

From the Numbing of Consciousness to the Recovery of Revolutionary Action: A Philosophical Approach to Triviality and Revolution

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Abstract:

At first glance, it may seem that triviality and revolution are two completely contradictory things. Triviality, in its general sense, means the decline of critical thinking and the immersion of consciousness in superficial everyday routines that neither question nor reconsider themselves. Revolution, on the other hand, stands in complete opposition to this, with its capacity for rejection and questioning. However, a closer examination of these two concepts reveals to us that the relationship between them is far more complex than a simple contradiction. Triviality reflects a deep crisis in consciousness and an accumulation of feelings of alienation and absurdity, which makes it fertile ground for the emergence of protest. It thus contributes to producing the conditions that make revolution possible. Yet this very revolution may itself open the door to triviality when it loses its critical substance and turns into nothing more than a passing emotional response, becoming a stage for triviality. This article will examine the boundaries separating a triviality that numbs consciousness from a triviality that reveals its crisis, and between a revolution that restores resistant action and a revolution that becomes a mere echo of the same distorted consciousness that it came to overcome. Between these two paths emerges the need to build a critical consciousness in order to move from a consciousness surrendered to triviality toward a consciousness that contributes to changing reality, instead of dissolving into the moment from which it was born.

Keywords: consciousness, reason, triviality, consumer culture, everyday thinking, rebellion, revolution, culture, politics.

Introduction:

Seneca notes, in the summary of his wisdom, that if you wish the whole world to submit to your will, then submit to the will of reason. Nonetheless, although reason is a sound criterion for determining what is good and what is bad, it deviates from this rule in some human and humanitarian matters, which we find subject to the logic of luck, fate, and error as well, which means that human reason is not an absolute guarantee against error and failure, and this is part of human nature, but when failure turns into a deliberate will, we have moved beyond the level of failure to the level of triviality. Further, the relationship between triviality and revolution has long been a subject of philosophical and social debate, as it is difficult, for instance, to connect triviality with a serious historical event such as a revolution. However, there are interesting intersections between the two that reveal a strange correlation between the rise of trivial tendencies in society and moments of revolutionary eruption. For, revolution is an expression of the highest forms of political and social consciousness, while triviality is a reflection of a superficial and consumerist culture that seeps

¹ Received: 10.03.2026 Accepted: 19.08.2026 Publishing: 21.09.2026

into the public sphere, threatening the structure of critical thought that fuels revolutions. This leads us to ask the question: Can triviality be a cause of the outbreak of revolution and a fertile ground for it? And if triviality is the other face of revolution, how do revolutions turn into a stage for triviality? More importantly, what mechanisms can be adopted to combat the system of triviality and build a more conscious society?

The Culture of Superficiality and Everyday Thinking:

Triviality is not merely a transient phenomenon within the structure of social life that can be reduced to a decline in public taste or the deterioration of cultural or media discourse. Conversely, in many contexts, it is the product of deeper processes associated with the reshaping of consciousness, taste, and perception under certain conditions of symbolic and material production. This phenomenon has received increasing attention in recent decades, particularly with the rise of what is known as organized or deliberate superficiality, whereby triviality is reproduced as a tool of social control and a mechanism for emptying the public sphere of meaning and critique. Therefore, triviality produces for us a life overflowing with superficial things, working to strip the self of its depth and critical sense and to transform it into a state of repetition, fluidity, and excessive ease in order to satisfy rapid and multiple desires. It is, in essence, an expression of the “natural state” experienced by the contemporary individual in their interaction and engagement with their surroundings and society, where they become immersed in superficial behaviors considered necessary for survival within the framework of a fast-paced and constantly changing social life. Hence, triviality becomes an integrated system that reinforces mediocrity and reflects the dominance of what is false and fragile at the expense of what is real and essential. Since it is not merely a passing state or simply an individual behavior, it has become necessary to investigate the reasons that have made triviality a form of everyday thinking. It is important to place triviality within its philosophical context, considering it to be more than a mere cultural characteristic or a social behavior. In fact, it is an existential condition and an indicator of a deviation from original being. It manifests as mental alienation within a false or parallel existence, incapable of adapting to a liquid way of life in a world whose most prominent characteristics are anxiety, fluidity, and instability.

And so that we do not remain within the limits of description or moral diagnosis, there emerges a need to invoke more radical analytical tools that move beyond the surface of discourse to reach its underlying conditions. Here, Marxism emerges not merely as an alternative perspective, but as a key to understanding triviality as a structural product of a mode of production that does not merely reshape the market, but also reproduces the human being himself according to the standards of utility, consumption, and reification.

A Marxist reading of triviality—even though Marx did not use this term literally—allows us to grasp the threads that connect mediocrity as a matter of taste with domination as a structure. In capitalist society, according to Karl Marx, the human being loses contact with the final product of his labor and is reduced to merely an instrument in the production process. On that account, the individual becomes alienated from himself, his work, and his society as well. Furthermore, if we apply this concept to triviality, we find that triviality does not, in this case, emerge merely as a cultural or social phenomenon, but rather as a form of social alienation. For, the human being is not fully human unless he lives a meaningful life and feels directly connected to the fruits of his labor and to his society. Since triviality separates the human being from himself and from the true meaning of his existence, it produces social and intellectual alienation, in which the individual becomes isolated from deep thinking and critical consciousness. Based on the foregoing, triviality becomes a cultural and psychological manifestation of a false existence, if we may appropriately use Martin Heidegger’s term in this context. The latter distinguishes between two types of existence: authentic existence and inauthentic existence, which arises as a result of immersion in everyday life and identification with “They.” Withing the same framework, Heidegger points out: “Dasein’s existence in its everyday form often takes on a false character, as it slips into the level of the “They”, where its life is governed by what is said and done, rather than by what it itself chooses as its authentic existence” (Martin, 2013, p. 168). Instead of

engaging in deep reflection on his being and interacting with what is authentic, the human being becomes immersed in superficial everyday activities that move away from any kind of existential contemplation. Giving that people do not live their lives in an authentic or genuine manner; rather, they become integrated into trivial patterns of existence that ultimately lead them toward intellectual and existential triviality.

Notwithstanding this, Heidegger's conception of inauthentic existence is not a moral or social condemnation. For, according to him, inauthenticity is not a mistake, but rather a natural mode of existence. Nevertheless, it becomes a predicament when it becomes the only existential form or the only possible mode: "Heidegger does not condemn inauthenticity; instead, he reveals that the human being is called upon to choose himself and reclaim his own possibilities, not as a matter of values, but as an existential destiny" (Fathi, 2007, pp. 113-114). Triviality transforms the human being into an indecisive creature who goes along with things, remains silent, and silences his conscience, thence becoming incapable of taking responsibility for his own existence, this conception is close to what Deneault put forward in his understanding of triviality when he stated: "In the system of triviality, you are not asked to think, but to repeat; to be capable of staying afloat—not to sink or merely to float, but simply to remain in the middle" (Alain, 2018, p. 34). The system of triviality therefore favors people who do not raise profound questions, but are content to reproduce the existing order without questioning it. This means that the culture prevailing in modern societies reinforces intellectual and behavioral patterns that hinder any genuine revolutionary project. But how did triviality become a rigid system?

The spread of "triviality" in modern societies cannot be regarded merely as an incidental product of cultural or economic transformations; in fact, it is an expression of a systematic and value-based system that is reproduced daily through prevailing patterns of thought. Triviality here is not merely an absence of meaning or a superficialization of discourse; it is a system with its own logic that works to exclude profound meaning and transform values into slogans that are consumable. This is confirmed by Marcuse in his statement that "the triviality that affects industrial societies lies not only in the reduction of critical thought, but also in encouraging forms of thinking that correspond to the needs of the system and limit the possibilities of moving beyond the familiar" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 141).

Considered from this angle, everyday thinking is considered a true reflection of this system. Since moving beyond thought does not occur by ceasing to think, but through thinking poorly, it often relies on disguised logical fallacies that present error in the form of valid reasoning. A fallacy is, for the most part, an easy form of thinking, and every form of easy thinking has a greater chance of finding those who adopt it within public circles. Since everyday thinking possesses a complete set of tools through which it can achieve its purpose, it relies on easy patterns of reasoning based on fallacies, such as the use of the fallacy of begging the question, appealing to the majority opinion, attacking the person rather than the argument, poisoning the well, appealing to the authority of the speaker, and other fallacies that are based on forms of reasoning that are closer to sophistry and do not reflect genuine patterns of thought. This type of thinking is what ensures the sustainability of the system of triviality because it confuses and marginalizes critical thinking, attempting to replace it with easy and ready-made conceptions. Ultimately, this produces a category of citizens who belong to a false existence and submit to an ideological logic, while being convinced that what they experience is natural and real. For, the most dangerous aspect of domination is that it is not exercised through direct repression, but through the triviality of everyday life, which makes the system appear self-evident" (Antonio, 1991, p. 223).

Triviality as a Context and Catalyst for Revolution:

Hannah Arendt indicates in her book *Politics, History and Citizenship* that people become revolutionaries because they rise up against the insults inflicted upon humanity. Besides, we can add the term "triviality" under the category of these insults; that is, revolution, in essence, is an act of resistance to triviality. It

represents a radical consciousness that seeks to transcend prevailing structures and offer an alternative vision of the world. It works to undermine the foundations of triviality as a tool of ideological domination that serves to distract the masses and divert them from thinking about change, thereby prolonging the life of the corrupt system. Revolutions seek to dismantle unjust structures and reshape reality according to more just visions. In this regard, Albert Camus indicates in *The Rebel* that the feeling of absurdity drives the human being toward rebellion, as their recognition of the falsity of reality drives them to search for an alternative meaning through revolution. Although triviality differs from absurdity in terms of its premises, they share the capacity to drive the individual or society toward revolution. For, triviality may generate an explosion after which it becomes impossible to continue living under the weight of superficiality and mediocrity, while absurdity generates an anxious consciousness that leads to revolution.

By the same token, popular frustration can be one of the fundamental driving forces behind revolution. Nonetheless, in the age of triviality, it takes on a particular character, in which sarcasm and mockery become weapons in confronting authority. Within a comparable context, Slavoj Žižek points out that sarcasm is not only a means of expressing anger, nor is it always a negative stance; rather, it can become a revolutionary nucleus, as a moment of consciousness that deconstructs official discourse and exposes its falsity. This may lead to popular uprisings. Therefore, Žižek cites the events in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 as examples, where sarcasm directed at political leaders through social media played a significant role in mobilizing the masses. Young people demonstrated an ability to expose the triviality of official political discourse, which contributed to the collapse of the prestige of the ruling regimes. However, the paradox lies in the fact that just as triviality can be a cause of the eruption of revolutions, it can also be a cause of emptying revolutions of their content and thwarting them.

Triviality as a Tool to Suppress the Revolution: How Does Triviality Hollow Out the Revolution?

Although triviality may be one of the factors that stimulate revolution, it is also one of the main causes that lead to delaying or distorting it. According to Antonio Gramsci, control over culture and the media is one of the tools used by ruling regimes to reproduce their power, whereby the energy of the masses is redirected away from serious political action through a focus on trivial issues or the creation of imaginary conflicts. Herbert Marcuse points out that “the one-dimensional man is a human being who is encouraged to comply with the demands of the social system through the media and technology, which restrict his critical thinking and make him submit to limited conceptions of his life” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 107). This can only be achieved through a close alliance between the media and authority. Giving to the fact that, authority does not need direct repression if it is capable of producing a false consciousness based on entertainment and superficial content. Thus, thought “which is supposed to be a tool of liberation has become confined within the logic of the existing system; it does not transcend it, but rather justifies it. Hence, reason itself becomes a trivial reason, revolving in a vicious circle of repetition” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 113). For that reason, triviality is used as a policy for suppressing revolutionary consciousness by creating artificial needs and transforming citizens into passive consumers, since “false needs are produced and promoted by forces that control consciousness—needs that do not express genuine desires but are imposed upon individuals in the name of well-being, making them slaves to things they do not choose” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 113). The same meaning is emphasized by Jean Baudrillard when he mentions that modern societies push individuals to live in a world of false images, where politics is transformed into an empty spectacle, thereby leading to the thwarting of any possibility of a genuine revolution. For, false existence also creates a kind of false satisfaction, and once “a human being feels satisfied within a sick society, revolution becomes impossible. This is the function of triviality: to numb pain through banality” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 88).

Accordingly, triviality contributes to emptying revolution of its content through a set of mechanisms:

- A. Transforming the revolution into a superficial media phenomenon or media event, this may attract attention for a temporary period without producing any real change. In this regard, Jean Baudrillard argues that the media is no longer merely a medium that transmits events, but has become something that creates reality itself according to its own logic (Jean, 1995, p. 55). This is what happens in many contemporary revolutions, where demonstrations and protests are portrayed in ways that attract viewers, yet remain confined within a rapidly fading consumerist framework, instead of being a long-term project requiring the reconstruction of society from within, the revolution becomes a television event that people engage with and then forget as soon as media coverage comes to an end. This points to the rapid forgetting and temporary engagement that leaves no lasting resonance and eliminates the symbolic significance and value of the revolutionary event.
- B. Creating trivial revolutionary symbols, occurs through the production of superficial symbols that claim to represent change but, in reality, offer no serious political project. “Organic intellectuals” are produced who serve the interests of the ruling elite rather than becoming genuine leaders of change. This occurs when revolutionary figures are promoted through the media, while in reality they are merely an extension of the existing system.
- C. Transforming the revolution into a commodity or a fashion, Guy Debord in this regard states in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* that “what was real has now become representation” (Guy, 2000, p. 12), indicating that the spectacle has come to dominate social life completely, whereby the commodity becomes the central element in social perception. This leads to the transformation of revolutionary ideas into consumer commodities. “What was previously a genuine revolution has now become part of the spectacle, presented as a consumer product that is continually reproduced” (Guy, 2000, p. 99).
- D. Creating false alternatives to revolution is one of the most subtle methods of emptying revolution of its content. It relies on presenting false alternatives that give people a false sense of change without destabilizing the foundations of the existing system. Slavoj Žižek, in his book *Violence: Reflections on the Dark Side of the Twentieth Century*, points out that many modern revolutions do nothing more than reproduce the same system with new faces. For instance, an authoritarian leader may be replaced by another without any real change taking place in the deeper structure of power, or some superficial reforms may be introduced without addressing the actual causes of the revolution. Thus, revolutionary action is transformed into nothing more than a temporary outlet for the system, rather than becoming a genuine force capable of destroying the foundations of corruption and authoritarianism. Resultantly, triviality is reproduced through the revolution itself.

Can a revolution succeed in the age of triviality?

Revolution is not a mere violent change in the political system; it is a revolution against monotonous forms of thinking, against packaged and ready-made culture, and a genuine will to begin anew. “Successful revolutions do not arise merely from blind mass power, but from the ability to shape new collective convictions that reconstruct political and social meaning” (Hannah Arendt: *Politics*, 2018, p. 30).

According to Slavoj Žižek, modern revolutions face an unprecedented challenge, namely, the ability to transcend the symbolic systems that shape the consciousness of the masses. Revolutions no longer confront only state repression, but also the resistance of individuals themselves, who have been conditioned to accept the existing system as a reality that cannot be changed. Nevertheless, this does not mean that revolution is impossible; rather, it indicates that its success requires new strategies that go beyond traditional means. Revolutions can succeed if they are able to create a new discourse that resists triviality and restores people’s critical sense. This requires a fundamental role for organic intellectuals, in Gramsci’s terms, who are capable of confronting cultural hegemony and exposing the falsity of dominant discourses. The solution, therefore, lies in critical consciousness, whereby individuals must recognize how they are culturally and media-wise manipulated. As Antonio Negri points out, the importance of the revolutionary subject lies in its ability to transcend the framework imposed by the system by creating new political spaces that cannot be easily

contained. This means that genuine revolution must transcend traditional media and build independent networks of consciousness and mobilization that are not subject to the logic of the market and consumption. Revolution remains possible when individuals are able to overcome fear and recover their moral sense toward injustice. And since evil, as Hannah Arendt stated, “lies not in intention but in the absence of thought,” resistance to triviality begins with the ability to stop, reflect, and refuse.

Conclusion

It can be said that the relationship between triviality and revolution is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, triviality functions as a tool of ideological repression, while on the other hand, this very triviality may lead to the outbreak of genuine revolutions, especially when the feeling of absurdity and value emptiness reaches an unbearable level. Nevertheless, the success of revolution in confronting triviality is not guaranteed; conversely, it requires a deep political and philosophical consciousness capable of dismantling systems of cultural control and rebuilding a resistant discourse. Triviality is a strategy for emptying any revolution of its content and transforming it into nothing more than a symbolic spectacle.

As a concluding point, for a revolution to be genuine, it must rebuild the free individual who is capable of thinking and questioning, because between triviality and revolution stand culture, media, and politics, all of which are arenas of symbolic struggle that determine the fate of societies.

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