in fact reading and processing what we read. Although this cognitive ability is culturally constructed, it's also automatic unconscious, and irrepressible.

[...] Culture can and does alter our brains, hormones, and anatomy, along with our perceptions, motivations, personalities, emotions, and many other aspects of our minds.

[...] If we want to explain these aspects of brains and psychology as they appear in modern societies, we need to understand the origins and spread of high rates of literacy—when and why did most people start reading?

[...] It began late in 1517 [...]. A monk and professor named Martin Luther had produced his famous Ninety-Five Theses, which called for a scholarly debate on the Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences.

[...] Embedded deep in Protestantism is the notion that individuals should develop a personal relationship with God and Jesus. To accomplish this, both men and women needed to read and interpret the sacred scriptures—the Bible—for themselves, and not rely primarily on the authority of supposed experts, priests, or institutional authorities like the Church. This principle, known as *sola scriptura*, meant that everyone needed to learn to read.

## PART I: The Evolution of Societies and Psychologies

### 1—WEIRD Psychology

[...] Unlike much of the world today, and most people who have ever lived, we WEIRD people are highly individualistic, self-obsessed, control-oriented, nonconformist, and analytical.

[...] Guilt depends on one's own standards and self-evaluation, while shame depends on societal standards and public judgment.

[...] Success and respect in [a] world [with] kin-based institutions [...] means (1) conforming to fellow in-group members, (2) deferring to authorities like elders or sages, (3) policing the behavior of those close to you (but not strangers), (4) sharply distinguishing your in-group from everyone else, and (5) promoting your network's collective success whenever possible. Further, because of the numerous obligations, responsibilities, and constraints imposed by custom, people's motivations tend not to be 'approach-oriented', aimed at starting new relationships or meeting strangers.



Instead, people become 'avoidance-oriented' to minimize their chances of appearing deviant, fomenting disharmony, or bringing shame on themselves or others.

That's one extreme: now, contrast that with the other—individualistic—end of the spectrum. Imagine the psychology needed to navigate a world with few inherited ties in which success and respect depend on (1) honing one's own special attributes; (2) attracting friends, mates, and business partners with these attributes; and then (3) sustaining relationships with them that will endure for as long as the relationship remains mutually beneficial. In this world, everyone is shopping for better relationships, which may or may not endure. People have few permanent ties and many ephemeral friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. In adapting psychologically to this world, people come to see themselves and others as independent agents defined by a unique or special set of talents (e.g., writer), interests (e.g., quilting), aspirations (e.g., making law partner), virtues (e.g., fairness), and principles (e.g., 'no one is above the law'). These can be enhanced or accentuated if a person joins a like-minded group. One's reputation with others, and with themselves (self-esteem), is shaped primarily by their own individual attributes and accomplishments, not by nourishing an enduring web of inherited ties that are governed by a complex set of relationship-specific social norms.

[...] In WEIRD societies, the pressure to cultivate traits that are consistent across contexts and relationships leads to dispositionalism—a tendency to see people's behavior as ached in personal traits that influence their actions across many contexts. For example, the fact that 'he's lazy' (a disposition) explains why he's not getting his work done. Alternatively, maybe he's sick or injured? Dispositionalism [...] makes us uncomfortable with our own inconsistencies (Cognitive Dissonance).

[...] The idea here is that, in individualistic societies, those who don't feel much guilt will struggle to cultivate dispositional attributes, live up to their personal standards, and maintain high-quality personal relationships.

[...] Impersonal pro sociality includes the inclinations

we feel toward a person who is not tied into our social network at all.

[...] In places where people trust strangers and cooperate with those they've just met, they are also more inclined to punish anyone who violates their impartial norms of fairness or honesty even if the violation isn't directly against themselves. At the same time, they are less inclined to seek revenge against those who've personally crossed them.

[...] Countries where people show more impersonal prosociality have greater national incomes (GDP per capita), greater economic productivity, more effective governments, less corruption, and faster rates of innovation.

[...] It turns out that how much people rely on others' mental states in judging them varies dramatically across societies. As usual, WEIRD people anchor the extreme end of the distribution, relying heavily on the inferences we make about the invisible states inside other people's heads and hearts.

[...] The key distinction [between 'analytic' and 'holistic' thinking] is between focusing on 'individuals' or their 'relationships'.

[...] To tackle these questions, we'll examine how the medieval Catholic Church inadvertently altered people's psychology by promoting a peculiar set of prohibitions and prescriptions about marriage and the family that dissolved the densely interconnected clans and kindreds in Western Europe into small, weak, and disparate nuclear families.

## 2—Making a Cultural Species

[...] Rituals can be thought of as ensembles of 'mind hacks' that exploit the bugs in our mental programs in subtle and diverse ways [and can be turned into social technologies].

[...] During synchronous dances, drills, or marches, our mental tracking system is flooded with false mimicry cues, suggesting that everyone likes us and wants to interact.

[...] Lorna Marshall, about Ju/'hoansi trance dances :



« Whatever their relationship, whatever the state of their feelings, whether they like or dislike each other, whether they are on good terms or bad terms with each other, they become a unit, singing, clapping, moving together in an extraordinary unison of stamping feet and clapping hands, swept along by the music. »

### 3—Clans, States, and Why You Can't Get Here from There

[...] Rites of terror: experiencing terror together forges powerful memories and deep emotional connections that bind participants for a lifetime.

[...] Early farming spread not because rational individuals prefer to farm, but because farming communities with particular institutions beat mobile hunter-gatherer populations in intergroup competition.

[...] The manipulation and accumulation of rituals powers and offices has been one of the main ways in which some clans have set themselves above others.

[...] To get a sense of how the first state-level institutions emerged, consider how chiefly clans can harness (exploit?) age-set institutions to create a well-functioning military. This begins when, in consolidating various rituals powers, a chiefly clan gains control over the male initiation rites that lie at the core of age-set institutions. With this leverage, chiefs can deploy the warrior age-grade as a tightly bonded army regiment that must obey (if they don't, they won't be initiated into the next age-grade).

### 4—The Gods Are Watching. Behave!

[...] Such embedded primes influence Christians as well, creating the Sunday effect. [...] Sunday came, and many Christians got a ritualized booster shot that elevated their charitable inclinations.

[...] The character of gods, afterlives, rituals, and universal morality common to today's world religions is unusual, the product of long-running cultural evolutionary processes.

[...] The evolution of our potent mentalizing abilities may also account for our species' tendency toward dualism—thinking of minds and bodies as separable and potentially independent. Dualistic inclinations leave us susceptible to beliefs in ghosts, spirits, and an afterlife in which your body goes in the ground and your soul departs for heaven.

[...] The gods of huntergatherers tended to be weak, whimsical, and not particularly moral.

[...] Even in rare cases when the gods did punish people for violating widely shared social norms, this usually involved an arbitrary taboo rather than something like murder, theft, adultery, or deception.

[...] These beliefs evolved not because they are accurate representations of reality but because they help communities, organizations, and societies beat their competitors.

[...] The team estimated the probability that a society scaled up in complexity in situations in which beliefs in broad supernatural punishment already existed and when they did not. The estimated probability of a historical transition to a complex chiefdom when no such punishment existed was—surprisingly—close to zero. [...] The role of religion in the scaling up of societies grow clearer.

[...] Universalizing religions included variants of three key features: contingent afterlives, free will, and moral universalism.

[...] CREDs [Credibility-Enhancing Displays] are actions that attest to people's underlying beliefs or true commitments, actions that they'd be very unlikely to perform if they didn't firmly hold their verbally stated beliefs. The clearer example of a CRED is martyrdom. Dying for our professed beliefs provides a convincing demonstration that we actually held those beliefs as deep convictions. Observers who see or hear about the actions of a martyr are more likely to acquire the martyr's expressed beliefs or deepen their own faith.

[...] Religions have also evolved to deploy CREDs to make religious leaders—priests, monks, and prophets—into more effective transmitters of the faith, through their vows of celibacy, poverty, and other demonstrations



of their deep commitments.

[...] Unlike the extravagant, emotional, and often painful rites of tribal religions, doctrinal rituals involve the performance of repetitious and often tedious devotions. Such practices require consistent and sustained attention, typically demanding some small but repeated costs in time or effort. [...] Individuals cultivate greater self-regulation by performing these routine rituals.

## PART II: The Origins of WEIRD People

### 5—WEIRD Families

[...] Most societies have long lived in extended family households, permitted polygamous marriage, encouraged cousin marriage, and tracked descent primarily through one parent.

[...] 1 in 10 marriages around the world today is to a cousin or other relative.

[...] The locals were just more inclined to believe new religious teachings when missionaries showed up with fancy technologies and seemingly miraculous skills, like reading. Complexities aside, the most important factor in explaining the Church's immense success lies in its extreme package of prohibitions, prescriptions, and preferences surrounding marriage and the family.

[...] By undermining intensive kinship, the Church's marriage and family policies gradually released individuals from the responsibilities, obligations, and benefits of their clans and houses, creating both more opportunities and greater incentives for people to devote themselves to the Church and, later, to other voluntary organizations.

[...] By promoting the notion of 'illegitimacy' [illegitimate children] and endowing itself with the power to determine who is legitimately married, the Church had seized a powerful lever of influence. These interventions made it substantially less appealing for cousins to marry or for women to become secondary wives.

[...] Neither a dim recognition of the health effects of inbreeding nor the social benefits of monogamously

marrying strangers can explain the incest taboos on affines, step siblings, and godparents (and godparents' children)—they aren't genetically related and needn't be socially close.

[...] In the 16th century, King Henry VIII turned England Protestant in response to such papal stubbornness [even after a legitimate divorce, remarriage was impossible].

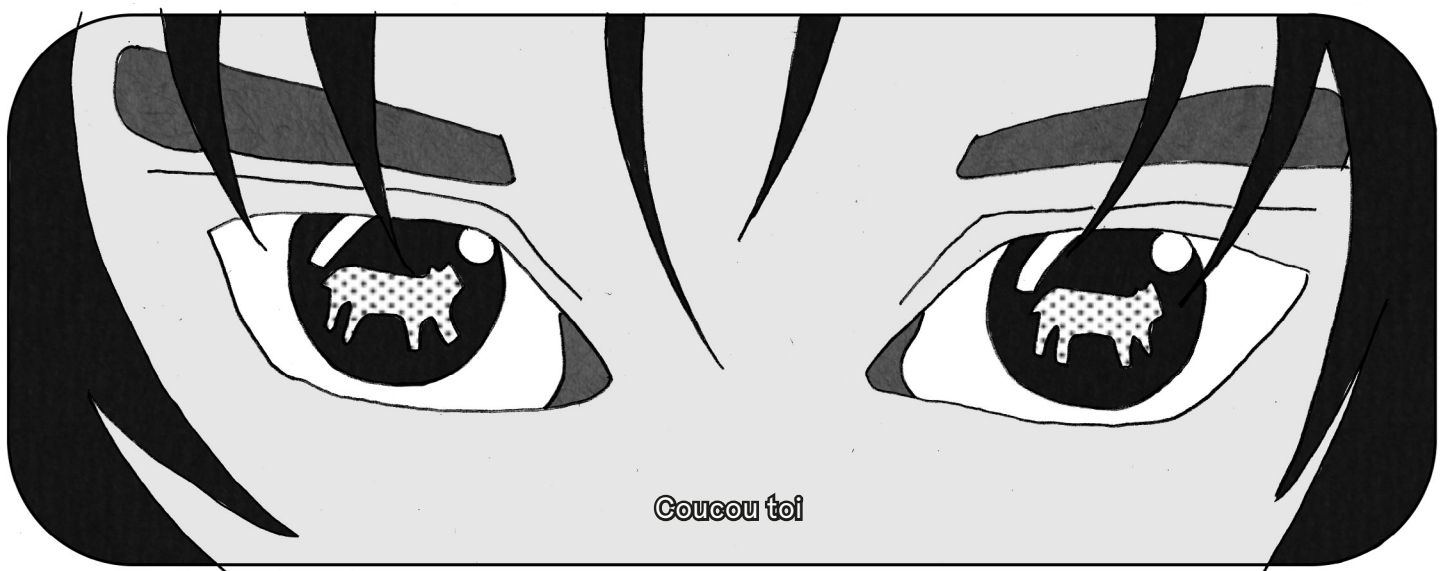
[...] In lineage—or clan-based societies, for example, lands are often corporately owned by all members of a kin-group. [...] There's no individual ownership. Often, the notion of selling clan lands is unthinkable.

[...] Molding this parable [Gospel of Matthew (19:21–26)] into a cornerstone, Ambrose erected a treasury for the Church by promulgating the idea that the wealthy could indeed get into heaven by giving their wealth to the poor, through the Church. Ideally, rich Christians should give their wealth to the poor and put themselves into God's service. But, the Church also provided a psychologically easier alternative: rich people could bequest some or all of their wealth to the poor at the time of their death.

[...] This drive for individual ownership and personal testaments would have weakened kin-based organizations, because these corporate groups would have continually lost their land and wealth to the Church.

[...] The spread of charitable donations would have both attracted new members through the persuasive power of expensive gifts—CREDs—and deepens the faith of existing members. At the same time, these bequests generated torrential revenues. The Church became immensely wealthy during the medieval period through a combination of bequests, tithes, and payments for services such as annulments and dispensations for cousin marriage.

[...] Beginning with Cluny Abbey (910 CE) and accelerating with the emergence of the Cisterian Order (1098 CE), monasteries became less like clan businesses and more like NGOs, with the democratic election of abbots, written charters, and a hierarchical franchise structure that began to balance local independence with centralized authority.



Coucou toi

## 6—Psychological Differences, Families, and the Church

[...] In the Asch Conformity Task, for example, people may feel shame when they contradict their peers in public or they may feel guilt for caving in to peer pressure and giving the incorrect answer.

[...] Guilt seems to be the primary emotional-control mechanism in societies lacking intensive kinship.

[...] All known societies depend on some form of sanctioning to sustain social norms. In kin-based institutions, norm-violators are typically punished either by their own family members or by traditional authorities, such as clan elders.

[...] By contrast, in societies with weak kinship, strangers can reprimand each other as individuals, point out violations, and even call the police, if necessary, without risking an honor-driven retaliation from the norm-violator's entire extended family.

[...] Intensive kin-based institutions bind communities together by intertwining individuals in webs of shared identity, communal ownership, collective shame, and corporate responsibility. In this world, scrutinizing a person's intentions or other mental states may be less relevant or even counterproductive. In predicting people's behavior, many contexts are so constrained by social norms and the watching eyes of others that intuiting people's personal beliefs or intentions won't help very much. Instead, it's better to know their social relationships, allies, debts, and obligations. Similarly, in making moral or criminal judgments, the importance of intentions depends on the relationship among the parties involved.

[...] National populations that collectively experienced longer durations under the Western Church tend to be (A) less tightly bound by norms, (B) less conformist, (C) less enamored with tradition, (D) more individualistic, (E) less distrustful of strangers, (F) stronger on universalistic morality, (G) more cooperative in new groups with strangers, (H) more responsive to third-party punishment (greater contributions in the PGG with punishment), (I) more inclined to voluntarily donate blood,

(J) more impersonally honest (toward faceless institutions), (K) less inclined to accumulate parking tickets under diplomatic immunity, and (L) more analytically minded.

## 7—Europe and Asia

[...] Italians from provinces with more cousin marriage (1) use fewer checks, instead favoring cash; (2) keep more of their wealth in cash instead of putting it into banks, stocks, etc.; and (3) take more loans from family and friends than from banks.

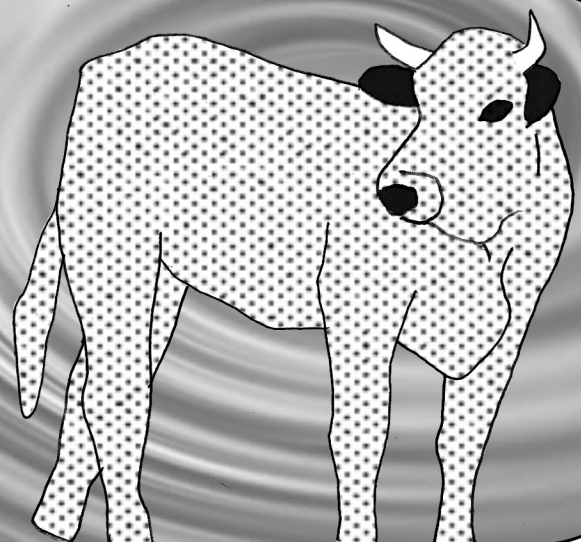
[...] The greater the rate of cousin marriage in a province, the higher the rates of corruption and Mafia activity. [...] The strength of in-group loyalty and the power of nepotism in societies with intensive kinship create precisely the kind of psychology and social relations that foster graft and fuel organized crime. These patterns have developed despite Italy's formal governing and educational institutions, which are like those in other Western European countries.

[...] The consistent and robust impact of historical kinship intensity on the psychology of second-generation immigrants reveals that an important component of these psychological effects is transmitted from one generation to the next, and not simply due to people's direct exposure to poor governments, social safety nets, particular climates, endemic diseases, or oppression by the native population in the immigrant's new home.

## 8—WEIRD Monogamy

[...] I'll make the case that monogamous marriage norms—which push upstream against our polygynous biases and the strong preferences of elite men—create a range of social and psychological effects that give the societies that possess them a big edge in competition against other groups.

[...] Polygynous marriage tends to generate a large pool of low-status unmarried men with few prospects for marriage or even sex. Responding to this situation,



men's psychology shifts in ways that spark fiercer male-male competition and, under many conditions, foment greater violence and more crime. [...] In polygynous societies, the pull to invest in seeking additional wives over investing in one's current wife and her children is just much more greater than in monogamous societies.

[...] As in birds, this line of research suggests that humans possess a physiological system that regulates men's testosterone, along with other aspects of our psychology, by relying on cues related to mating opportunities, parenting demands, and status competition. When necessary, T levels rise to prepare males to compete for status and mates. But, when it's time to build nests and nurture offspring, T levels decline. Across human societies, fathers with lower testosterone care more for their infants and are better attuned to their cries. WEIRD monogamy norms manipulate these dials by reducing the mating opportunities available to married men and by bringing them into greater contact with their children, both of which lower their testosterone levels.

Aggregating these effects across an entire population, we can begin to see how monogamous norms suppress testosterone at a societal level. By prohibiting higher-status men from monopolizing potential wives, monogamous norms allow many more lower-status men to both get married (pair-bond) and father children. Thus WEIRD marital norms ensure that a higher percentage of men will experience the low-T that attends both monogamous marriage and caring for children. By contrast, in polygynous societies, many more men will remain in the 'Still Unmarried' category throughout their lives. Thus, in polygynous societies, a higher percentage of men never experience the testosterone declines observed in men from monogamous societies. So, like polygynous birds, unmarried men in polygynous societies relatively higher levels of testosterone across their life span.

[...] The key difference between humans and birds is that in our species cultural evolution can generate so-

cial norms that exploit these built-in hormonal responses for its own end.

[...] By suppressing testosterone levels, monogamous marriage may be giving men's prefrontal cortices more control, thereby promoting greater self-regulation and self-discipline based on learned standards (such as impersonal norms about trust).

These kinds of experiments confirm that testosterone can and does sometimes influence men's (1) hair-trigger response to challenges, (2) taste for revenge, (3) trust in others, (4) capacity for teamwork, and (5) financial risk-taking.

[...] Moreover, keep in mind that testosterone is not about taking risks, behaving impatiently, acting aggressively, or distrusting people per se. It's about assessing and motivating the most effective actions for climbing the status ladder.

[...] At the societal level, problems arise when the most viable, or only, road to higher status (and mating) demands that status seekers lie, cheat, steal, and kill to get up the ladder.

### PART III: New Institutions, New Psychologies

#### 9—Of Commerce and Cooperation

[...] Summarizing our progress: the breakdown of intensive kin-based institutions opened the door to urbanization and the formation of free cities and charter towns, which began developing greater self-governance. Often dominated by merchants, urban growth generated rising levels of market integration and—we can infer—higher levels of impersonal trust, fairness, and cooperation. While these psychological and social changes were occurring, people began to ponder notions of individual rights, personal freedoms, the rule of law, and the protection of private property.

#### 10—Domesticating the Competition

[...] Here's a surprising claim: greater competition among voluntary associations, be they charter towns,



universities, guilds, churches, monasteries, or modern firms, can raise people's trust, fairness, and cooperation toward strangers. Historically, the proliferation of voluntary associations in Europe, from the High Middle Ages onward, led to greater and more enduring intergroup competition.

[...] Some religious groups offer a trifecta: (1) interdependent networks that provide mutual aid, (2) shared commitments to sacred norms, and (3) rituals and supernatural beliefs that help manage existential anxiety and uncertainty. In a world filled with war and other disasters, intergroup competition favors the spread of religious packages that furnish this trifecta because these religions will win in competition with groups lacking these crucial qualities (not because these religions are 'true').

[...] Slowly, through this long and unusual selective process, territorial states eventually coalesced, constitutions (charters) were written at the national level, and larger-scale democratic experiments began.

[...] Endemic war [...] shocked people's psychology and thereby accelerated cultural evolution along a new pathway, one centered on individuals, voluntary associations, and impersonal interactions.

[...] I'm calling this form of intergroup competition (or interfere competition) 'domesticated', because cultural evolution appears to have tamed the 'wild' form of intergroup conflict (war), which is often deadly, and built it into modern institutions in ways that can harness its social and psychological effects.

#### 11—Market Mentalities

[...] Urbanites in more individualistic countries tend to walk faster than those in less individualistic countries.

[...] Facing greater impersonal competition, artisans, merchants, monks, and magistrates all aimed to cultivate reputations for punctuality, self-discipline, and precision.

[...] As with many other temporal systems, prayer times are based on the sun's position, so they vary seasonally and geographically. [...] This means that the periods

between calls to prayer throughout the day do not provide a uniform temporal structure—they don't organize the day or people's minds like the clock time.

[...] Clocks only keep you on schedule if you've internalized a devotion to clock time—it's about your mind, not your watch.

[...] Pierre Bourdieu: « The profound feelings of dependence and solidarity...foster in the Kabyle peasant an attitude of submission and of nonchalant indifference to the passage of time which no one dreams of mastering, using up or saving... All the acts of life are free from the limitations of the timetable, even sleep, even work which ignores all obsession with productivity and yields. Haste is seen as a lack of decorum combined with diabolical ambition. »

[...] The combination of historical and cross-cultural data suggests that the rise of urbanization, impersonal markets, and commercial practices involving things like hourly wages probably increased the time that Europeans spent working.

[...] In an open market for employees, friends, spouses, and business partners, people want to hire, befriend, marry, and associate with those who can achieve long-term goals, invest now for future payoffs, avoid tentation, and simply show up on time. By contrast, in a world governed by inherited and enduring relationships, people can't just pick whom they want to hire, marry, or work with. They need to consider group loyalty and select partners with whom they have dense social interconnections. This is because it's the embeddedness rather than their partner's or employee's disposition that people rely on.

[...] Wage labor often requires individuals to work now and get paid days or weeks later, so this kind of payment scheme is effectively a training regime that demands work now for delayed rewards. And, as with other exchanges in impersonal markets, wage labor also often requires the trust in strangers that accompanies market norms.

[...] WEIRD people get psychologically attached to stuff they personally own in ways that make them



behave in seemingly irrational ways—this emotional attachment is the endowment effect. Something about personally owning a thing seems to make it more valuable.

[...] This is striking: hunter-gatherers with little market integration show no endowment effect, but when part of this population is exposed to impersonal markets, they begin irrationally holding on to their initial endowments.

[...] I suspect that impersonal markets cultivate an emphasis on personal attributes, unique abilities, and individual ownership. Such markets can also foster conspicuous consumption (like fancy pocket watches), with people using consumer goods to signal their personal qualities.

[...] In short, among the Hadza, one just can't get too attached to one's stuff, because soon it will be someone else's stuff. Such institutions should suppress any inclination toward an endowment effect.

#### PART IV: Birthing the Modern World

##### 12—Law, Science, and Religion

[...] Troubled by contradictions, the more analytically minded seek out higher—or lower—level categories or distinctions to 'resolve' them. By contrast, holistically oriented thinkers either don't see contradictions or embrace them. In Europe, analytical approaches gradually came to be thought of as superior to more holistic approaches. That is, they became normatively correct and highly valued.

[...] In many societies, law is about restoring harmony and maintaining the peace, not, as it is for more analytical thinkers, about defending individual rights or making sure that abstract principles of 'justice' are served.

[...] Our commonsensical inclination to associate inventions with their inventors has been historically and cross-culturally rare.

[...] Well before any patent laws, people began adopting the notion that it was wrong to copy and promulgate others' manuscripts, mathematical proofs, or even

ideas without giving them credit.

[...] The notion that something as immaterial as an idea, song, or concept could be individually owned began to make intuitive sense.

[...] In principle, the only thing Protestants defer is scripture. [...] Salvation—a contingent afterlife—is generally achieved based on people's own internal mental states—their faith. Rituals and good deeds play little or no role. Intentions and beliefs, or what's in a person's heart, are most important. Thinking about murder, theft, or adultery is often a sin in and of itself. Leading denominations also emphasize that all people have a calling—a freely chosen occupation or vacation—that uniquely fits their special attributes and endowments. Working hard to successfully pursue one's calling with diligence, patience, and self-discipline is doing God's work.

[...] [In the Church], religious elders, who came to be called 'father' or 'papa' (pope), possessed privileged access to divine truths and special powers, including the power to grant (channel) God's forgiveness.

[...] By driving widespread literacy, Protestantism thickened people's corpus calls, sharpened their verbal memories, and eroded their facial recognition abilities.

[...] After committing a sin, Catholics who experience guilt can fix things right by confessing their sin to a priest and doing Penance. Having completed their Penance, Catholics are forgiven and can merge back on the fast track to heaven (or so they think). For Protestant, in contrast, there's no straightforward route from sin to confession, penance, and forgiveness. Instead, doing something sinful—which includes things like thinking about forbidden sex—seems to evoke a compensatory response that involves doing more 'good stuff'. Since many Protestants see their occupations as divine callings, or simply see productive work as purifying, their compensatory response is often to work harder.

[...] Besides encouraging literacy, schooling, democracy, and economic growth, Protestantism has another important effect. It can open people up to suicide. The journey to God in these most individualistic of faiths is ultimately a solo act that can leave people feeling



isolated and alone. Max Weber noted that Protestantism can induce 'a feeling of unprecedented loneliness'.

[...] John Locke, David Hume, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Thomas Paine, and Adam Smith: this flotsam of WEIRD ideas.

[...] Non-Western political theories bestowed descent, or divine commands, not individual rights. But, the WEIRDer your psychology, the less inclined you'll be to focus on relational ties, and the more motivated you'll be to start making up invisible properties, assigning them to individuals, and using them to justify universally applicable laws.

### 13—Escape Velocity

[...] Most innovations are really just novel recombinations of existing ideas, techniques, or approaches.; a tool is taken from one domain and applied in another.

[...] Necessity is certainly not the mother of invention. Over the course of human history, people often ignored life-saving inventions for years, sometimes only realizing how much they needed an invention long after its arrival (e.g., penicillin, nitrous oxide, the wheel).

[...] Every time a king, guild, university, or religious community cracked down on some economically productive individuals or innovative groups, it lost in competition to its more tolerant and open counterparts.

[...] U.S. counties that took in more immigrants—even when compelled to by circumstances—were subsequently more innovative, educated, and prosperous.

[...] Individuals who see the world as a zero-sum are unlikely to waste time working to improve a tool, technology, or process because they implicitly believe that any productivity gains they might achieve will be at the expense of someone else and others will think badly of them.

### 14—The Dark Matter of History

[...] The centrality of cultural change meant that, generation after generation, young learners had to adapt

and calibrate their minds and bodies to an ever-shifting landscape of sharing norms, food taboos, gender roles, technical demands (e.g., projectile weapons and underwater foraging), and grammatical conventions. At the same time, cultural evolution has favored an arsenal of mind hacks, including rituals, socialization practices (e.g., bedtime stories), and games, that mold people's psychology in ways that allow them to more effectively navigate their culturally-constructed worlds.

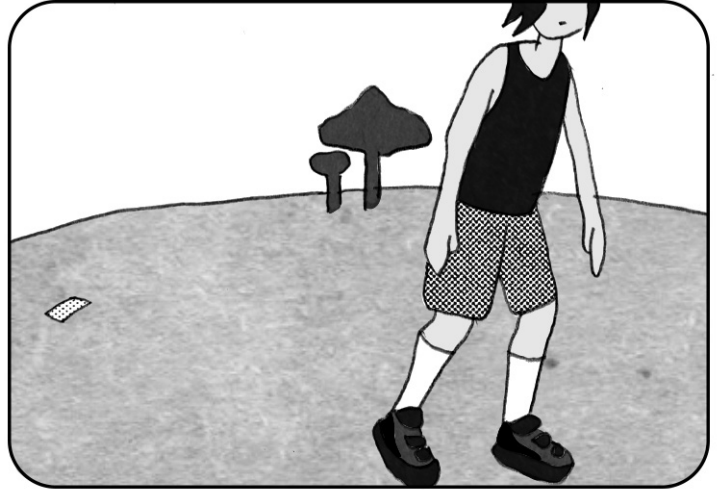
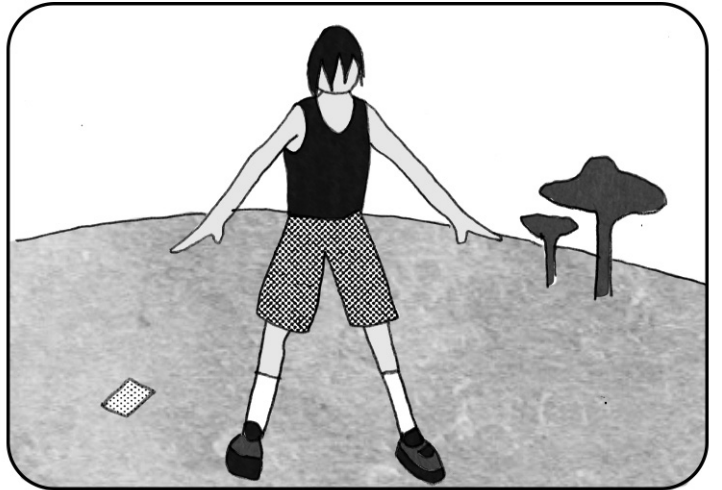
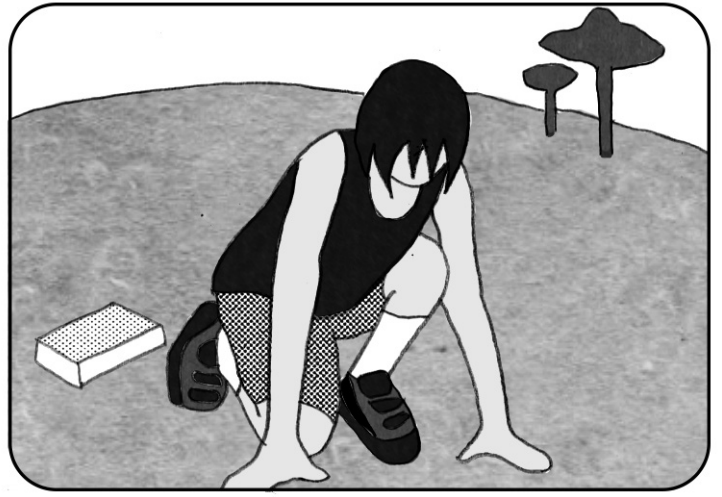
[...] The elimination of polygynous marriage and the tightening of constraints on male sexuality may also have inhibited male status-seeking and competition, which would have suppressed zero-sum thinking, impatience, and risk-seeking.

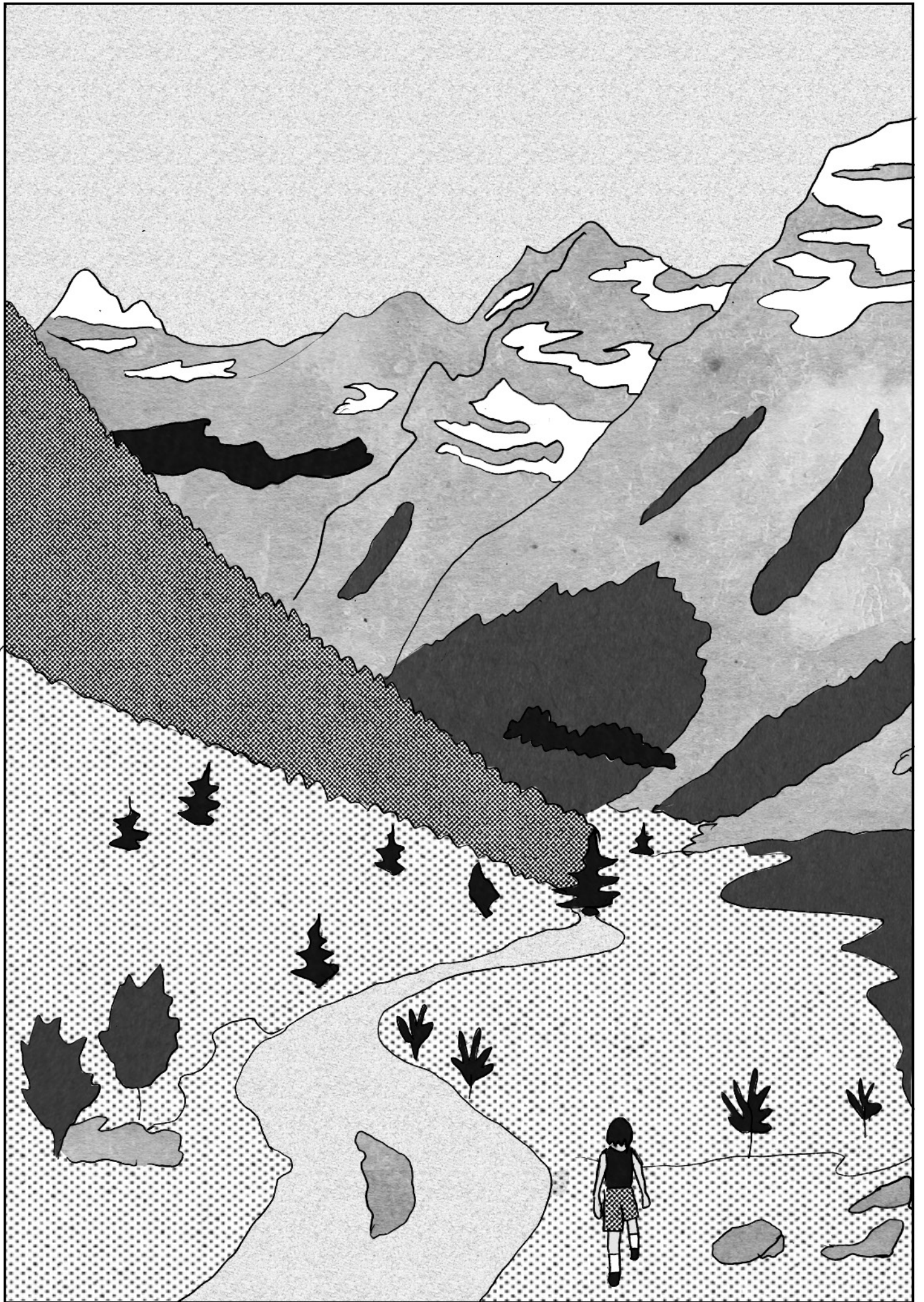
[...] By producing a growing division of labor, within which an expanding class of individuals could select their occupations and social niches, these new social environments may have fostered more differentiated personality profiles—expanding eventually into the WEIRD-5—and strengthened people's inclinations to think in dispositional ways about other individuals and groups.

[...] While some researchers have sought to argue that rising wealth and greater material security can directly shift some aspects of people's psychology—such as patience or trust—many aspects of psychology that I've described here have never been associated with affluence. For example, no one has explained or shown that greater wealth causes people to think more analytically, emphasize intentions in making moral judgments, or experience guilt over shame.

[...] You can't truly understand psychology without considering how the minds of populations have been shaped by cultural evolution.







# L'AMÉRIQUE AU JOUR LE JOUR

1947

*Simone de Beauvoir*

[...] (intro) L'ampleur de l'entreprise autobiographique trouve sa justification, son sens dans une contradiction essentielle à l'écrivain ; choisir lui fut toujours impossible entre le bonheur de vivre et la nécessité d'écrire ; d'une part la splendeur contingente, de l'autre la rigueur salvatrice. Faire de sa propre existence l'objet de son écriture, c'était en partie sortir de ce dilemme.

[...] Mais aujourd'hui, c'est différent : il me semble que je vais sortir de ma vie ; je ne sais si ce sera à travers la colère ou l'espoir, mais quelque chose va se dévoiler, un monde si plein, si riche et si imprévu que je connaîtrai l'extraordinaire aventure de devenir moi-même une autre.

[...] Je marche dans les rues non tracées pour moi, où ma vie n'a pas encore dessiné d'ornière, où ne rode aucune odeur du passé. Personne ici ne se soucie de ma présence, je suis encore un fantôme et je me glisse dans la ville sans rien en déranger.

[...] Ce qui me déconcerte c'est que ces décors de studio auxquels je n'avais jamais cru soudain soient vrais.

[...] Il fait un beau soleil et je veux me promener le long de l'East River. Mais la drive, cette large chaussée surélevée qui longe la rivière, est réservée aux autos. J'essaie de tricher, et j'avance, collée au mur. Mais c'est difficile de tricher en Amérique ; les engrenages sont précis, ils servent l'homme à condition que celui-ci s'y emboîte docilement ; les voitures lancées à 60 miles sur cette espèce d'autostrade me frôlent dangereusement.

[...] Je comprends ce que je suis venue chercher : cette plénitude qu'on ne connaît guère que dans l'enfance

ou dans la première jeunesse lorsqu'on est aboli au profit d'autre chose que soi. Bien sûr, dans d'autres voyages j'ai goûté cette joie, cette certitude, mais elle était fugace. Paris demeurerait pour moi, en Grèce, en Italie, en Espagne, en Afrique, le cœur du monde ; je n'avais jamais tout à fait quitté Paris, je restais installée en moi-même.

[...] Je suis leurs traces. Je n'ai aucun passé à moi et j'emprunte le leur.

[...] Je n'ai rien à dire encore ; je ne veux qu'écouter. Je pense seulement que l'Amérique est un monde et qu'on ne peut pas plus accepter ou refuser un monde qu'accepter ou refuser le monde.

[...] Et pourquoi choisir un dentifrice plutôt qu'un autre ? Il y a dans cette profusion inutile un arrière-goût de mystification. Voici mille possibilités ouvertes : mais c'est la même. Mille choix permis : mais tous équivalents. Ainsi le citoyen américain pourra consommer sa liberté à l'intérieur de la vie qui lui est imposée sans s'apercevoir que cette vie même n'est pas libre.

[...] L'Américain moyen, si soucieux d'être en accord avec le monde et lui-même, sait qu'au-delà de ces frontières il prend une figure odieuse d'opresseur, d'ennemi : c'est ce visage qui lui fait peur. Il se sent haï, il se sent haïssable : cette écharde dans son cœur conciliant est plus insupportable qu'un danger extérieur défini. [...] Et tous les blancs qui n'ont pas le courage de vouloir la fraternité essaient de nier cette déchirure au sein de leur ville même, ils essaient de nier Harlem, de l'oublier ; ce n'est pas une menace pour l'avenir, c'est au présent une blessure ; c'est une cité maudite, la cité où ils sont maudits : c'est eux-mêmes qu'ils ont peur de rencontrer au coin des rues. Et parce que je suis blanche, quoi que je pense, et dise, et fasse, cette malédiction pèse aussi sur moi. Je n'ose pas sourire aux enfants dans les squares, je ne me sens pas le droit de flâner dans les rues où la couleur de mes yeux signifie injustice, arrogance et haine.

[...] Vieil argument qu'on trouve dans la bouche des patrons capitalistes, des colons : ce sont toujours les ouvriers, les indigènes qui sont les plus libres et les plus heureux. En effet, l'opprimé échappe au pouvoir des



idoles que s'est choisi l'opresseur : ce n'est pas là un privilège qui suffise à justifier l'oppression. [...] J'essaie de lui expliquer qu'il confond pensée et érudition...

[...] Et pendant qu'ils organisent des collectes en faveur de l'enfant malade ou qu'ils envoient des cartes de félicitations aux heureux époux, les gens ont à peu de frais l'impression de participer activement à la vie du pays : ils abandonnent d'autant plus volontiers aux mains de spécialistes les problèmes de la liberté du travail, de la lutte contre les Rouges, de l'intervention dans les affaires d'Europe.

[...] Quand on se sent désadapté on peut être tenté de mettre le monde en question : cette attitude révolutionnaire est dangereuse pour la société qu'elle menace, angoissante pour l'individu qui se trouve en face de décisions à prendre, de risques, de responsabilités. On admettra a priori que c'est le désadapté qui est dans son tort ; et lui-même est tout heureux de considérer son désarroi comme une maladie aussi sûrement guérissable qu'un rhume de cerveau.

[...] S'adapter, ici, c'est en vérité se démettre de soi-même ; être heureux, c'est savoir s'aveugler avec entêtement. Beaucoup de choses seraient changées chez les Américains s'ils voulaient bien admettre qu'il y a du malheur sur terre et que le malheur n'est pas a priori un crime.

[...] L'arrogance des Américains n'est pas volonté de puissance : c'est volonté d'imposer le Bien ; le miracle c'est que la clef du Paradis est entre leurs mains.

[...] Si les Américains ont si peu le sens des nuances, ce n'est pas qu'ils soient incapables de les saisir : la réalité américaine est elle-même suffisamment nuancée ; c'est qu'ils en seraient gênés. Admettre la nuance, c'est admettre l'ambiguïté du jugement, la contestation, l'hésitation : devant des situations complexes, il faut penser. Ils souhaitent se conduire dans la vie par géométrie, non par sagesse : la géométrie s'apprend tandis que la sagesse s'invente, et seule la première donne les reposantes certitudes nécessaires à un homme consciencieux. Aussi choisissent-ils de croire à un monde géométrique, où les perpendiculaires se contredisent

exactement, comme dans leurs buildings et dans leurs rues.

[...] Il ne me sera jamais promis rien d'autre que moi-même, et moi-même ce n'est rien si je n'ai rien à faire de moi.

[...] Ce qui me frappe, ce qui me désole, c'est qu'ils [les étudiant·e·s d'Oberlin] soient aussi apathiques sans être aveugles ni inconscients. Ils connaissent, ils réprouvent l'oppression de treize millions de noirs, la terrible misère du Sud, la misère presque aussi désespérée qui souille les grandes villes. Ils assistent à la montée chaque jour plus menaçante du racisme, de la réaction : à la naissance d'un fascisme. Ils savent quelle est la responsabilité de leur pays dans l'avenir du monde. Mais eux-mêmes ne se sentent responsables de rien, parce qu'ils ne croient pas pouvoir rien faire en ce monde. À vingt ans, ils sont convaincus que leur pensée est vaine, leur bonne volonté inefficace : « L'Amérique est un corps trop vaste, trop lourd pour qu'un individu puisse songer à la remuer. » Et je me formule ce soir ce que je pense depuis des jours. En Amérique, l'individu n'est rien. Il fait l'objet d'un culte abstrait ; en le persuadant de sa valeur individuelle, on arrête en lui l'éveil d'un esprit collectif ; mais ainsi réduit à lui-même, on lui ôte tout pouvoir concret. Sans espoir collectif, sans audace personnelle, que peut faire l'individu ? Se soumettre ou alors, si par un hasard très rare cette soumission lui est odieuse, s'en aller.

[...] Je me rappelle que le premier soir de mon séjour à New York un Français m'a demandé de ne rien écrire sur la question noire, sous prétexte qu'en trois mois je ne pouvais rien comprendre. Je conviens que mon expérience est mince pour un si grand sujet ; ce serait, cependant, la dénaturer que de ne pas parler d'un ensemble de faits auxquels si souvent je me suis heurtée et qui ont une si grande importance dans la vie américaine.

[...] Le public se tait à la fin de la séance quand sur un fil de fer, à 30 mètres au-dessus du sol, un homme entreprend de sauter à la corde. Il n'y a pas de filet et les spectateurs sont haletants. Quant à moi je trouve cette angoisse insupportable et je m'indigne que les filets ne soient, ni en France, ni en Amérique, obligatoires. Je sais bien que c'est le risque de mort qui donne à cet



exercice la vérité d'un événement ; quelque chose se passe, pour de bon ; c'est là ce que veut l'acrobate, ce qui fascine le public et me fascine. Seule la présence de la mort peut donner à un moment de la vie une si poignante authenticité. Mais qui est digne ici d'une pareille vérité ? Elle se propose dans un instant voué aux divertissements les plus faciles et qui est lui-même sans vérité. Ce qui permet de défendre les courses de taureaux c'est leur caractère sacré ; l'assistance y participe avec gravité et le sang versé par l'animal justifie, exige même que le sang de son meurtrier puisse aussi couler. Mais ici l'acrobate n'a pas d'adversaire vivant, il pourrait défier la pesanteur à 2 mètres du sol sans mettre en jeu sa propre vie : et puisqu'il n'y a personne en face de lui qui le menace, que les lois de la physique ne le tueront pas, c'est le public même qui apparaît comme assassin. Cependant il n'assume aucunement ce rôle : il regarde, c'est tout. Quand c'est un spectacle réel et non imaginaire qui est donné à voir, sa relation avec le spectateur devient un difficile problème ; ce qui est évidemment choquant ici c'est que la mort soit invitée pour des raisons purement spectaculaires ; son tragique s'en trouve galvaudé. L'émotion n'est pas suscitée par une situation en elle-même dramatique comme celle d'un homme et d'un fauve qui s'affrontent ; on rend dramatique la situation afin de susciter l'émotion. C'est en tant qu'il est destiné à être contemplé dans un cirque que cet exercice acrobatique a été pimenté d'un danger mortel : il en résulte une contestation de sa vérité qui dégrade la vérité de la mort même et qui place l'argent plus haut que la vie dans la hiérarchie des valeurs. D'ailleurs, dans une corrida, la mort du torero n'est qu'une vague possibilité, nécessaire à la beauté du drame mais perdue dans un lointain horizon ; l'assistance n'en est pas hantée ; ici, à chaque seconde, l'équilibriste est précipité du haut des cintres et miraculeusement ressuscité ; ce qui émeut, ce n'est pas que son pied touche le fil de fer mais qu'il ne l'ait pas manqué. C'est une réussite négative ; tandis qu'un numéro de jongleur charme par lui-même, cet exercice n'est qu'une longue horreur conjurée.

[...] Il y a deux principes qu'on invoque aujourd'hui successivement et ensemble, glissant de l'un à l'autre de

manière à prendre l'individu dans un piège fatal : « L'intérêt de chacun prime celui de tous », déclare-t-on ; et en même temps on affirme : « Chacun est libre, charbonnier est maître chez soi. » Qu'un citoyen soit considéré comme « rouge » on le chasse des services gouvernementaux au nom de l'intérêt général ; mais d'autre part, les administrations privées refuseront de l'employer : « C'est leur droit, chacun est libre. » Et le citoyen se retrouve libre lui aussi d'être rouge et de mourir de faim. Au nom du premier principe on restreint le droit de grève, on ruine les unions ouvrières ; au nom du second, on autorise à l'égard de minorités raciales ou de partis politiques toutes espèces de brimades privées. Et la triste vérité c'est que l'« intérêt général » ne se trouve plus être que celui d'une catégorie « privée » de citoyens, ceux qui profitent du régime et qui veulent continuer d'en profiter. Et les autres ne sont libres que dans la mesure où ils se soumettent, ce qui est la plus abstraite des libertés.

[...] L'adolescence est précisément le passage entre le monde donné de l'enfance et l'existence d'homme où tout est à fonder et à conquérir, passage qui souvent ne s'effectue qu'à travers une crise difficile. Je crois que la majorité des adolescents d'Amérique ne l'effectuent pas ; et c'est ce qui donne une certaine vérité au slogan d'ailleurs si superficiel : « Les Américains sont de grands enfants. » Leur drame est précisément qu'ils ne sont pas des enfants, qu'ils ont des responsabilités d'homme, une existence d'homme, mais qu'ils continuent à s'accrocher à un univers opaque, tout fait, comme celui de l'enfance.

[...] « Mais si ce sont de grands artistes, ils arrivent et ils gagnent de l'argent », dit B. « Supposons qu'ils n'arrivent pas. » « Alors, ce ne sont pas de grands artistes. » Il y a dans ce raisonnement quelque chose d'hégélien : le réel est ce qui fait la preuve de sa réalité, c'est une des idées américaines que je ne songe pas à récuser ; le génie se confond avec l'expression qu'il se donne : mais est-ce l'oeuvre faite ou l'argent gagné qui l'exprime ? C'est ici que nous ne sommes plus d'accord. On en revient toujours à ce paradoxe qu'épris de réalité concrète l'Américain n'en reconnaît cependant d'autre manifestation que ce signe tout abstrait : l'argent. Les autres



valeurs sont trop difficiles à apprécier : qu'un homme ait du talent tant que le succès n'en a pas décidé, c'est une angoissante responsabilité que d'en juger ; personne ne veut prendre le risque ; chacun s'en décharge sur tous.

[...] Il apprend à chercher hors de lui, chez autrui, le modèle de ses conduites ; de là vient ce qu'on appelle le conformisme américain : en fait, les individus sont aussi différents, aussi séparés dans le nouveau monde que dans l'ancien mais ils trouvent plus facilement le moyen de fuir leur singularité et d'éviter le sentiment du « délaissement originel » ; ou peut-être, ne le trouvent-ils pas, mais du moins ils le cherchent avec plus d'entêtement. Ils connaissent, comme tout le monde, l'ennui, l'insatisfaction, le doute ; mais ils essaient de rationaliser leur désarroi en posant leurs « problèmes » ; au lieu de prendre appui sur leur solitude, d'essayer de la dépasser en l'approfondissant, ils s'accrochent obstinément au donné ; la source des valeurs et de la vérité, ils la voient dans les choses, non en eux ; leur propre présence n'est qu'un hasard auquel ils ne veulent pas attacher d'importance. C'est pourquoi ils s'intéressent au résultat brut, non au mouvement de l'esprit qui l'engendre, tels les étudiants du professeur T. qui refusaient la démonstration d'une formule. De même ils croient pouvoir isoler la partie du tout comme en témoigne le parti pris de spécialisation qu'on rencontre dans les techniques, les sciences, la culture. En termes hégéliens, on peut dire que la négation du sujet conduit au triomphe de l'entendement sur l'Esprit, c'est-à-dire au triomphe de l'abstraction. Et c'est pourquoi dans ce pays qui paraît si décidément tourné vers le concret le mot d'abstrac-

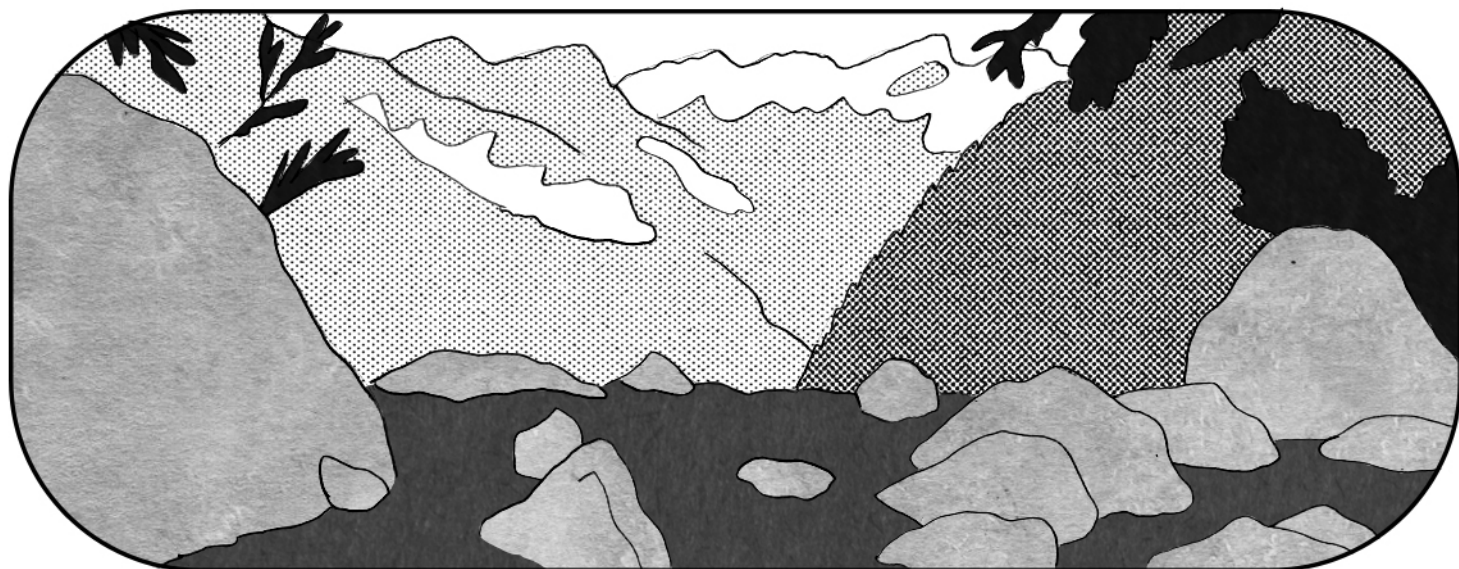
tion m'est venu si souvent aux lèvres ; l'objet, érigé en idole, perd sa vérité humaine et devient un abstrait car la réalité concrète est celle qui enveloppe à la fois un objet et un sujet. C'est là le paradoxe de tous les positivistes, de tous les pseudo-réalistes qui se détournent de l'homme pour affirmer la chose : ils manquent la chose elle-même et n'atteignent que des concepts.

[...] Du fait qu'ils refusent la durée, ils refusent aussi la qualité ; ce n'est pas seulement pour des raisons économiques qu'il n'y a aucun « artisanat » en Amérique ; même dans les loisirs de la vie domestique on ne cherche pas de réussite qualitative : on fait cuire des aliments, mûrir des fruits le plus vite possible ; dans tous les domaines il faut se hâter de peur que le résultat ne soit déjà périmé au moment où il sera atteint.

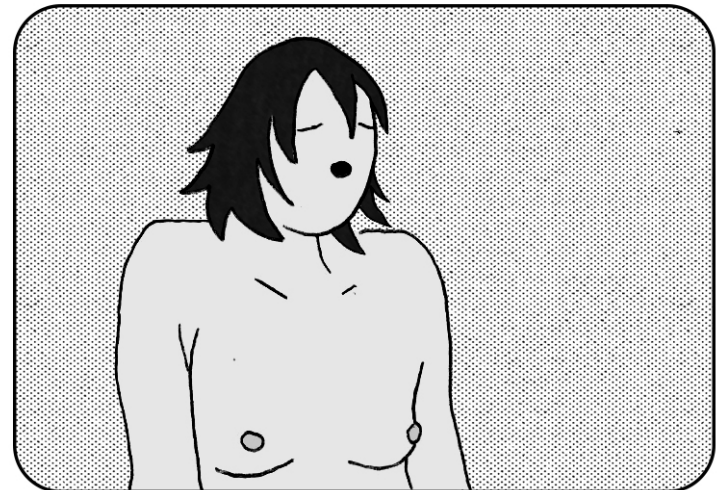
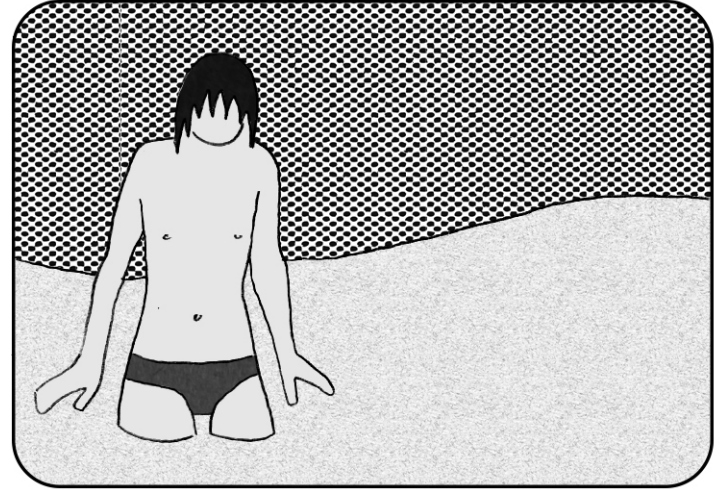
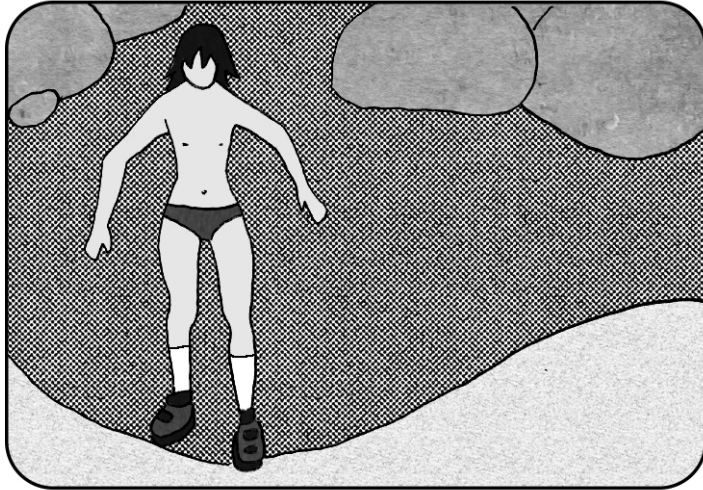
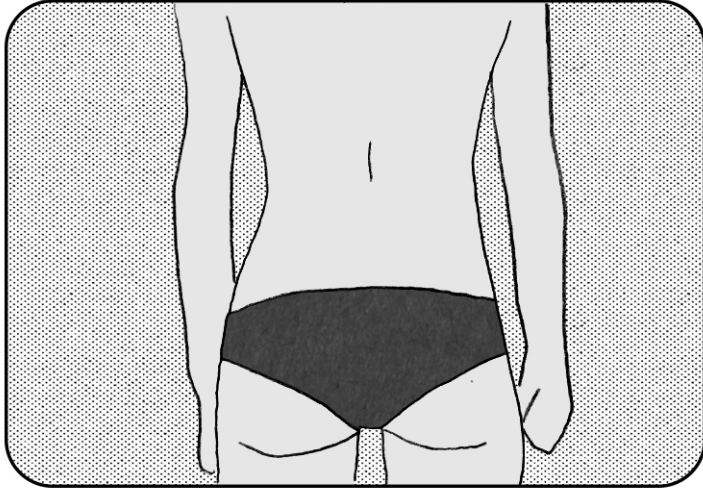
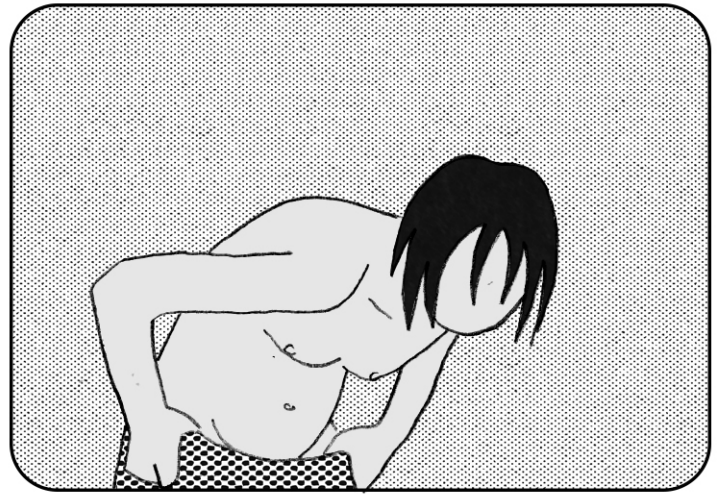
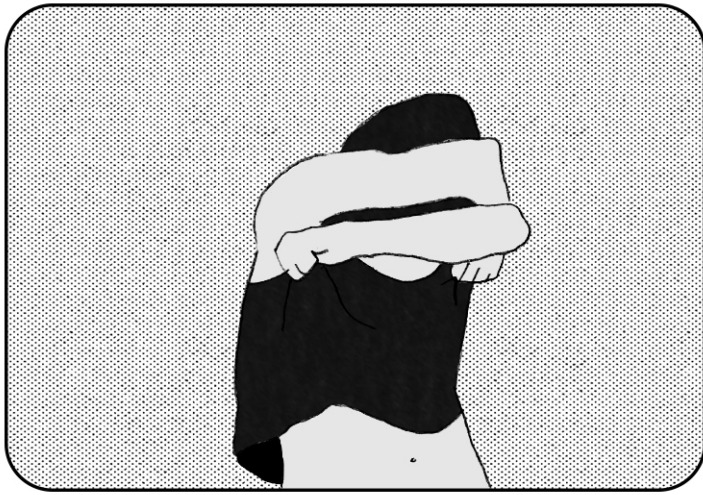
[...] Mais pour autant qu'on peut se permettre des généralisations, c'est la grande majorité qui est victime de cette machinerie : la fuite de l'ennui et de la solitude les enferme dans la solitude et l'ennui ; pour avoir voulu se perdre dans le monde, ils ont perdu toute prise sur lui.

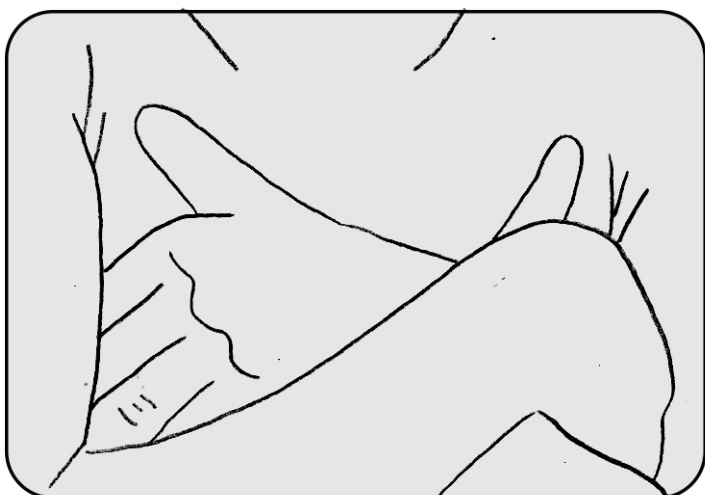
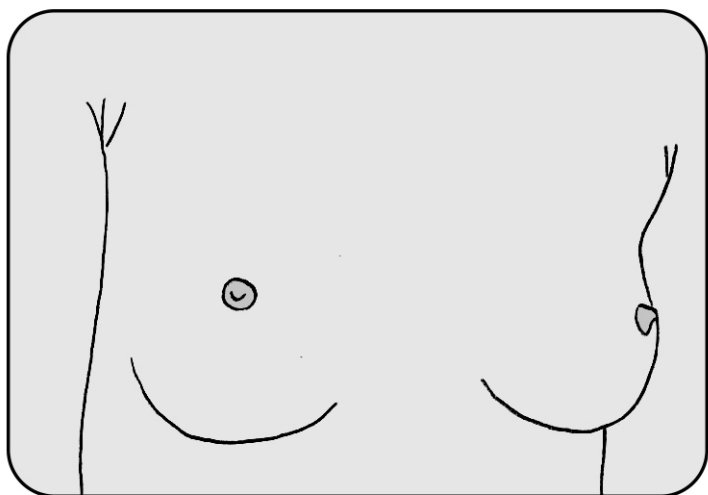
[...] On répugne par exemple, même chez les esprits de bonne volonté, à poser clairement le conflit actuel entre justice et liberté et la nécessité d'inventer un compromis entre ces deux idées ; on aime mieux nier l'injustice et le manque de liberté. Que la complexité des facteurs en présence crée des problèmes qui dépassent toutes solutions vertueuses, on ne veut pas l'admettre.

[...] Aimer l'Amérique, ne pas l'aimer : ces mots n'ont pas de sens. Elle est un champ de bataille et on ne peut que se passionner pour le combat qu'elle livre en elle-même et dont l'enjeu récuse toute mesure.







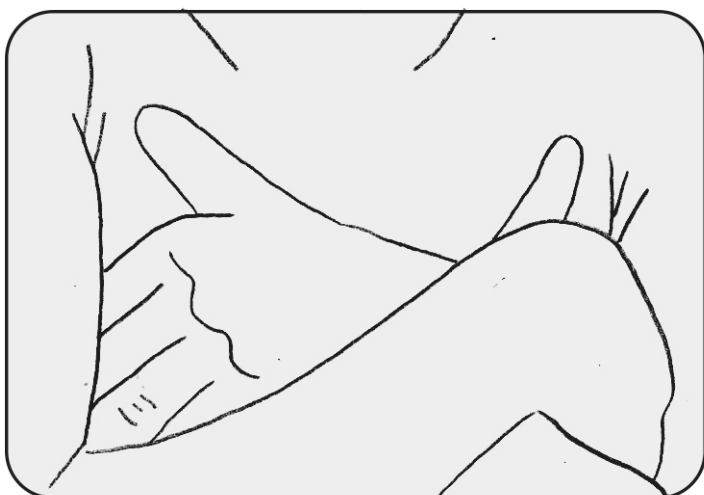
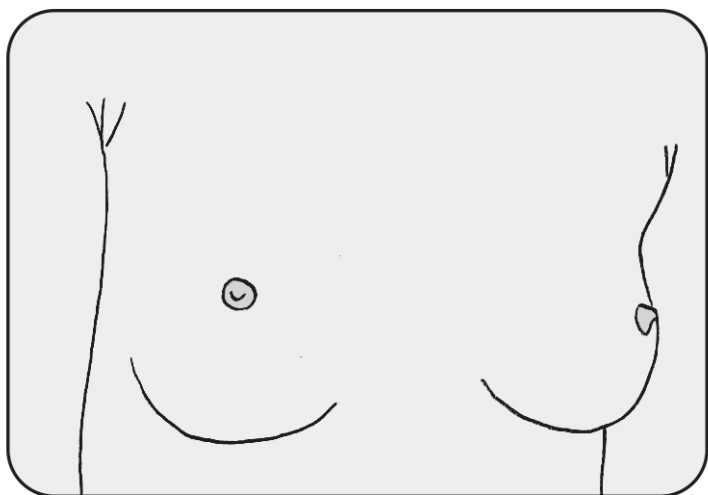


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