

# Identities

Identities

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- ▶ Jacques Ranciere
- ▶ Katerina Kolozova
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**The Future  
of the Idea  
of the Left**





Jacques  
Rancière

## Skopje: Time, Narrative, and Politics

### Bionote

*Jacques Rancière is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris-VIII. His books include The Politics of Aesthetics, On the Shores of Politics, Short Voyages to the Land of the People, The Future of the Image, and The Nights of Labor.*

### Skopje: Time, Narrative, and Politics

#### Abstract

I would like to recall several ideas that have supported the entirety of my work for the past 40 years: forms of worker emancipation and the regimes of the identification of art; the transformations of literary fiction and the principles of democracy; the presuppositions of historical science and the forms of consensus by today's dominant apparatuses. What unites all these areas of research is the attention to the way in which these practices and forms of knowledge imply a certain cartography of the common world. I have chosen to name this system of relations between ways of being, doing, seeing, and thinking that determine at once the common world and the ways in which everyone takes part within it the "distribution of the sensible." But it must also be said that temporal

categories play an important role in this as well. By defining a now, a before and an after, and in connecting them together within the narrative, they predetermine the way in which the common world is given to us in order to perceive it and to think it as well as the place given to everyone who occupies it and the capacity by which each of us then has to perceive truth. The narrative of time at once states what the flow of time makes possible as well as the way in which the inhabitants of time can grasp (or not grasp) these "possibles." This articulation is a fiction. In this sense, politics and forms of knowledge are established by way of fictions including as well works that are deemed to be of the imagination. And the narrative of time is at the heart of these fictions that structure the intelligibility of these situations, which is to say as well, their acceptability. The narrative of time is always at the same time a fiction of the justice of time.

The title I have chosen for this intervention is: time, narrative, and politics. To give a proper introduction to it, I would like to recall several ideas that support this reflection because they have also supported the entirety of my work for the past 40 years concerning objects and areas of research that apparently seem distant

from each other: forms of worker emancipation and the regimes of the identification of art; the transformations of literary fiction and the principles of democracy; the presuppositions of historical science and the forms of consensus by today's dominant apparatuses. What unites all these areas of research is the attention to the way in which which these practices and forms of knowledge imply a certain cartography of the common world, of the forms of visibility and invisibility that structure it, the way in which which subjects occupy it according to forms of co-existence and exclusion, wherein events and forms of events are identified, wherein the possible and the impossible are determined according to all these varying elements. I have chosen to name this system of relations between ways of being, doing, seeing, and thinking that determine at once the common world and the ways in which everyone takes part within it the "distribution of the sensible." But it must also be said that temporal categories play an important role in this as well. By defining a now, a before and an after, and in connecting them together within the narrative, they predetermine the way in which the common world is given to us in order to perceive it and to think it as well as the place given to everyone who occupies it and the capacity by which each of us then has to perceive truth. A narrative of time always defines at once two things. On one hand, it defines the framework of experience: that which is now present, the way in which this present is linked to a past or detaches itself from it, whereby it allows or forbids certain futures. But at the same time, it also defines ways of being in time, which is to say, ways of being attune with it or not, of participating – by way of the mode of accord or discord— with a power of truth or error linked to this flowing of time. The narrative of time at once states what the flow of time makes possible as well as the way in which the inhabitants of time can grasp (or not grasp) these "possibles." This articulation is a fiction.

But it is important to be clear about the meaning of this word: a fiction is not the invention of an imaginary world. It is the construction of a framework at heart of which subjects, things, and situations can be perceived as being linked together within a common world and where events can be thought in a way as to be organized into an intelligible sequence. In this sense, politics and forms of knowledge are established by way of fictions including as well works that are deemed to be of the imagination. And the narrative of time is at the heart of these fictions that structure the intelligibility of these situations, which is to say as well, their acceptability. The narrative of time is always at the same time a fiction of the justice of time. This expression, "justice of time," recalls the phrase used by Anaximander concerning the manner in which things suffer the payment of their injustice according to the order of time. This phrase is better known by way of the commentary which Heidegger granted to it. But the way in which I want to place the central focus of my talk today in the relation between justice and the order of time is quite different than Heidegger.

For me it seems essential to recall this fictional structuration of time up against the analyses of our present that have flourished during the past 25 years. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet empire was credited to a rather simple view of our time. It was said that with the collapse, it was not merely an economic and state system that fell into rubble, but it was also an entire age of history that had come to an end – the age that had granted time the responsibility to bring about a hidden truth within the heart of the movement of things themselves and which identified the arrival of this truth with the arrival of a world of justice. It was as if time had been stripped of the fictions for which we had made it responsible, stripped of the promises that we had believed to read within its past and stripped of the

future that we had assigned to it as some kind of goal, as if during its course, time had been rendered ordinary. Of course, there are various ways of understanding this ordinary course of time: some people identified it with the wise management of a time freed from utopian futures, a time brought back to the immediate present and its neighbouring consequences [consequénces proches] where it became merely a question of calculating the chances for prosperity presented by the measures taken for the months to come and which were then required to be verified by these months to come. Others identified the opposite, the crepuscular time of a post-history characterized by the generalized nihilist reign of unbelief and by the lone jouissance of market happiness [bonheur marchand] But in every case, there was evidence of a disjunction between this indeed real present and the great expectations and bygone illusions of a historical time directed by the future. This is what the philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard, summarized within the stunning formula: the end of the grand narratives.

Nevertheless, this radical change in temporality was immediately called into question. On one hand, the countries that had been freed from a communist future quickly found themselves caught within rediscovered nationalistic narratives, within renewed genealogies of monarchies and empires as well as ethnic and religious conflicts. And on the other hand, it quickly became clear that the triumphant free-market also had its long-term demands which required, in order to preserve its future, the sacrifice of privileges inherited from the past and the egoisms of present interests. What would quickly appear was that the too simple opposition between the solid realities of the present against the illusions of history covered over a division at the heart of the present itself, a division of temporalities which was also a division of possibles and capacities.

In order to understand the logic of these reversals, we have to understand the more complex temporal logic that supported the famous grand narratives. And to do this, we must take a long step all the way back to the canonical text that set in place the laws of fiction in the Occident and by doing so imposed a certain figure of the rationality of time. I want to speak about Aristotle's *Poetics*. In it, he states that the task of the poet is not to create verse but to construct a fiction, namely, a link between events, a structure of causal rationality. For it is not a question of describing how events happened as such, but rather to recount how events could have happened, which is to say, starting from their possibility. The poet constructs a causal schema of connection articulated according to two great relations: the relation between fortune and misfortune, and a relation between ignorance and knowledge. It is this way that the poet constructs a relation between the history of justice and a model of intelligibility. To paraphrase the famous phrase by Anaximander, we could say that tragedy defines an order of time according to which beings gain access to knowledge by way of being judged for their injustice, an injustice which is first of all an ignorance. Tragedy in this way permanently links an intrigue of justice granted to an intrigue of acquired knowledge. But there are two important remarks to make as far as this rationality of an order of time is concerned. The construction of a sequence by which possible events can be created, claims Aristotle, comes about either by way of necessity or plausibility [vraisemblance]. Learned necessity and poetic plausibility are equivalents as forms of the rationalization of time – or of the justice of time. This is because both of them are equally in opposition to a poor form of time: the time of simple succession, the time where things happen one after another without any causal link. This is what, according to Aristotle, makes poetry superior to history: poetry states how thing could

have happened, history simply merely states how things happened within their empirical succession. But we should also add here what Aristotle does not need to state in his *Poetics*: this distinction between two types of temporal linking is itself based on a distinction between two forms of lived experience of time and two categories of humans: there are people for which the present is situated within the events of a time that “can happen”, the time of action and its ends goals [ses fins], of leisure and knowledge: in short, the time of people who have time, these men which for all this we call active. And there are people who live in the present of things where things simply happen one after another, the repetitive and narrow daily time: in short, the time of people who don’t have the time, those people we call passive – not because they don’t do anything but because they passively receive time. The rational causality of temporal linking that assures the passage between fortune and misfortune, knowledge and ignorance, is articulated by a distribution [partage] of temporalities which is a distribution of forms of life. It tosses aside, outside of its domain, those for whom the form of life is doomed to the time of pure succession and by way of this excludes the misfortune and fortune of poetic rationality. So it is that the justice of time is achieved. There is the poetic justice of the process that makes active men pass from fortune to misfortune and from ignorance to knowledge. But there is also this other justice which is the subject of the Platonic *Republic*, this justice which consists of an organized distribution of activities, of spaces and times that is based on a prerequisite posed in Book II of the *Republic* at the very beginning of the tale about the origin of the City: this prerequisite is to retain within the workshop [atelier] beings who have no other time but to do what the work that will not wait demands of them.

Such are the distribution of times which we must return to if we want to understand what is at play within these forms of rationality that we have called the grand narratives. On one hand, the modern grand narratives appropriated the logic of fictional rationality. And they carefully applied it to this historical succession which Aristotle pitted against poetic rationality. Thus, on one hand, they rejected the opposition of temporalities: they made of the world things that happen one after another, a world subjected to the laws of rational linking. And it is precisely in this world, within the obscure daily reality of the production of material life that Marxism embedded [logé] the matrixial form of causality of human events. And by this same token, proposed a new link between knowledge and justice. Whereas tragic heroes only gained access to knowledge by way of the misfortune suffered by their unjust acts, the new knowledge by way of the new temporal order also announced a new type of justice: the new justice was at once the knowledge of laws according to which injustice reigned and the knowledge of laws according to which time itself would judge this injustice. History therefore became the exemplary fiction of a passage from misfortune to fortune based on the passage from ignorance to knowledge. Historical evolution produced a science of evolution that allowed historical agents to play an active role in the transformation of necessity and possibility. But the opposition of temporalities that were apparently driven out by the new rationality of history would soon re-emerge in full force. The historical movement which produced the conditions for knowledge and the fortune it promised also produced gaps [écarts] and delays that threw entire social classes back into the past. And it also produced, within the quotidian practice of gestures of work and modes of thought, the veil of ideology which confined historical agents to the ignorance of necessity. And this ignorance was itself twofold: on one hand, it

was the persistence of repetitive time that indefinitely postponed the completion of justice inherent to the march of history. And on the other hand, it was an illusion for those unaware of the necessity of this delay and too quickly wanted to project themselves into the future. The opposition of temporalities which previously had been between two separate worlds thus lodged itself within the heart of historical necessity itself. The same historical process was lived in two different ways: certain people lived within the time of knowledge, that is, the time of causal connection; others – which was a larger number – lived within the time of ignorance, the time of succession that was not understood in its diverse forms: embedded within the present of repetition, attached to a bygone past, or to the illusory anticipation of a future that is not yet possible. Thus it's not, as they tell us, the simple faith in a future brought about by the evolution of time which had animated the grand narratives of historical necessity. It is the splitting of this necessity into the principles of possibility and impossibility, a splitting that itself was founded by the maintained logic of the opposition of a time where things happen one after another and the time of rational connection. The science of this necessity has always been simultaneously the science of the possible rupture of domination and the science of its necessary reproduction and the indefinite delay of the rupture. From this point of view, it is completely false to say that our époque has broken away entirely from the grand narratives in order to consecrate itself to the lone dimension of the present. Our époque has simply redistributed the relation between necessity, possibility, and impossibility. It has enclosed the possible within the lone alternative of the reproduction of the existing necessity or of the catastrophe of humanity doomed to the radical misfortune of its self-destruction. Necessity has thus become the necessity of the lone possible – or of the least of evils – as the lone

alternative to imminent disaster. And in order to assure of this lone possible, the science of necessary connection more than ever had to be opposed to the ignorance of men of empirical succession which resist the necessity of the march of time. The capitalist and state-owned order that declared the expiration of the Marxist grand narrative simply took back up this same logic for its own account. What quickly emerged was that the solid present our governments and their ideologies had pitted against the reveries of yesterday concerning the meaning of history also had its long-term demands. This present that was said to liberate us from the chimerical promises of history and the revolution could itself only keep its promises by taking into account a much larger historical process, which was called globalization. It is not simply a question of an empirical adjustment to the ebb and flow of the market, but the implementation of conforming the empirical time of individuals with the rational time of production and the capitalist redistribution of wealth: a work in eliminating all the roadblocks to the natural accomplishment of these laws, that is, all the systems guaranteeing the rights to work and the redistribution of wealth in the form of public services and social solidarity. This work of harmonizing time that was entrusted to the various States itself supposed the construction of a new fiction of historical necessity. It is in this way that the Europe of Maastricht (the European Union) pitted the historical process of Reform against the past illusions of the Revolution: not reforms, but Reform as the war of the rational time of necessity against the delayed time of men of succession, attached to the privileges inherited from the past and incapable of seeing beyond the present moment. The dominant logic here takes back up in its own way the Marxist scenario of a war of times. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Marx and Engels stigmatized artisans and petit-bourgeois that held on to outdated social forms hindering the rise of Capitalism and thereby hindering

the socialist future this rise was supposed to bring about. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this scenario was re-interpreted. What hindered the promised prosperity, by way of the wise management of the present, had become the struggling workers who were defending the collective rights to work and institutions of social solidarity. In order to vanquish this sin against the order of time, one first had to re-baptize it: one had to transform the workers in struggle who were defending social rights into privileged egotists, defending their rights in the short term to the future detriment of their own children. On this basis, we see, in my own country, an entire leftist intelligentsia backing justifications of Marxist sciences that are then used by governments of the right that use them in applying the triumph of the Reform. The sense of history was always there and always demanded to clear the path for the future. But however, the future which one needed to clear the way for against the men stuck to the routine of the present no longer went by the name of the socialist revolution but by that of the triumph of the free-market.

The narrative of historical necessity was thus recycled by the managers of the free-market whose destruction it has promised in the past. It is true that, faced with this annexion, it re-affirmed itself as the critical discourse for the capitalist order of time. But it was predominantly under the same mode, which was that of science, on the one hand, tasked to demonstrate the necessity of temporal connection and, on the other, to denounce the ignorance of the inhabitants of time. Only, while the official discourse announced the historical necessity of the global free-market, and denounced those ignorant few who refused to adapt to its rhythm, critical discourse accused those same ignorant few of an inverted sin: that of being too well-adapted to this rhythm and of too quickly wedding themselves to its

values whether it be by way of a passive mode of frenetic consumption, by way of a fascination of the spectacle or by way of slavery to credit, or by way of an active mode of the promotion of libertarian and anti-authoritarian values that destroyed traditional obstacles that had once prevented its development. On the one side, there was the critique of commodity fetishism, of consumer society, and the society of spectacle that formally was preoccupied with making the capitalist machinery visible, which continues more and more to task itself with denouncing the democratic individual, starved of enjoyment [jouissance] at all levels, as the principle reproductive agent of the commodity system. And on the other side, the collective forms of anti-authoritarian subversion were denounced as constructing the new modes of subjectivation necessary for the new forms of capitalist production. This was the main theme depicted in the book, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Its authors strived to show how the May '68 movement in France was opposed to the tradition of social critique, an artistic critique established on individual values of autonomy and creation. It was in this manner, the authors noted, that they provided to capitalism, which was shaken by the crisis of 1973, means to regenerate itself by way of integrating these values of creativity and autonomy within new forms of flexible management. Following this, an entire literature of critique that claimed itself to be radical, ended up showing how the values of the democratic individual and the flexible man at once contributed to new forms of capitalist labour that now mobilizes the totality of life and to the subjective integration of the values of neo-liberalism. So it is that critical thought becomes then a perfect circle of necessity and of an integration of any deviance within this circle. This circular logic lends itself to two scenarios: there is the scenario of repetition, the eternal denunciation of reproduction of necessity that is itself eternal. But there

is also the scenario of the catastrophic spiral that sees a humanity of flexible individuals and frenetic consumers precipitating humanity toward the final Judgment day when it will atone for all these sins against the order of time.

So it is that the logic of the judgment of history is re-distributed according to two fundamental dramaturgies: a dramaturgy that leads the tribunal of history back to the sciences of remedies necessary to keep societies alive, and a dramaturgy that makes of this life itself the scene of the Last Judgment. Both these dramaturgies are two ways of dealing with the dominant scenario of necessity today, which is that of the crisis. In Marx's time, the economic crisis was a sign of the dysfunctions of Capitalism, of its deadly nature. Today it has become the opposite, which is to say, the crisis has become the notion itself by which Capitalism retains its seat of power. On one hand, the crisis itself, is the other name of globalization, the so-called unavoidable reality that dictates the destruction of all the "delays" that are opposed to the law of the free-market. But it has also become the perpetually visible sign of identification between the exercising of this law and scientific necessity. This identification presumes that, behind the economic mechanisms, we reactivate the first notion of the meaning of crisis, its medical meaning. But this reactivation itself implies a manipulation that changes the relation between the notion of crisis and the time of illness. In the Hippocratic tradition, the crisis was in effect a well-defined moment. It was the final moment of the illness when the doctor had done all he could do and let the sick person confront the final battle alone wherein the sick person would either die or come out cured. However, in the use that is now dominant, crisis designates the exact opposite: no longer the moment of resolution but the pathological state itself. The economic crisis in the strictest sense, thus, becomes

a social crisis – or even, an anthropological crisis— an illness of society or humanity, and this illness precisely grants power to the character that the old "crisis" had told to take sick leave, that is, it granted power to the knowledge of the doctor [à savoir le médecin]. If the crisis no longer designates a critical moment of a process but the general state of the world, it is clear that what the crisis calls for are the attentive and uninterrupted care of doctors. As for these doctors themselves, they are, truth be told, nothing more than state authorities and the financial managerial powers of this state named crisis. Which goes back to saying that the "illness" of the crisis is nothing more than the robust health of a system of exploitation. But to appeal to the normality of the name of crisis is also to hollow out once more the gap between those that are ill and live in successive time – pathological time – where, for example, crisis means the loss of employment, the lowering of salary, or the loss of social status, and those who live within the time of science, the time wherein crisis designates both those ignorant who are ill that one must heal and the overall necessity recognized by science. It is to both confirm the knowledge of the scientists and the ignorance of those who are ignorant, but it also confirms the guilt of the ignorant whose illness is to have not known how to adapt their time to global time. The grand narrative of the justice of time comes back to the simple opposition of the time of those who know and those who do not. At the same time, of course, this identity of health and illness, of the medical norm and moral fault allows itself to be interpreted according to a catastrophic schema which makes the crisis a general crisis or a last judgment of human sins.

We have not exited the time of the grand narratives. The narratives that construct the adhesion to domination or those narratives which claim to contest it, remain caught

within the fictional logic that goes all the way back to Aristotle: the logic of a necessary linkage of events, itself founded upon a hierarchical partition of temporalities. In the shadow of the so-called reigning “presentism”, all the authorities of the state, finance, media, and science are ceaselessly working to produce these gaps [écarts] that render the same individuals at once dependent to the justice of global time and constantly at fault with respect to this time [en faute à l’égard du ce temps]. They work at reproducing both the fiction of global necessity and the difference between those who live within the time of knowledge that renders justice and those who live within the guilty time of ignorance. But by this alone, they invite us to change our perspective, to rethink the justice of time that would no longer be on the side of a future directed by global processes, but on the side rather of an intimate division of temporalities. Behind the variants of the discourse on global necessity that goes from ignorance to knowledge and from fortune to misfortune – or the opposite, there is the first division [partage premier] or the first injustice – that separates those who have and those who do not have time. But there are also struggles striving to bring into question this narrative of time, struggles by those who do not have the time to take this time that they do not have, in order to split [fender] from within the interior of time “work that cannot wait”. In my work concerning the forms of workers’ emancipation and the theory of intellectual emancipation, I tasked myself with showing the centrality of the stakes for this recovery of time. I don’t want to take back up this demonstration here but I simply want to extract several elements which seem necessary for me in order to rethink the justice of time.

is not about celebrating the quotidian against the global. It is about stating that the global is always at play within the quotidian. The quotidian is not some misfortune that must be redeemed by way of understanding its dependence with regards to global connection. It is the time within which the whole of injustice of a condition is concentrated, but also its possible reparation. This is what I developed several years ago in Belgrade in speaking about the “method of equality” and in so doing, I returned to a central theme of my book, *Proletarian Nights*, how the workday was recounted in the 1840s by the carpenter, Gauny. The workday is not simply the time that is given to Capital by way of the reproduction of labor force and surplus value. On one hand, for the worker, it is a compulsory occupation [occupation contrainte] An occupation is not simply the exercise of an activity, it is also a way of being in time and space. In this sense, the workday is the quotidian constraint that constantly reproduces the divisions of temporalities as divisions of forms of life. But it is also the concrete flowing of hours and minutes wherein a possible gap can be played out in relation to the norms of reproduction: the possibility of the working of the body and the mind that regains, in regards to the constrictions of space, the deviation of a gaze [regard] that leads thought elsewhere, or in regards to the constrictions of time, the division of a thought that makes the body work faster or slower or in any case in a different way. I have analysed the dramaturgy of the hours constructed in this manner by Gauny and the way in which the relation of the movements of thought to the movements of the body constructed a complex logic of gaps [écarts] between a time of renewed servitude and a time of acquired liberty: two times which occupy the same time. But of course the first recovery is the one which decides to put into a narrative this time, which by definition, had been the time excluded from the order of narrative, the time where nothing happens, if only

At the heart of emancipatory thought, there is first of all a change in focal points: a manner of locating the states of justice and injustice within the scansions of daily time. It



the reproduction of time, which is to say, the separation between times. And of course, this narrative is a fiction. The carpenter does not recount his workday, he fictions: he writes it as the contrary of what it normally is; he writes it as if each hour something happened. It is not merely the microcosm where science can recognize the law of a system of production. It is the time of a redistribution of times. The narrative written about the day, changes the modality of the experience of this time. But one must also add that the writing of this narrative itself supposes another alternation of the order of time. In order to write it, the carpenter had to take the time, either during the night when he takes the necessary pause to recover his energy, or during the time when he was unemployed, a time when normally one's time is spent looking for another job. Which is to say, the carpenter had to not only renounce the Aristotelian division between the time of succession and that of causality, but also the division that the same Aristotle establishes between two forms of inactivity: the pause that restores the energy of the worker and the leisure that nourishes the mind of those who are not subjected to the constraints of work.

This is the fundamental point at the heart of this use of time that defines the work of emancipation. The whole of justice or injustice of time is present in each one of these moments. Starting from these differences of scale, a justice of time is defined that is not filed under the meaning of the march of a homogeneous time, but which on the contrary, exerts itself as division of time, as a production of gaps which are not ignorances or delays as far as the march of time is concerned, but are ruptures from the normal logic of the division of temporalities. Time is divided from within by way of recovering these moments. Each one of these moments is at once the point where the reproduction of the division of time passes and the point of a possible gap [ecart], of a possible re-

division. The moment is the productive power of another time. Which means that time is not a long duration that is opposed to the ephemerality of the moment, but on the contrary, it is the expansion of the power of the moment, which is to say, the redistribution of the weights on the scale of destinies. It is this power of the moment constructing another time which is at the heart of the theory of intellectual emancipation in the work of Joseph Jacotot that I shed light on in *The Ignorant Schoolteacher*. There is normal time, the time of the education processes of individuals and societies which is the endless reproduction of their renewed incapacity in the name of knowledge itself and the promised equality during the term of this path. And there is the time of the capacity of these same individuals and time whose path we can begin to trace starting from any point and any moment whatsoever. This power of the moment that begins another time is not merely the time of individual emancipation. It also characterizes the "revolutionary" days where the people of "passive" men forget the "work that cannot wait" and leave their workshops in order to affirm within the streets participation in a common time. In a famous text, Walter Benjamin saw within this time a powerful explosion of the temporal continuum, symbolized by the man who, during the Paris revolution of July 1830, shot out the street clocks in order to stop time, like Jousé stopping the sun. But what these kinds of days produce is rather the opening of another time where the evidence that structures the temporal order of time is erased, where the distribution of the possible is reconfigured and, with it, the power of those who inhabit time. It is a new common time, constructed starting from breaches within the dominant operating order of time.

We know how this power of the redistribution of time has found itself to be at once repressed [refoulée] within the Marxist revolutionary tradition and appropriated

elsewhere as a principle of a revolution of literature. On the hand, the Marxist tradition puts its over on the side of a bad time: the time of those who want to change time and who are unaware of the scientific laws that preside over the succession of time. On the other hand, the rupture within the scale of time has been the principle of another revolution, the modern revolution of the art of narratives was called literature. This revolution very precisely called into question the Aristotelian opposition between the time of succession and that of causal connection. Here I'm thinking of a text by Virginia Woolf entitled, *Modern Fiction* that denounces the tyranny of the plot and pits against these false sequences of cause and effect, the truth of these atoms of time that ceaselessly fall into our minds and which the writer owes it to herself to re-transcribe. We often have willingly assimilated this rupture of the temporal order with the biased elitist position of literature that takes its time to detail the various states of the idle bourgeois soul. But this would be to forget that this rupture of the temporal scale was first of all a dismissal of the opposition of two human categories. The time of the atoms that fall one after the other is the common time of humans said to be active and humans said to be passive. It is the time that Virginia Woolf's heroine, Mrs Dalloway, shares with all those anonymous lives that cross her path. It is the time of all those lives who strive to shatter the order that keeps them enclosed on the wrong side of the barrier of time. Behind the day of Mrs Dalloway, pre-occupied to preparing for even party, one can feel the presence of another day described by Flaubert: the day of the peasant girl, Emma Bovary, watching behind her windows the always identical flow of the time of hours and who attempted to invent a history that would shatter the repetition of this order; and behind this day, is the day of the carpenter, Gauny, transforming his hours of servitude into hours of freedom. Modern Literary

Fiction puts into its heart this time where the struggle of fortune and misfortune can happen at any hour of the day. But this also means that it creates its own time, the new texture of the narrative, prepared to abandon its characters to the misfortune of those who vainly wanted to have the time that they did not have.

I think today it could be useful to re-think this game of three between the narratives of global processes, the temporality of moments of emancipation and the time of literary fiction in order to exit the grand narrative of necessity in these two versions of the management of the lone possible or of the final catastrophe. I particularly find useful in re-thinking today the possible connections between the lived time of individuals and moments of collective affirmation. On the one hand, it seems necessary to call into question the analyses that are in vogue regarding the conformity of the "flexible" individuality or "neo-liberal subjectivity" with the law of a global process from now on exerting its mastery throughout one's whole lifetime. It also seems impossible for me to subscribe to Hardt and Negri's analysis who, from this supposed identity between work time and living time, want to draw the inverse conclusion: that of a future communist time that is already present within the present forms of capitalist production. Contemporary forms of work impose rather experiences of a time full of holes, one that is discontinuous and full of recesses: incessant passages from employment to unemployment, the development of part-time work positions, and all forms of intermittency; the multiplication of those who belong both to the time of salaried work, and to the time of education, to artistic time and the time of small day jobs; there is also the multiplication of those who trained for one specific job and who are employed in a completely different one, who work in one world and live in another. This fragmented time perhaps puts back on the current

agenda the problematic of emancipation: that of the work of moments of time, concerning the intimate war between the hierarchical division of temporalities: active and passive divisions within the time of work, concerning times of the pause and leisure within non-work. This war for the re-appropriation of holey-time [le temps troué] can perhaps be the principle of a new link between individual and collective ruptures. This is exactly what was proven several years ago in France with the strike of those that were named “Intermittents of the Spectacle.” In the beginning, this strike was concerned with the threats regarding unemployed workers’ compensation for artists whose time is split between visible hours of work and the time necessary for preparation. But the course of the strike revealed two opposing tendencies: a part of the actors in the movement wanted to maintain the specificity of their categorical demands while another group wanted to on the contrary generalize their demands. During this intermittent time of “artists,” they wanted to put the spotlight on the general form in which the precarious time of work now tended, but also shed light on a new form of struggle against this condition of precariousness: the formation of a common time constructed within a new war on the sharing or division [partage] of times.

It can be interesting to analyze the recent forms of collective movements from this point of view. From the Arab spring, to the Spanish “Indignados” movement, to the occupy movements, Madrid to New York or Athens to Istanbul. Their importance has often been denounced in the name of a simple division of times: those who pit against the spontaneous reactions and their ephemeral existence the time of long-term strategies which link moments together according to the connection of means and ends. But this simple opposition leaves out the much more complex game of the division or shaping

of times. It is precisely this game that summarizes the word occupation. This word in effect refers back to an affair of justice incarnated within the distribution of spaces and times. The justice of the Platonic Republic consisted of a distribution of occupations, directing each one to remain within the necessary time and space that suited their specific activity. It is against this that the factory workers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century occupied their factories in order to transform the place of exploited labor into a space that serviced the common, collective power of the workers. In a certain way, the park or the street takes the place of the factory for a population of workers today that are dispersed by the time and space of their jobs and obliged to create within the circulation of urban spaces, the place for a common time. But it is also the place where, within the same affirmation of a gap [écart], that various fragmented experiences of time can be assembled – multiple experiences of dispossession and recovery of time that is characteristic of the present time of precarious work, a present that is common to the small vendor on a Tunisian street whose suicide incited the Jasmine Revolution, and common to the graduated students without jobs in the occupied parks of New York and Madrid. Occupying as an anonymous people the indeterminate site of circulation while the workers of yesteryear occupied the work site that had already gathered them together, this perhaps is also a way to place back within the center of the conflict, the notion of the distribution of spaces. It is not immaterial that one of the most significant places of the occupations, that of Taksim Square in Istanbul, started out in part as a conflict concerning the future use of a site, it was a question concerning the transformation of a site of leisure open to everyone for indeterminate use into a complex of power and a commercial space. But it is also significant that the occupation of places was also the time of an encounter between multiple temporal experiences which were also

translated into multiple forms of action on time. It's as if the new forms of collective action, instead of strategic traditional temporalities, were implementing those forms of the coexistence of temporalities that the literary revolution has pitted against the worn out tyranny of plot. The temporality of the occupation is the conjunction of several forms of the recovery of time. There are the interruptions of the normal course of the hours of the day and the actions that the *standing man* symbolized in his performance at Taksim Square, standing, silent, for eight hours facing the Atatürk cultural center, a time of interruption that is also one of these new forms of encounter between the time of artistic performance and that of political action. There are organization forms for the collective time of autonomous discussion and decision in relation to the institutional forms of public life. There are forms of the organization of collective daily life. And there is the effort to install in the long term these moments of reconstruction of a common time in the form of institutions affirming the capacity of everyone in all those spheres where within the dominant system, the management of time is identified as a production of gaps [écarts], which is to say, a production of incapacities, from the system of production of goods all the way to the transmission of knowledge or the circulation of information. We know how the recent movements have brought back to our attention these alternative forms of the organization of the time of life that played such a big role in past workers' movements as the future anticipated in the present.

Of course, they also brought back into question the contradiction of these forms of anticipation. But my problem today was not to designate the right or wrong models of the future. It was simply to invite us to re-examine the dominant models that are used today in order for us to think the relations between the historical

flow of global time, the forms of domination, and the time of our lives. I proposed to operate a double displacement in relation to these dominant models. Against the analyses that claim to help us exit the time of grand narratives and which are dedicated to a lone present, I attempted to demonstrate how the narrative of historical necessity continues to structure the dominant time at the price of transforming the promises of liberation into disillusioned findings of subjection or into prophecies of a final catastrophe. I reiterated how this narrative of necessity itself was rooted within a hierarchical division of time that it relentlessly reproduced. I tried to show how another thought of time and its possibilities could be drawn from forms of class struggle as well as forms of narratives that have called this hierarchical division of time into question and continue to do so today.

Translated by Drew S. Burk

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## Metaphysics of Finance Economy Of its Radicalization as the Method of Revoking Real Economy

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### Abstract

My claim here is that there is no exit from metaphysics. We are metaphysical creatures inasmuch as we are material, the latter always already inviting the former. However, an exit from the disciplining and hallucinatory grasp of philosophical metaphysics or from philosophy is possible, as both Marx and Laruelle have shown. The effects of such exit will not only be intellectual or academic, but also social. Philosophical decisionism in an absolute form is the essence of capitalist economy and politics, and I will try to demonstrate this further on. Nonetheless, the ideas of political system or the possibilities of thinkable political horizons remain or become ever more detached from the economic logic of the liberal, pseudo-materialistic and individualist philosophy of exploitation through alienation called capitalism.

If “giving up our abstractions” (Marx) is the central and most important task of the science Marx invents and attempts to institute, then, I would argue, the follow up task should be to emancipate the metaphysics that is the object of that science from the authority of philosophy. It is the primitive and radical metaphysics of the inevitable gesture of mediating the immediate real that ought to be salvaged through non-philosophical, scientific operation with the *chôra* of metaphysical thought. Economic emancipation and other important forms of social emancipation would only follow consequentially. I would sum up Marx’s project as follows: its central task is to overcome the underlying and essentially philosophical alienation which enables the dichotomies of state politics and civil society, of the “spiritual” or religion and the secular, of “use value” and “surplus value.” Finally, the task of Marxist science is to serve to a political struggle which seeks to overcome the phantom existence shaped by wage labor and surplus value. The universe ruled by surplus value is guided by the impulse to suffocate real life and its material grounding represented as use value.

To radicalize metaphysics is to render it transcendental in the last instance, to acknowledge it as the necessary mediator or the core of radical subjectivity or what Laruelle terms “the Stranger.” The subject establishes a

relation of exteriority to it<sup>1</sup> and, seen in its last instance (or radically and inalienably),<sup>2</sup> it is the Stranger at the heart of the human-in-human. This concept admits and affirms the dyad between the real, the lived (or “le joui sans jouissance”) of the human in the last instance and the subject, while remaining radically descriptive or minimally transcendental.<sup>3</sup> The affirmation of the dyad engenders the radical subjectivity or the “figure of the Stranger,”<sup>4</sup> as explained in the previous chapter. The sense of pain created by the original and necessary estrangement and the sense of appropriation of this pain which transmutes the painful lived into joy, the sense of possession or of being at home, i.e., the sense of inalienable belonging, with the Stranger emerging from the heart of our mute self is the most immediate form of radical metaphysics.

My claim here is that there is no exit from metaphysics. We are metaphysical creatures inasmuch as we are material, the latter always already inviting the former. However, an exit from the disciplining and hallucinatory grasp of philosophical metaphysics or from philosophy is possible, as both Marx and Laruelle have shown. The effects of such exit will not only be intellectual or academic, but also social. Philosophical decisionism in an absolute form is the essence of capitalist economy and politics, and I will try to demonstrate this further

1 François Laruelle, *Théorie des Étrangers: Science des hommes, démocratie et non-psychanalyse*, Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1995), 196.

2 Laruelle, *Théorie des Étrangers: Science des hommes, démocratie et non-psychanalyse*, 196: « ‘Radical’ ne signifie pas autre chose qu’inaliénable ou que « de-dernière-instance.»

3 Larulle, *Théorie des Étrangers*, 221-223.

4 François Laruelle, *Théorie des Étrangers: Science des hommes, démocratie et non-psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions Kimé), 1995, 164-166

on. Nonetheless, the ideas of political system or the possibilities of thinkable political horizons remain or become ever more detached from the economic logic of the liberal, pseudo-materialistic and individualist philosophy of exploitation through alienation called capitalism.

Philosophical entrapment of metaphysics is constituted by the so-called amphibology of “the being” and the real,<sup>5</sup> of “essence” and “the being.” I would like to propose a non-philosophical procedure of radicalizing metaphysics – through unilateralizing the dyad – by way of situating it in the “material self” as its subject. Through the necessary and radical estrangement, or, in Laruelle’s terms, through the emergence of the figure of the Stranger at the core of the real or of the human-in-human, the inception of the metaphysical is constitutive of every subjectivization. This inception is painful, nonetheless inevitable and always already in place without being the product of a philosophical intention. Radicalizing metaphysics would result into furnishing the grounds for a realist or non-philosophically materialist theory of the human universe. The radical dyad is at the heart of the material self which has trouble claiming its own self as its own. Affirming the dyad means affirming the real of the trauma it produces. It also means affirming its reality instead of erasing it through a second gesture which is always philosophical (which, of course, includes religion and in particular Abrahamic theologies).

### **1. The source of the capitalist drive: dispossession rather than possession**

The sense of alienation begins at the level of subject’s constitution and it is this sense of dispossession that begets the grounding anxiety which creates philosophy

5 A Laruellian term, explained in the previous chapters.

as a panic and totalitarian response to it. Capitalist hyper-production of “added value” (added to the surplus value) represents a total colonization of society and material life by philosophy as the totalitarian response to a metaphysical need. Let us reiterate, this metaphysical need is materially grounded. The hysteria of private possession and of possessing the truth (of the real) as if it were the real itself aims to compensate for this primordial sense of dispossession. Can the problem of primordial dispossession be solved through the gesture of erasing it and, if done so, wouldn’t that be a properly philosophical response? So, is the abolition of the desire for any form of possession or property the true goal of communism seen as the result of the non-philosophical science Marx attempts to establish? If alienation created through wage labor represents exacerbation of the sense of grounding dispossession, capitalism is certainly not the solution to it, in spite of its ceaseless compulsion to be precisely that.

Therefore, a sense of possession is not what defines capital and the capitalist self but rather insatiable urge for it originating in the grounding dispossession. The capitalist drive creates an unstoppable process of alienation of labor, of objectifying human labor and the suffering behind it. Numeric or speculative value of pleasures or sources of pleasure (measured in money) derives from the urge toward ever greater perfection through abstraction of the needs that are only in their last instance material. In short, the founding operation of capitalist society is the procedure of dispossession of the material from its own metaphysical transposition (for example, of the worker from her metaphysics of work, of the lover from his metaphysics of pleasure). The cancelling of radical or primitive metaphysics is the defining prerequisite of philosophical and capitalist metaphysics.

At the beginning of the 21st century, economy is no longer economy in the proper sense of the word. It is an instrument of finances which postures as economy in its own right. “Finance industry” establishes amphibology with the real economy linked to material production of material consumables (a term explained below). The purely symbolic, linguistic (insofar as a matter of signification) value of money is no longer added to the material or use value. It is utterly detached from it. It has become auto-referential and its value is measured only according to hypothetical measurements in hypothetical systems of measuring. According to *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report* published by the US Government in 2011,<sup>6</sup> the great financial crisis which began in 2008 (and in 2013, it seems, it is here to stay), or the “recession,” was the result of “wrong estimations of the ranking agencies and the banks” about: the worth of “derivatives,” “securities” and other forms of derivation of financial value from another financial value and with no *direct* reference to any real or physical property or use value. (Indirectly and in the last instance, after a virtually endless line of mediations, there is always reference to an *estimation* of the *worth* of a material property.) The authors of the Report write:

In the years leading up to the crisis, too many financial institutions, as well as too many households, borrowed to the hilt, leaving them vulnerable to financial distress or ruin if the value of their investments declined even modestly. For example, as of 2007, the five major investment banks—Bear Stearns, Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley—were operating with extraordinarily thin capital. By one measure, their leverage ratios were as high as 40 to 1, meaning for every \$40 in assets, there

6 *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report* published by the US Government in 2011, pp. xix-xx.

was only 1\$ in capital to cover losses. Less than a 3\$ drop in asset values could wipe out a firm. To make matters worse, much of their borrowing was short-term, in the overnight market—meaning the borrowing had to be renewed each and every day. For example, at the end of 2007, Bear Stearns had 11.8 billion in equity and \$ 383.6 billion in liabilities and was borrowing as much as 70\$ billion in the overnight market. It was the equivalent of a small business with \$50.000 in equity borrowing \$1.6 million, with \$ 296 750 of that due each and every day. One can't really ask "What were they thinking?" when it seems that too many of them were thinking alike. And the leverage was often hidden—in derivatives positions, in off-balance-sheet entities, and through "window dressing" of financial reports available to the investing public.<sup>7</sup>

Evidently what was traded was not the material value (or the use value) of a material or physical object, together with its estimated surplus value. Only the surplus value entered into exchange after it had become completely detached from reference to and relevance of any use value. Negligence and squander of the real value of mortgages, or the fact that their real financial value had been unchecked or falsified, was not the main reason for "the collapse of the financial system" in 2008. The possibility of an utterly speculative trade, one based on pure abstractions of values and complete detachment from the material (reflected in use value) is the generator of the problem. Moreover, it represents the very foundation of investment banking and the "investment business" as a form of economy. As we can see in the paragraph quoted above, the "investment economy" is not based on capital in the classical sense of the word. It is not based on capital even in the financial sense which implies its translatability into the material. Its

<sup>7</sup> *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report*, xx.

foundations lie in the "thin air" of its capacities to rank, estimate, evaluate, predict, create and control processes in the financial market.

There is nothing material in the 21st century form of capitalism. Contemporary capitalism is not only based on "immaterial labor," as Negri and Hardt claim,<sup>8</sup> but also on pure abstraction and elevation to immateriality of both labor and capital. This situation is the result of the complete mathematization and speculation of the real. The 662 pages of the *Financial Crisis Inquiry Report* to the US Government (quoted above) display the blatant truth that concept itself (and all of its possible realities) of the "investment banking" is indiscernible from the so called "shadow banking system." In the last instance it is speculative and while speculating it interprets the material according to its own immanent rules (of speculation) and is in no way bound by the "primitive real." The real which has not been transformed into a meaning, signification or value is the "primitive," unruly real that seems to be non-existent unless given shape and value by the speculative mind. Investment banking, in the last instance, is determined by the practice of conducting "expertise" and speculation about the immaterial value (surplus or financial value) behind - or derived from - material worth.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitudes: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin Putnam), 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report*, 27-28: First, we describe the phenomenal growth of the shadow banking system—the investment banks, most prominently, but also other financial institutions—that freely operated in capital markets beyond the reach of the regulatory apparatus that had been put in place in the wake of the crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. This new system threatened the once-dominant traditional commercial banks, and they took their grievances to their regulators and to Congress, which slowly but steadily removed long-standing restrictions and helped banks break out of their



Capitalism is grounded in fetishization, wrote Marx. Contemporary economy is, in the last instance, determined by fetishism. The term fetishization in Marx may be borrowed from the studies of religion he was familiar with at the time when he was writing the first volume of *Capital*, but its meaning is very precise in terms of understanding the split between use value and surplus value, and also how the latter necessarily engenders the very logic of money as capital.

$M - M'$ . We have here the original starting-point of capital, money in the formula  $M - C - M'$  reduced to its two extremes  $M - M'$ , in which  $M' = M + DM$ , money creating more money. It is the primary and general formula of capital reduced to a meaningless condensation. It is ready capital, a unity of the process of production and the process of circulation, and hence capital yielding a definite surplus-value in a particular period of time. In the form of interest-bearing capital this appears directly, unassisted by the processes of production and circulation. Capital appears as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest – the source of its own increase. The *thing* (money, commodity, value) is now capital even as a mere thing, and capital appears as a mere thing. [...] The social relation is consummated in the relation of a thing, of money, to itself. Instead of the actual transformation of money into capital, we see here only form without content. As in the case of labour-power, the use-value of money here is its capacity of creating value – a value greater than it contains. Money as money is potentially self-expanding value and is loaned out as such – which is the form of sale for this singular commodity.<sup>10</sup>

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traditional mold and join the feverish growth. As a result, two parallel financial systems of enormous scale emerged.

10 Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. III Part V, Chapter: Externalization*

If capitalism is determined in the last instance by what Marx calls “fetishism,” and if the latter is determined as speculative (hence, philosophical),<sup>11</sup> it is bound to end up (and also - end) as “financial economy,” understood in opposition to “real economy” (the distinction is discussed below). By way of instituting the “fiat money” principle at its very origins, the possibility of an economy unattached to any material or use value (or in some economic vocabularies “objective value”) has been introduced. Moreover, speculation and, therefore, detachment from the real are the determination in the last instance and the vector of capitalist economy.

## 2. Pure speculation as the determination in the last instance of capitalism as philosophy

The defining detachment from use value produces and sustains a defining relevance of the pretension that the speculative logic of economy determines or engineers the use value itself. The implication is, therefore, that direct and material needs can be subsumed under fetish based needs. The desire is disciplined by the capitalist *jouissance* and it operates upon the physical attempting to mold it. As language governs the body, as philosophy governs the real so the “speculative needs” are more urgent than the material ones. A philosophy as the world or the world as philosophy, specifically defined

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*of the Relations of Capital in the Form of Interest-Bearing Capital* (First English edition of 1887 with modernisation of spelling; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/>, accessed on 17 October 2014.

11 As explained in the previous chapters, Marx equates philosophy with the abstract or the metaphysical (even when it is defined as “materialistic”), and it is difficult to determine if he seems any intrinsic possibility for it to detach itself from the metaphysical determination in the last instance.

by capitalism, is what sustains these processes and maintains capital's circulation of significance.

The philosophical/capitalist mirror of desires and needs falls asunder when confronted by the material urgency of the suffering bodies. Pain, hunger and rage created by the urgency of survival dispel the speculum of detached needs inscribed in the universe of "what matters in human life." When economic resources that provide for the material (and "spiritual" as used in Marx's texts) needs and interests are exhausted and survival is under threat, the speculum of capitalism and philosophy becomes "the bubble" *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report* talks about.

In 2008, the bubble burst and thereupon the state intervened. The intervention could not, however, be speculative. It had to draw on the material resources of its citizens: mortgages defaulted in the US, austerity cuts introduced in the EU. The brute material had to enter the scene of finances. The material in the guise of defaulted mortgages and destroyed livelihoods provided the grounds for the resurrection of a universe of nothing but signification - finances and the speculative "finance industry." The world made of "estimation" of the material had to be saved by a holocaust of the material. In the end, it wasn't the monetary value added to the material use value and to the labor force but the sheer bricks and land and life (as labor force) and livelihood of the labor force that had to ensure the survival of the banks and the resurrection of the specter – the market of speculation. The bricks and livelihoods were destroyed as soon as they were translated into "derivatives."

The 2008 crisis was the first instance in the history of capitalism when its speculative foundation was proven untenable unless supported by matter and in the last instance determined by the real and/or the

physical. Contemporary economics is the product of the philosophical determination in the last instance which postulates that the brute material is meaningless unless signified as monetary value. All ought to become pure signification since the material in itself is meaningless and worthless in the human universe which is one made of signs, exchange of signification or communication. My simplifying generalization is that, according to the ruling visions of authority today, the essence of economy or the logic market has its own intrinsic laws unattached to the basic survival needs of the human and non-human animals. In the last instance, contemporary economics is determined by the transcendental. Namely, it is determined by a philosophical decision as to what reality is, and this decision institutes itself as more real than the real itself. The transcendental postulation which constitutes its determination in the last instance is Kantian and post-Kantian. In other words, it is always already postmodern.

Capitalist vision of the world is essentially philosophical. It is a vision determined by its decisionism rather than by the authority of the real without the "added value" of philosophical or economical meaning. With this explanation of capitalism in view, I concur with the accelerationist idea of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, inspired by Nick Land's theory of accelerationism, according to which speeding up capitalism's functioning according to its inherent logic can be revolutionary.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, acceleration itself is immanent to capitalist political economy. The sheer introduction of the gesture of acceleration to what already accelerates itself

12 "#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO FOR AN ACCELERATIONIST POLITICS," *CRITICAL LEGAL THINKING* (14 MAY 2013), available at <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics>, accessed on 29 January 2014.

unstoppably does not constitute an intervention (let alone a revolution). Emancipation of the processes of acceleration from the bourgeois grip and their subsequent radical socialization (transformation into commons rather than the private property of a few individuals) are required in order to transcend capitalism and begin the creation of a socialist society.

The ever more accelerated capitalism will inevitably take its political-economic infrastructure and the specter of “finance industry” to a stage of hitting against the bedrock of the real and, as a result, to the falling asunder of its auto-referential meaninglessness. The real is not speculative, it is “the physical and sensuous” (Marx). It is the real-of-the-human which is presubjective and prelingual (Laruelle).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the revolts in the city squares, the sit-ins, the occupation of space, as Benjamin Noys argues, the overall slowing down and resistance to the temporal strategies of capital is one of the effective forms of resistance.<sup>14</sup> In a parallel fashion and without establishing contradiction, another form of resistance is to accelerate the speed of speculative finance in order for it to hit against the impossibility of the real consisting in the lack of material resources. If finance industry capitalizes on the sheer ruse of projections about the worth of the material (all assets backed by material property), the absence of anything to estimate and project about will condition its end.<sup>15</sup> The surplus value and use value will inevitably dissociate when there are disproportionately more empty buildings than populated ones, an inflation

of defaulted mortgages and devaluated assets. An apocalyptic landscape is, evidently, necessary for a new political horizon to appear. Nick Land’s accelerationist nihilism could be understood also in this sense, and this is where I identify its revolutionary potential (regardless of whether Land positions himself right or left).<sup>16</sup>

The financial crisis in 2008 proved wrong the philosophical grounding of modern economy as essentially materialistic and conveyed its purely transcendental or speculative foundations. The sobering effect of the real materialized in the form of trauma caused by defaulted mortgages, lost homes and lost jobs dispelled the mathematical purity of contemporary economy as financial in its last instance. In spite of the blow of the real which burst the global financial bubble in 2008, nowadays, 8 years later, the fetish or the specter of money rules stronger than ever. Austerity cuts aim at saving speculation itself. Remorseless saving has been imposed on social strata but also on entire countries. The most prominent case in Europe is that of Greece. Real economy is practically dead because for the sake of saving and returning a debt of fiction: “interest rates,” estimations of the worth of estimation (money). Real economy is dying in the name of the industry of production of signification or value. Finance industry is now alive and well, in perfect detachment from the material or use worth, whereas the material resources are progressively impoverished, and, in the end, will be destroyed. The vampirism of finance industry and its political elites is sucking out the life of all that is living on this planet. The exploitation and destruction of nature – which includes the human race – leaves us with a spectral universe which will soon be inhabitable for its vampires

13 Laruelle, *Ethique de l'Étranger* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2000), 259.

14 Benjamin Noys, “The War of Time: Occupation, Resistance, Communization,” *Identities* X 1-2 (30 October 2013), 83-92, available at <http://identitiesjournal.edu.mk/cat.php?id=1>.

15 Brett Scott, *The Heretic Guide to Global Finance: Hacking the Future of Money* (London: Pluto Press), 2013

16 Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, edited by Ray Brassier and Robin McKay (Falmouth: Urbanomic), 2011

too. Currently, the real is suppressed by the (essentially capitalist) universe of speculation in the philosophical sense, but also in the sense of the speculative mind of gaming.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Economy is always already political

Gaming includes risk. But the type of gaming which grounds the so-called finance industry does not presuppose risk in the last instance, i.e., material defaulting and materially – or physically and really – experienced loss. In the last instance, when the gamers collided with the rock of the real – the material threat to “their way of life” – they asked for a government bailout and they got it. Apparently, there is direct complicity between banking industry and the government, at least in the US and in the European Union, as it has been proven since 2008. Intervention of the state in the affairs of economy of the kind which produces use value (apart from or in addition to the surplus value) is understandable. However, the motivation of the state to intervene in the so-called finance industry in order to save it and maintain economic stability is utterly vague. How does the stability of the investment banks and funds serve the general economic stability, the one linked to material production, consumption and sustainability?

17 *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report published by the US Government* (2011), 48: Herb Sandler, the co-founder of the mortgage lender Golden West Financial corporation, which was heavily loaded with option ARM loans, wrote a letter to officials at the Federal Reserve, the FDIC, the OTS, and the OCC warning that regulators were “too dependent” on ratings agencies and “there is a high potential for gaming when virtually any asset can be churned through securitization and transformed into a AAA-rated asset, and when a multi-billion dollar industry is all too eager to facilitate this alchemy.

Investment banking concerns investments into investments, betting on the viability of investments and selling those speculations to other investment speculators. They serve all sorts of funds whose activity comes down to the trade of their assessment, of their best guess or speculation about of the financial worth of something which has only indirect or meditated – if any – material worth. The material determination in the last instance is not the subject of trade in investment banking and is hardly its determination in the last instance.

In the last instance, investment (and/or banking) industry has no effect on the real industry. At least, not a productive one. So, why is the maintaining of the stability of the finance market so important for the economic stability of a country? How come it is more important than the “material industry” or the so called real economy? This question departs from the fact that the bailout of the former takes place at the detriment of the latter.<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of the eventual presence/absence of oversight, government intervention was required and considered legitimate since it is a government’s responsibility to

18 *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report*, 60: This resilience led many executives and regulators to presume the financial system had achieved unprecedented stability and strong risk management. The Wall Street banks’ pivotal role in the Enron debacle did not seem to trouble senior Fed officials. In a memorandum to the FCIC, Richard Spillenkothen described a presentation to the Board of Governors in which some Fed governors received details of the banks’ complicity “coolly” and were “clearly unimpressed” by analysts’ findings. “The message to some supervisory staff was neither ambiguous nor subtle,” Spillenkothen wrote. Earlier in the decade, he remembered, senior economists at the Fed had called Enron an example of a derivatives market participant successfully regulated by market discipline without government oversight.

preserve economic stability of a country (and through that of all other forms of social stability). This means that the use value necessary for life, both physical and “spiritual” (as in Marx’s texts, i.e., as attached and directly issuing from the physical) survival of the ordinary citizens, had to be transformed into surplus value that serves the stability of the financial market. In other words, the material is annulled by transforming it into the purely speculative, the use value is barred by its total transformation into surplus value and the sole purpose of this process is to sustain a universe of pure surplus value.

How important is the health of the investment and banking industry, how important is the health and the stability of hedge funds and insurance companies for the survival of the so called real economy? How has the crisis of the investment industry really affected the material production of tangible use value? If banking industry can be viewed as an industry in its own right which can remain fundamentally detached from the real economy, how important is it for a country’s stability to insure the survival and preservation of this autonomous universe? The crisis has certainly affected all those whose houses have been defaulted or who have lost social benefits. If that is the case, then, the US Government’s bailout of the big investors brought more than danger than stability to its society and, hence, economy: a) growth of poverty, b) a huge hole in the national budget, and c) preservation of an “industry,” which not only does not necessarily support the real economy, but, quite to the contrary, immanently contains the tendency to destroy it (the real economy) if it brings more profit to it.<sup>19</sup>

19 Michael Schroeder et al., “The Role of Investment Banking for the German Economy: Final Report for Deutsche Bank AG, Frankfurt/Main,” Mannheim: Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung, 2011, p. 12

This is one attempt at explaining the phenomenon of “financialization of economy.” Let us examine what other possible definitions there are.

#### 4. The change of Marx’s equation

Investment banks do not serve the final beneficiaries of any real economy, i.e., humanity and other living beings. Since the dawn of capitalism until the emergence of “finance economy,” industry has been producing material goods. Its goal has always been the surplus value, its vector has always been  $M \rightarrow M_1$ , however always and by definition grounded in the production of commodity, the hybrid of use value and surplus value. Use value has been the indispensable intermediary in the creation of surplus value. That is the logic behind the equation  $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M$  (money-commodity-money).

At the turn of the 21st century, investment banking assumed the status of the unavoidable intermediary for the investors’ main activity (making profit). With the usurpation of the status of the main intermediary in investing, banking industry has suppressed and, finally, eliminated production of use value as the central intermediary for achieving the defining capitalist goal (represented by the  $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M$  equation). Since investment or finance industry has assumed the status of an industry in its own right and its speculative activities have been assigned the quality of products exchanged on the market, Marx’s  $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M$  has turned into  $M \rightarrow M \rightarrow M$ . Commodities produced by the apparently self-sufficient industry of banking are purely financial phenomena because they originate in the register of speculation which produces pure signification - money. Commodities produced by the banking industry bear the names of: securities, derivatives, certificates, bonds, equities, etc. The  $M \rightarrow M \rightarrow M$  cycle is detached from the material, from

the primary, secondary and tertiary economy which continues to satisfy the material needs of the human and non-human animals. The chasm that has appeared between the universe of sheer speculation (M-M-M) and that of the physical world and its immediate needs (to which M-C-M was still somehow related) will grow. Finally, the foundering of the image, and of the tenuous reality of the economic whole the two are presumed to constitute, will become inevitable.

When in 2008 financial crisis or recession was declared, the US government decided that the financial institutions facing bankruptcy were “too big to fail,” since that would have destabilized the entire economy considering they were “too interconnected with other financial institutions.”<sup>20</sup> But would such eventual failure have affected the real economy, in all of its three sectors? Considering investment banks are detached from commercial banks and work practically with no capital, as the *US Financial Crisis Inquiry Report* informs the reader (quotes are provided above), exactly how would the eventual failure of banking industry have affected the production of the real economy?

In a study entitled “The Impact of the Financial Crisis on the Real Economy,” the authors state: “The cost of the financial crisis to the real economy has so far remained underexamined, probably because of the difficulty in making such an assessment.”<sup>21</sup> This study, which is a policy analysis of the financial crisis’ effects on the European and, more particularly, German economy, makes apparent the fact that the impact of the financial market on the “real market economy” remains a “rather

vague phenomenon.” It is not only vague to the authors of the study but also to the other academic and non-academic authorities in the area cited in it.

Hartmann-Wendels et al. (2010, p. 23), for instance, consider the legal term „Finanzdienstleistungsinstitute“ the German equivalent of investment banks. According to the legal definition of the functions of financial service providers (“Finanzdienstleistungsinstitute”, §1a KWG), however, the term is rather broad as it also includes other financial service providers besides investment banks. Another issue is raised by the assignment of some financing activities closely intertwined with investment banking activities (e.g. financing of M&A transactions). Although in practice such financing activities may be considered a part of investment banking, the widespread definition of investment banking in academic literature refrains from assigning any financing functions to the term investment banking. Hartmann-Wendels et al. (2010, p. 16) define investment banking as the set of “all functions of a bank, which support trading at financial markets.”<sup>22</sup>

In his book from 2013 “Profiting Without Producing,” Costas Lapavitsas claims the same and he explains that the notion of “financialization of economy” never even entered the vocabulary or the conceptual apparatus of mainstream economics. Nonetheless, the phenomenon has been determining our economic realities since 2008.<sup>23</sup> Lapavitsas’ book also demonstrates how the neoliberal economy is essentially enabled by “monopoly state control over the final means of payment.”

20 *Ibid*, 386.

21 Daniel Gros and Cinzia Alcidi, “The Crisis and the Real Economy,” *Intereconomics* 2010/1 [DOI: 10.1007/s10272-010-0320-0], pp. 7-20.

22 *Ibid*. 12.

23 Costas Lapavitsas, *Profiting Without Producing: How Finance Exploits Us All* (London/NY: Verso, 2013),

The fact that the role of the “finance economy” was completely unexamined at the time when the Crisis was declared did not prevent the US government to react with bank bailouts as it did not prevent the EU governments to react with budget cuts and other forms of state intervention aiming to preserve “economic stability.” What was, in fact, being saved was the self-enveloped world of the financial market, a self-sufficient universe parasitizing on the rest of the society and of the economy rather than providing grounds for their survival and growth. On the other hand, the negative effects on the real economy caused by the reduced spending capacity of the population were something which could be predicted by every economist, politician and also by the ordinary citizen. Therefore, what is known to be detrimental to the economic stability and growth (material not financial or speculative) was sacrificed in the name of what is known to be utterly unexamined in terms of its effects with respect to the real economy. The states which went on to save their national and the global “financial industries” determined that the intermediary between money making and more money making was more important for the overall economic stability than the real economy.

*The Enigma of Capital*<sup>24</sup> by David Harvey proffers a genealogy of the “financialization of economy” and of the financial crisis which occurred after 2007. According to the evidence presented by Harvey, deregulation of finance was the cornerstone of the “new and global financial architecture,” which originated in the late 1970s, and “was accelerated in 1986 and became unstoppable 1990s.”<sup>25</sup> Harvey explains that deregulation was a *political invention*. It was an intervention of the neoliberal governments into the banking system aiming

to bridge “the gap between what labor was earning and what it could spend.”<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that the banks were reluctant to embrace absolute liberalism and, hence, absence of any regulation. Therefore, tells us Harvey, “political pressure” had to be used in order to force financial institutions such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to “loosen the credit strings for everyone.”<sup>27</sup>

Costas Lapavitsas debunks the myth about the helpless states incapable of establishing control over the “out of joint capitalism” and of the imagined “elemental forces” of naturalized economy. Behind the mirage of unrestrained liberalism lies the truth of economic and social policies of nation-states. The idea of absolute liberty of the market, the imaginary of the natural forces of capital is made possible by a grounding metaphysical premise about “naturalness” of capitalist free market economy. Lapavitsas reminds us that economy has always been political, just as Marx insisted.

Second, crucial to the ascendancy of private credit money has been its legal convertability into state-backed money created by central banks. The latter is a hybrid form of money: it is partly credit since it is created through credit mechanisms (mostly lending by the central bank to private banks); it is partly fiat since it is inconvertible legal tender that normally rests on the state’s promises to pay. This hybrid form of money is the ultimate lever of state power in the realm of finance because it allows the state to provide liquidity and to make payments at critical junctures. Financialization has been stamped by the conscious management of state-backed central bank money through various mechanisms of the state. Central

24 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

25 Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 16.

26 Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 17.

27 Ibid.

banks have emerged as a leading public institution, typically under a façade of independence. The command exercised by states over central bank money has made sustained intervention in the field of finance possible throughout the period of financialization. The importance of control over state-backed credit money was made clear in the course of the global crisis of the 2000s.<sup>28</sup>

Political pressure that needed to be used in order to install the “system of neoliberalism,” proves that absolute liberty of economy and finances is not a natural, self-generated reality. Rather, it is the product of a political decision. Therefore, it is the product of philosophical decision. It relies on a postulation of reality that is essentially philosophical. This means that one not only postulates cognitively about the real, but also performs a practical gesture of philosophical intervention whereby thought determines what the real/reality is. While determining the real, the same gesture performs a second subterfuge gesture - truth substitutes reality. “Decisionism” of this sort, let us reiterate Laruelle’s thesis, is what determines any and all philosophy in the last instance, thereby producing an amphibology between thought and the real. Most important product of this amphibology is “the Being.”<sup>29</sup> By that same logic, absolute freedom and its supposed innate self-regulation are creations of a philosophical decision which surreptitiously and “amphibologically” instilled itself as the real rather than what it really is – a political (and philosophical) decree.

Through the bailouts of investment banks and through the budget cuts, the state authorities have strived to preserve a self-sufficient universe of abstraction called

“finance industry.” This universe of pure abstraction seems to be based on the original presupposition that it can survive completely detached from the real or the material world (= the world of defaulted houses and massively reduced reproduction of material goods). Is it possible that this is a philosophical flaw, result of a mere superstitious misconception? Is it possible that the origin of the crisis consists in a philosophical fallacy according to which the fetish (money) represents not just a reality but also a worth in its own right rather than mere mediation between two or more material realities? George Soros has accused the German Chancellor Angela Merkel for precisely this – a philosophical fallacy in the ways in which she has dealt with the crisis, i.e. for “misconceptions and taboos” which lead to austerity measures against the debtor Eurozone countries such as Greece.<sup>30</sup> In a number of interviews and articles, George Soros, the person who had been one of the main proponents of “finance industry,” unraveled the spectral nature of that same industry which made him rich. He termed the belief in its realness - a misconception. This point is the undercurrent in the central set of arguments in his article on the topic, published in October 2013. Let us consider the following quote:

I can testify from personal experience that investors would flock to Greece once the debt overhang was removed. But the official sector cannot write down its debt, because that would violate a number of taboos, particularly for the ECB.<sup>31</sup>

30 George Soros, “Angela Merkel’s Pyrrhic Victory,” Project Syndicate VIII (7 October 2013), available at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/george-soroson-angela-merkel-s-pyrrhic-victory>, accessed on 30 November 2013.

31 George Soros, “Angela Merkel’s Pyrrhic Victory,” available at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/george-soroson-angela-merkel-s-pyrrhic-victory>, accessed on 30 November 2013.

28 Costas Lapavistas, *Profiting Without Producing*, 70.

29 François Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie* (Bruxelles-Liege: Pierre Mardaga, 1989), 42 ff.



Certainly, one can never be sure if Merkel suffers from “misconceptions” about the nature of financial market and its allegedly immanently liberal and self-regulating nature or whether she has made an informed political decision to stick with the policies of neo-liberalism. The same dilemma stands for Barack Obama and his financial policies and political decisions related to the post 2007 crisis. In spite of Soros’s advice to the contrary, in 2008, Obama decided to bailout the banks. George Soros, one of the most generous financial supporters of Obama’s electoral campaign in 2008, advised Obama to nationalize the banks instead, reports the Wall Street Journal Online.<sup>32</sup> It appears unusual that a finance magnate would opt for nationalization of banks while a politician decides to opt for financialization of the national economy. Once again, it seems viable to claim – and, in this respect, I follow David Harvey’s argument presented above – that the financialization of global economy is a political project rather than an economic “natural process.”

Fictitious financial capital took control and nobody wanted to stop it because everyone who mattered seemed to be making lots of money. In the US, political contributions from Wall Street soared. Remember Bill Clinton’s famous rhetorical question as he took office? ‘You mean to tell me that the success of the economic program and my re-election hinges on the Federal Reserve and a bunch of fucking bond traders?’ Clinton was nothing if not a quick learner.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of the conscious decision or the philosophical ruse to convince the world that “innate absolute freedom” of finance is natural state of affairs rather than a state’s trick to postpone decisions regarding real economy (as much as possible or almost indefinitely), we might be dealing with misconceptions too. In other words, an informed political decision to pursue neoliberal policies does not exclude the possibility of uninformed misconceptions about its “realness” in the world of material production and reproduction (social, economic and physical). The idea that one could postpone material reality without material consequences is probably a misconception, a fallacy of the fundamentally speculative mind of contemporary Capital perpetuating an old metaphysical hierarchy which accords primacy and supremacy to the mental (or “the idea”) over the bodily (or “the material”).

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32 Luca Di Leo, “Soros Criticizes Obama’s Bailouts,” *The Wall Street Journal* (1 March 2010), available at <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704089904575093760994295890>, accessed on 9 December 2013.

33 Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 17. Oxana

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Oxana  
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## UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE FOR COMMUNISM

### Bionote

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### Abstract

The question of what the community should be is a question of value and what ought to be; any attempt to answer this question leads us to discordant models of social organization, to an ideological quarrel about how to rebuild humanity. The community appears as a gathering of people, large or small, but certainly different from a group, a collective, a society – in terms of its density or the character of its objectives, its anatomy or teleology. As we are told, the community is not a group, not a collective, no – and it is not a nation, not a people – but it is also not a crowd or a mass. The specter of communism hangs in the common and

unappropriated air. The very name swears an oath of allegiance to the idea of the community. Communism is the society of the community, what is common and belongs to no one, but we will never agree on the subject of whether this principle coincides with or opposes democracy. Thus the specter of communism, having appeared out of the air, disperses into it as well. Communism is humanity’s memory of what has not yet happened. In this way it resembles a dream – you never know when the idyll might turn into a nightmare.

Passenger pigeons used to inhabit all the territories of the US and Canada. They appeared in the sky in such thick flocks that they literally blocked the sun. It grew dark like during an eclipse. The flying birds covered the whole firmament from one horizon to the other. Pigeon dung fell from the sky like snowflakes; the endless hum of wings recalled the whistling of storm winds.

Hours went by, but the pigeons were still flying and flying, with neither the end nor the beginning of their marching column in sight. Nothing could divert this “squadron,” innumerable as locusts, from its course—not shouts, not gunshots, not cannonfire. [...]

Was it really possible to exterminate such a fantastic multitude of birds quickly? The sad fate of the passenger pigeon tells us that it is possible, if you take up this task in a clever way.

(I. Akimushkin. *The Tracks of Unseen Beasts*<sup>1</sup>)

The question of the community is the question of a definition that is always lost in the succession of scholarly paradigms. Its answer follows the formula  $A=B$  (C, D...), where the community is an indifferent object among other equally indifferent objects, a washed-out stain on the scholarly picture of the world. It may be this or that, but its definition (or set of definitions) is not even a tool, let alone a weapon in this dangerous game we play with ourselves, and in which the community is one of the biggest stakes.

The question of what the community should be is a question of value and what ought to be; any attempt to answer this question leads us to discordant models of social organization, to an ideological quarrel about how to rebuild humanity. The community appears as a gathering of people, large or small, but certainly different from a group, a collective, a society – in terms of its density or the character of its objectives, its anatomy or teleology. As we are told, the community is not a group, not a collective, no – and it is not a nation, not a people – but it is also not a crowd or a mass.

The question of the community – they tell us – is a question about the essence of democracy, a question about the limits of human coexistence, a question about the common, about what we share with one another, beyond definitive goals, identities, advantages, fortunes, stations, ideologies, idols, ideals, fears, passions – beyond everything that links us to a group, a collective, a nation, a people, and also to the crowd and the masses. As if between us there was a place for some kind of common “in general,” some general-in-commonality, but at the same time not total and certainly not “totalitarian.” This is a specific modality of resisting totalization, resisting the unification of an imaginary gathering under a common flag. The community, they tell us, will not march in step to the victory of any one transcendental principle. As an indeterminate and immanent multiplicity of singularities, the community is indistinguishable from the absence of community: it is unrepresentable, but nothing is possible without it, it’s just like the air we breathe – common to all and belonging to no one. No one can appropriate the air.

The specter of communism hangs in the common and unappropriated air. The very name swears an oath of allegiance to the idea of the community. Communism is the society of the community, what is common and belongs to no one, but we will never agree on the subject of whether this principle coincides with or opposes democracy. Thus the specter of communism, having appeared out of the air, disperses into it as well. The name “communism” is hurriedly stuffed with the noise of discussions about the general horizon of the future, and these are filled with the noise of other discussions – about the past, about the burden we drag altogether with us toward our horizon, making it seem all the more frightening. Communism is humanity’s memory of what has not yet happened. In this way it resembles a

1 This article was written as part of my research at Humboldt University in Berlin with the financial support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (stipend for experienced researchers). It also summarizes several outcomes of my two-year work in the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht (2010-2011).  
Ivan Akimushkin, *Sledy nevidannykh zverei* (Moscow: Geografiz, 1961).

dream – you never know when the idyll might turn into a nightmare.

The moment when an idyll turns into a nightmare is one of those moments in the dream, when the real of our desire tries to speak. It speaks in the language of the unconscious, difficult to translate and belonging to no one. There is no “I” in this language; it is pre-personal and pre-individual, and it is with this language that the unrepresentable, anonymous multiplicity expresses itself. It is not so much an “it,” or “id,” in the Freudian sense, as a “they” which has not yet appeared as a gathering of people. The inhabitants of this world are animals; the dream’s navel joins me to “them,” those who have no faces.

The question of what a community is or what a community should be – a question of definition or necessity – is a question about people, about calculable gatherings of people, by whose efforts the original matter of democracy or communism is in the end subordinated to the forms of national or totalitarian states – at least this is what concrete historical experience teaches us. But a “they” is not a “we” – only at the level of the real of our desire, the level of affect, does the uncountable multiplicity of beasts first come into its rights. The question of the community as desire (the question of utopia) brings us back to the uncountable multiplicity of beasts, to the animal unconscious. Here there is nothing primary, original, organic, native – following “them,” the paths of beasts, we return not to the origin but to that which has never been.

The idyll of the community (communism) never existed before its reality became a nightmare. The real of our desire never existed before we began to translate it from the language of the unconscious – an inarticulate

language, like a beast’s cry. We only know this language in translation, but indeed it only arises at the moment of translation; the original (forgotten, lost) arises through the process of translation. “They” do not exist before us by themselves, but as soon as “we” arrive, “they” are always already here, “they” were always already here: a paradoxical retrospection. The question of “we,” of the community (and with them the question of communism, of democracy, of utopia) in this way becomes a question of the animal multiplicity (of the unconscious), and this is precisely how we will raise it here.

As Lacan said, the unconscious is structured like a language. The unconscious is the speech of the Other, a form of speech not ruled by the ego.<sup>2</sup> Human subjectivity, as Lacan understands it, is the result of an appropriation of what lies “beyond” the mirror, beyond speech, what is called the outside. A human being is born prematurely, awkward, fragmented, ill prepared. But when a small child, just having learned to walk, looks in the mirror and sees his reflection, suddenly he or she guesses that this is “me.” The miracle of recognizing oneself in the mirror is something like a compensation for our premature appearance in the world.<sup>3</sup>

According to Lacan, animals do not have language, and this means no unconscious, no speech of the Other to appropriate from the outside and from which to build one’s integrity and singularity. What does Lacan’s pigeon see in the mirror? Another pigeon, a potential

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- 2 See, for example: Viktor Mazin, *Vvedenie v Lakana* [“Introduction to Lacan”] ([http://www.xliby.ru/kulturologija/vvedenie\\_v\\_lakana/p20.php](http://www.xliby.ru/kulturologija/vvedenie_v_lakana/p20.php)).
- 3 Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage As Formative Of The I Function As Revealed In Psychoanalytic Experience”, in *Ecrits*, A Selection, Trans. by Bruce Fink (New York; London, W.W. Norton & Company), 93-100.

sexual partner. Lacan refers to a biological experiment which “acknowledges that it is a necessary condition for the maturation of the female pigeon’s gonads that the pigeon see another member of its species, regardless of its sex; this condition is so utterly sufficient that the same effect may be obtained by merely placing a mirror’s reflecting field near the individual. Similarly, in the case of the migratory locust, the shift within a family line from the solitary to the gregarious form can be brought about by exposing an individual, at a certain stage of its development, to the exclusively visual action of an image akin to its own, provided the movements of this image sufficiently resemble those characteristic of its species.”<sup>4</sup>

In his essay “And Say the Animal Responded?” Jacques Derrida groups Lacan with Descartes, Heidegger, and Levinas – philosophers who draw a clear line between the human and the animal. For Derrida the very possibility of such a distinction is highly problematic as one of a series of metaphysical binary oppositions that reduce the multiplicity of beasts to a certain generic figure of the “animal,” against the background of which the identity of the human is organized. This is how he discusses the passage quoted above about the pigeon: “Lacan speaks of movement from the ‘solitary’ to the ‘gregarious’ form, and not to the ‘social’ form, as though the difference between *gregarious* and *social* were the difference between animal and human.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course, for Derrida this is a question of a particular kind of politics – an unresponsive, speechless, herd-like animality that turns out to be that point, at first glance marginal, from which all the viciousness of the

repressive, totalitarian philosophical tradition suddenly opens up to one’s gaze, the viciousness of the circle that marks the human, logos, and being.<sup>6</sup> Giorgio Agamben calls the mechanism of production of this distinction the “anthropological machine,” not only separating people from animals but also anthropologizing animals and bestializing people.<sup>7</sup>

Both Agamben and Derrida are concerned with this border and the violence that occurs on the approach to it – racist violence or the violence of the apparatus toward life, toward the body. Both base their analysis of animality – an analysis of difference or a border – on a deconstruction or criticism of Heidegger’s project and, in particular, Heidegger’s critique of humanism (according to Heidegger, humanism is not sufficiently radical because it recognizes the animality of the human – superior in some ways, for example thinking, but still an animal).<sup>8</sup> The deconstruction of Heidegger’s *Destruktion* follows the tracks left by beasts that must be excluded from the community. We can live with them in one house, Heidegger says, but we cannot co-exist with them and share being with them, just like we cannot share sense with them – after all, only language is the authentic house of being, while they are homeless, do not understand our language, producing only senseless noise.<sup>9</sup>

4 Ibid., 96.

5 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 121.

6 See, for example, Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” trans. Edouard Morot-Sir, Wesley C. Puisol, Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Barbara Reid, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30, 1.

7 See Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (California: Stanford University Press, 2004).

8 See Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

9 See, for example: Susanna Lindberg, “Heidegger’s Animal,” in

While I agree with Derrida, Agamben, and other contemporary philosophers that the classic idea of the human's superiority over the animal is far from innocent, and its sustained unraveling is a matter of principal importance, I cannot deny the constitutive role of binary oppositions and their ambivalent consequences – in particular for a non-human theory of the community, of which I will risk a brief sketch in this essay. Of course, Derrida's attacks on traditional metaphysics and its reduction of the irreducible multiplicity of the animal world to one simple category of "the animal" are fair, but at the same time, as Slavoj Žižek affirms in a somewhat Hegelian vein, "the violent reduction of such a multiplicity to a minimal difference is the moment of truth."<sup>10</sup> Žižek's idea, to put it briefly, is that precisely this minimal, theoretical binary gives birth to the truth of the human – not the truth that is officially pronounced on its side of the opposition (rational, thinking, etc.), but another truth about the non-human core of humanity. We would never have learned about this other side without the animal, what we think we are not, looming on the horizon of our knowledge about ourselves.

Yes, animals *have* no unconscious; they *are* the unconscious themselves (not so much the darkness of

instincts and drives, but the language of the Other – not the possession of language but its being, which is carried to us either as noise or a cry). They *have* no being; they *are* being itself (the human is the shepherd of being, says Heidegger; and this means that being is a herd, and the call that comes from it is indistinguishable from noise or a cry). They *have* no community; they *are* community themselves (an irreducible, noisy multiplicity). I am taking account of the paradoxical aspect of this method, but I hope that the intuitions and hypotheses lying at its foundation can serve as a fragile bridge to the utopian community of beasts, about which the desire for communism communicates in its own language, so difficult to translate.

To begin I will attend to one more distinction, made by Heidegger, between the animal and the human. Namely, for him, animals are not only incapable of language, they also cannot count.<sup>11</sup> This thesis brings us back to Lacan's pigeon, who cannot count to one. The pigeon is a real narcissist, naively believing in the reality of its reflection in the mirror. In fact, the animal world has no mirrors – in contrast to gatherings of people, animal multiplicities are not formed from singularities, from egos. The pigeon and its reflection are already a couple, hinting at coitus: a visual effect is enough. People come together into gatherings – and they come one by one; animals multiply, looking at one another. Yes, they do not know how to count, and they are uncountable. Pigeons, these – as they say now in Belgium – "rats with wings,"<sup>12</sup> gray

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*Phenomenological Studies* (Hamburg, 2004), 215, and also my articles: Oxana Timofeeva, "Koni v zakone: Kratkii nabrosok k filosofii zivotnogo," [Horses in Law: A Brief Outline to the Philosophy of Animal"] *Sinii divan* 10-11 (2007), 80-95; idem. "Bednaia zhizn': Zootehnik Visokovskii protiv filosofa Xaideggera," [Poot Life: Zootechnician Visokovsky Against Philosopher Heidegger"] *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 106 (2011) 96-113; and the monograph: Oxana Timofeeva, *History of Animals: An Essay on Negativity, Immanence and Freedom* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academy, 2012), 119-130.

10 Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 408.

11 See, for example, Stuart Elden, *Speaking Against Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

12 See, for example, these recent news about plans to euthanize urban pigeons, approved by the authorities in Brussels: <http://korrespondent.net/tech/health/1568341-vlasti-bryusselya-odobrili-plan-evtanzii-gorodskih-golubej>.

bastards of the city, block the sky with their bodies, fill the squares, and shit on the heads of monuments to the most noble and respected people.

One can count all the people living on the planet within a certain margin of error. But we could never count all the animals. Only some limited groups of specific animals can be counted if they are integrated into the economic activity of human beings (pets, livestock, rare examples of disappearing species). The economic activity of human beings, it is true, spreads across the entire living world, but to determine the number of beasts as a whole is impossible – not because there are too many of them but because they have no number. At least not such a number as what can be calculated, rationally enumerated and inventorized. Economic control of the human being over the animal world for this reason replaces the count of classifications, parsing this motley, humming multiplicity into types, species, or families.

Thus, the Book of Numbers is a kind of census of the Jewish population, a broad calculation of gatherings of people. Leviticus, which precedes it, contains among other things a classification of animals. The God of Leviticus tells the Jews which animals can be eaten or sacrificed and which cannot, which are clean and which are unclean.

We learn about one particularly radical biblical attempt at counting the animals in Genesis 5-8, the story of Noah's Ark. Regretting what he has created (since humanity has fallen into sin), God decides to exterminate all living things – the flood waters are meant to wipe all living beings from the face of the earth, apart from those taken aboard the rescue boat.

Turning to Noah, God gives his first command about the animals – take “two of every kind of flesh,” “male and

female:” “Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.” Here the count is a question of life or death – only those that have been counted will survive. What is disturbing about this command? Whole species remain beyond the field of vision of the ark's creator. All animals that lack sexual difference, hermaphrodites, homosexual animals, and those who reproduce themselves asexually – none of these will make it on board.

However, later God gives a new command: “of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.”

Why should clean animals be taken on board in sevens, and the unclean only in couples? Noah, of course, does not ask God about this, but we would have liked to ask, if we had had the opportunity. Perhaps the answer was obvious for the people of the Old Testament. The selection of animals for the ark is the most serious and important household activity, with which Noah and his family are entrusted, and here classification serves as the foundation for a headcount of cattle. Clean animals are those that can be, first, eaten, and, second, sacrificed. Most likely, besides one couple, intended for the maintenance of the species, two extra couples (and, perhaps, their offspring) formed a kind of food supply. One member of each group of seven – a single animal, with no mate, as if agamic – will be sacrificed to God as a sign of gratitude when the floodwaters recede and the boat reaches dry land.

And so the preparations are complete: “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of

heaven opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.” Only one couple or one group of seven of every species is on board. All the rest – who have not been counted and are uncountable – are abandoned to the deep.

Is it not from this abyss that the animal unconscious is called to our memory? Our path to it lies through one more Bible story – this time from the New Testament.

In the legend of the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus and his disciples sail to the country of Gadara and meet a man who is possessed by devils, wears no clothes, and lives not in a house but in the tombs. The unclean spirits torture the possessed man; people bind him in chains, but he tears them off and flees into the desert. Jesus asks his name, and the man answers: “My name is Legion: for we are many.”<sup>13</sup> The legion of devils asks Jesus not to send them into the abyss but into a herd of pigs, grazing nearby. Jesus allows them to enter the bodies of the pigs after leaving the man, and the herd throws itself into a lake and drowns.

Pigs are unclean animals. Another meaning of the word “unclean” is a devil, an evil spirit. The unclean, evil spirits, the number of which fits their name – Legion – in the final analysis find a refuge (and death) in the bodies of beasts. The herd of sheep, carrying away the devils inside, recall the famous “ship of fools,” particularly Michel Foucault’s description of it in his *History of Madness*.<sup>14</sup> He refers to the medieval tradition of gathering all madmen, putting them on a boat, and sending them off on an endless voyage in the open sea.

Thus the community – the gathering of people – heals its body by excluding the dangerous, heterogeneous elements that do not participate in economic activity and do not submit to calculation. The ship of fools is Noah’s Ark in reverse. Here safety is only on land, and the sea together with the ship is a symbol of the abyss (and, as Foucault reminds us, a symbol of madness).

Abandoned by the crowd of devil-beasts, man is left alone. This is the meaning of the healing procedure – now he is given his name, his home, now he can again recognize himself in the mirror and return to the society of other people. The possession that tortured him – that is, his mental illness, his madness – has abated; the Legion of devils has retreated and gone into the small abyss of the lake; “they” have fallen silent; the unclean animal multiplicity has given up its place for the unity of the human “I.”

There is something in this biblical miracle of healing akin to psychoanalysis – the science of the unconscious, which Freud linked to the repressed animal element in the human, and Lacan to language, to the unruly speech of the Other. In 1910 a Russian patient, Sergei Pankeev, later known as the Wolf Man, comes to Freud in order to complete a course of therapy and cure himself of his psychic malady. During one of the sessions he tells Freud his childhood nightmare. It is nighttime and the boy (the patient) is lying in his bed. Suddenly the window of his bedroom swings open, and he sees a tree, and on its branches are sitting wolves – several (six or seven) white wolves with bushy tails like fox tails. The wolves sit motionless and stare fixedly at the boy. After this terrifying vision (he is afraid of being eaten by the wolves), the boy wakes.

The patient notes that the only movement in this dream about motionless wolves is the window opening

13 Mark 5:8.

14 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006).



before him. A rather significant detail, which allows the patient to understand all at once that it was not the window but his own eyes that suddenly opened before something terrible. In the course of analysis, by means of an inversion, the idea comes up that the fixed stare of the wolves is in fact the boy's own gaze. According to Freud, it is he, the boy, who is looking with wolf's eyes at something frightening in the place where he is supposed to be himself: "The attentive gaze, which in the dream he attributes to the wolves, is actually to be ascribed to him."<sup>15</sup>

Interpreting this narrative, Lacan again uses the metaphor of the mirror. The subject's gaze coincides with the place it is directed towards: "The subject passes beyond this glass in which he always sees, entangled, his own image."<sup>16</sup> Lacan links this unique experience provided by the "navel" of the dream with some ultimate real, emphasizing the fact that the unconscious is not some kind of supplement to the subject but its dissociation, disintegration, disruption. The human subject carries its own rupture within. For the multiplicity of animals, evil spirits, and the abyss is now no longer in some other place but in the human subject itself. The boy is the wolves staring at him with their fearsome eyes. To be precise, they stare at him from the outside (the anonymous multiplicity of the unconscious).

While trying to describe the picture of his dream, the patient cannot remember exactly how many wolves were sitting in the tree. He hesitates – were there seven, six, or

even five? Freud has an explanation for this uncertainty. No doubt the patient heard from his nanny the popular Russian fairy tale, "The Wolf and the Seven Kids:" the mommy-goat left her seven kids alone one day and went off for milk. While she was gone the wolf got into the house. The kids had time to hide in different places, but the wolf found them anyway and ate them. Only one of them managed to survive – the one hiding in the wall clock. The seventh kid hid and watched the scene of devouring from his hiding place against the wall. And this kid, as we can guess, is the boy himself, as if watching the others (who have now turned into strange wolves, as if they were bitten by a vampire). What follows is an extensive interpretation, in which Freud comes to the conclusion that at the root of this wolf fantasy lies a traumatic episode – a scene of his parents copulating that the patient happened to observe in his very early childhood.

Freud's conclusion has become the butt of endless jokes – especially by Deleuze and Guattari, who dedicated the second chapter of their *Thousand Plateaus* to the Wolf Man – "1914: One or Several Wolves?" For Deleuze and Guattari Pankeev's dream is the call of the pack, the animal multiplicity of the dreamer's unconscious: "Freud tried to approach crowd phenomena from the point of view of the unconscious, but he did not see clearly, he did not see that the unconscious itself was fundamentally a crowd. He was myopic and hard of hearing; he mistook crowds for a single person."<sup>17</sup>

With their silence the wolves call the boy to join the pack – to which he may have always belonged in the first place. Their gaze is a call to become one of them, to becoming-

15 Sigmund Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis, in The Wolf Man by The Wolf Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

16 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954--5*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York; London: W.W. Norton & company, 1991), 177.

17 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 29-30.

wolf, into which the boy was already being drawn, until his vision turned into a nightmare. Freud, according to Deleuze and Guattari, performs an unforgivable reduction, substituting the wolves first with kids, sheep, sheep-dogs – in a word, domestic animals – then with the parental couple, and finally with the father. He substitutes the singularity of family history for the wild multiplicity of the pack, step by step reducing the indeterminate number of wolves to one, and then to zero, in order to construct the unity of a normal subject, to construct the false unity of what is in fact an irreducible schizoid multiplicity. Wolves always travel in packs, Deleuze and Guattari remind us – everyone knows this, even a little child knows this, only Freud does not:

We witness Freud's reductive glee; we literally see multiplicity leave the wolves to take the shape of goats that have absolutely nothing to do with the story. Seven wolves that are only kid-goats. Six wolves: the seventh goat (the Wolf-Man himself) is hiding in the clock. Five wolves: he may have seen his parents make love at five o'clock, and the Roman numeral V is associated with the erotic spreading of a woman's legs. Three wolves: the parents may have made love three times. Two wolves: the first coupling the child may have seen was the two parents more ferarum, or perhaps even two dogs. One wolf: the wolf is the father, as we all knew from the start. Zero wolves: he lost his tail, he is not just a castrater but also castrated. Who is Freud trying to fool? The wolves never had a chance to get away and save their pack.<sup>18</sup>

The Wolf-Man keeps howling: Six wolves! Seven wolves! Freud says, How's that? Goats, you say? How interesting.

Take away the goats and all you have left is a wolf, so it's your father...<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Freud, Deleuze and Guattari know that a pack cannot be counted. They are fascinated by the beauty and multiplicity of the wolf pack, and they have no concern for family drama or the kid-goats. We cannot agree with these authors, however, when they say that the kids have nothing to do with the story. It is the biblical tradition – to which we are all, analysts and patients, forever in debt – that does not allow us to agree with them. In this tradition goats are specifically unclean animals, linked to evil spirits and even the cult of Satan. What Deleuze and Guattari call a reduction, in slightly other language could sound like a miracle of the psychoanalytic cure. Turning the wolves into fairy-tale kids, Freud literally drives out the demonic wolves that had possessed the patient, sending them into a herd of goats (comparable to the herd of pigs “feeding nigh”), in order finally to make both the demons and the beasts to disappear. There is no place for the animal multiplicity in human society, integration into which is one of the tasks of analysis. The ship of fools must sail off without the Russian boy on board.

How many wolf-kids can fit on this boat? Since the ship of fools is Noah's ark in reverse, nothing prevents us from assuming – employing (not so) free association and inversion – that seven unclean animals climb on board. Freud's seven kids are not the ones taken onto Noah's ark but the ones sent away on the ship of fools or cast into the abyss along with the demonic wolves. The seventh kid (suspended, hiding in the wall clock or on the other side of the bedroom window) is the one who must be sacrificed (perhaps as the cost of success in the psychoanalytic treatment). We recall that among

18 Deleuze, Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 28.

19 *Ibid.*, 38.

the unclean animals it is the goats that are traditionally sacrificed, and these goats are called “scapegoats” or expiatory sacrifices. All the sins of a given community are laid upon them, and then they are driven away.

The little wolf-man is not only a man and not only a wolf (wolves) but simultaneously a scapegoat, torn into pieces by the sins (desires, fears) that he embodies, and a little kid, peeking out of his hiding place at all these sins (starting with the famous Freudian primal scene and ending with the devouring of the other kids by the “papa-wolf”), and a little boy, whose gaze not only meets but suddenly coincides with the gaze of the uncountable beasts, who must be driven out, cast into the abyss, into oblivion, if he is to get the unity of human life in exchange. This expiatory sacrifice, described in the language of psychoanalysis in terms of repression, is the cost of being born into the adult individual world. From such units is formed the gathering of people. However we try to build humanity, first there must always be the miracle of exorcizing the demons or, the same thing – the nightmare of repression.<sup>20</sup>

However, I understand the thesis of how repression turns the animal (herd-ness, pack-ness) into the human (sociality, adding up one by one) only in a very narrow sense. The animal multitude (the unconscious) does not exist by itself, immediately, before and unrelated to the act of repression, but arises precisely in this mediating act as what immediately returns. As Lacan says:

The trauma, in so far as it has a repressing action, intervenes *after the fact* [*après coup*], *nachträglich*. At

20 On the problem of counting beasts in the context of an analysis of these two stories and the case of the Wolf Man, see my article: Oxana Timofeeva, “Chislo zverei,” in *Lakanaliia* 6 (2011), 118-22.

this specific moment, something of the subject’s becomes detached in the very symbolic world that he is engaged in integrating. From then on, it will no longer be something belonging to the subject. The subject will no longer speak it, will no longer integrate it. Nevertheless, it will remain there, somewhere, spoken, if one can put it this way, by something the subject does not control.<sup>21</sup>

Repression and the return of the repressed are one and the same thing. What returns has never been. Repression engages what has never been, into a kind of active non-being. I am speaking about the negativity of the wolf pack – this is what Deleuze and Guattari would never agree with, since they put the animal multiplicity of the unconscious into the plane of immanence, which knows no non-being (it is well known how negative the attitude of the theoreticians of schizoanalysis was toward negativity – the servant of dialectics).

The wolf pack (the crowd, the animal multiplicity of the unconscious) is not so much a naïve, wild predecessor, as it is an ambiguous fellow-traveller of the human, which condemns it to non-being. These monsters are engendered by the sleep of reason, and this sleep should not be understood metaphorically – as a pause or deactivation of the waking work of thought – but as what Freud called “the other scene” – something that thinks instead of us.<sup>22</sup> There are no original, natural wolves, calling the boy to return to the pack. It was not just simple wolves that came for him, but cultured, sexual, political wolves. They are complexly organized. “They” think.

21 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 1: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953–4*, trans. John Forrester (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 191.

22 See Mazin, *Vvedenie v Lakana*, accessed November 17, 2014. [http://www.xliby.ru/kulturologija/vvedenie\\_v\\_lakana/p20.php](http://www.xliby.ru/kulturologija/vvedenie_v_lakana/p20.php).

Yet how should one relate to the assertion of Deleuze and Guattari that wolves always travel in packs? Is it not an exaggeration to examine the animal unconscious exclusively in terms of a multiplicity? Our mythology is filled with lone wolves and she-wolves. The wolf is a veritable symbol of solitude – proud, romantic solitude, or the solitude of the strongest, or the solitude of an overdriven beast. Wolves travel in packs, in the night flashes a multiplicity of evil, yellow eyes, but for some reason our cultural imagination stubbornly rips out a single wolf from this pack. How can a given, concrete, singular individual be a part of a pack? Deleuze answers this question with the words of Franny: “How stupid, you can’t be one wolf, you’re always eight or nine, six or seven. Not six or seven wolves all by yourself all at once, but one wolf among others, with five or six others.”<sup>23</sup>

Let’s turn our attention to this “we” of wolves that we are in the schizophrenic experience of the pack. Here there is no I-wolf; we are in a composition of wolves, always immediately the entire pack; we are only ever together with the others, among their number. Offering another example, Franny tells her dream – “a very good schizo dream,” as Deleuze characterizes it – about the desert: “There is a teeming crowd in it, a swarm of bees, a rumble of soccer players, or a group of Tuareg. *I am on the edge of the crowd, at the periphery; but I belong to it, I am attached to it by one of my extremities, a hand or foot.* I know that the periphery is the only place I can be, that I would die if I let myself be drawn into the center of the fray, but just as certainly if I let go of the crowd.”<sup>24</sup>

In this description another interesting quality is added to the impossibility of being alone in a pack (Franny is bound

to the desert crowd by her hands and legs, her oneiric “I” is inseparable from the “we” – bees, footballers, or Tuareg people) – peripheralness. We are both in the pack and at its edge. Let’s compare this with the description of the pack (this time a human one – for example, a hunting or war party) by Elias Canetti – Deleuze cites him, emphasizing the distinction Canetti makes between a pack and a mass. A person in a mass presses toward the center, he or she is completely dissolved, submitting to the leader of the mass, to its tasks and its goal. The pack, by contrast, is characterized by decentralization, or in Deleuze’s words, “is constituted by a line of flight or of deterritorialization.”<sup>25</sup> Every individual in Canetti’s pack “will again and again find himself at its edge. He may be in the centre, and then, immediately afterwards, at the edge again; at the edge and then back in the centre. When the pack forms a ring round the fire, each man will have neighbours to right and left, but no-one behind him; his back is naked and exposed to the wilderness.”<sup>26</sup>

From the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, the question of one wolf in the pack does not make any sense at all, since for them the wolf is not some individual collection of characteristics but one name for the affect of becoming-wolf; every animal is itself already a pack. An irreducible multiplicity is not a gathering of individual beasts, taken one by one. The irreducible multiplicity means every animal is a pack, among its number.

Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari do have a place for a lone wolf – the one who runs alongside and at the same time a bit apart from the main pack. He can be the leader of the pack or an outcast. Deleuze and Guattari call such an animal, which exists in every pack, a demon,

25 Ibid., 32.

26 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Continuum, 1981), 93.

23 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p. 29.

24 Ibid.

an exceptional individual or an anomaly. And here the theme of the periphery or the border takes on a special significance. The exceptionalness of the individual is determined by its position at the border of the pack (sorcerers, for example, “have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods . . . at the borderline of the village, or between villages,”<sup>27</sup> where they enter into a secret alliance with various animals and demons).

The anomaly is not only at the border; it is the phenomenon of the border itself, of “bordering.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the border of the pack runs through the exceptional individual: “beyond the borderline, the multiplicity changes nature,”<sup>29</sup> crossing over into another dimension. As Catherine Malabou notes, the role of the anomaly is “to mark out the end of a series and the imperceptible move to another possible series, like the eye of a needle of affects, the point of passage, by means of which one motif is stitched to another.”<sup>30</sup> This extremely dynamic world of multiplicities and series is measured by intensities of becoming – on the borders of the pack anomalous individuals form alliances, blocks of becoming, of transition.

One should also not forget about sorcery – metamorphoses that occur at the border of the pack, metamorphoses of certain types of animals into others, into monsters. At a certain moment not only the lone wolf appears on the horizon but the werewolf or the

wolf in sheep’s clothing. Let’s return to the Wolf Man and have a look at this, using the optics of becoming and transition, how the metamorphosis from one animal series into another takes place in Freud’s interpretation. What follows, as mentioned earlier, is significant for its bringing psycho- and schizoanalysis, Freud and Deleuze, together into a paradoxical and unnatural alliance.

So, once again. The seven wolves are the kid-goats (eaten by the wolf). There are six of them because the seventh one hid in the wall clock. I have already drawn a comparison with the vampire bite – the kids eaten by the wolf turn into wolves themselves (contagion is one of the characteristics of a pack). It is clear that the dreamer himself should have been eaten first. But he was able to hide – at the cost of having to observe the bloody massacre of the others.

At this original stage of his interpretation Freud seems to perform a reverse movement, again drawing the little bodies of the kids out of the belly of the demonic wolves, or, more precisely, the belly of one demonic wolf (this time we remember another fairy tale – about Little Red Riding-Hood and the woodsmen, who kill the wolf and free the little girl and her granny, whom he had eaten).

Later we learn that the wolf, having eaten everyone else, is in fact the boy’s father. Some kind of strange universal father-mother, who in order to give birth to the boy from his belly must first eat him (or vice versa – but sequence does not matter in the world of the unconscious). Here the patient’s recollection of a book illustration that his sister used to scare him with in childhood plays a significant role – a wolf standing on its hind legs and reaching out a forelimb. Note the extraordinary position of this wolf; it is a pose uncharacteristic of his species, standing on the border between two packs – animal and human.

27 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 246.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, 245.

30 Catherine Malabou, “Who’s Afraid of Hegelian Wolves?,” in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 128.

Thus, before us there are at least three borders between packs, three anomalies – between the wolves and the kids, between the wolf and the human, and also between this monstrous multiplicity of wolf-kids, reduced by Freud to the lonely figure of the father, and the boy himself, who meets it and exchanges gazes with it (there are also intermediary borders, involving sheep, sheep-dogs, the spread legs of the mother, and even the wall clock). On which border does our patient find himself? On all three.

However, we should not allow any confusion at these borders. It is not just an undifferentiated animal multiplicity before us, where the fantasies of the child and the hypotheses of the analyst allow easy transformations from one thing into another. The animal multiplicity is not primordial chaos but, as already mentioned, the complexly constructed and difficult to translate language of the Other. Thus, between the wolves and the kids runs a line of tension that separates two animal multitudes – not just one pack from another but, let's be clear, a pack from a herd. Deleuze and Guattari are not very interested in this aspect of the situation. In principle, they are indifferent to what parameters, besides intensities and affects, real animals use to organize themselves, so to say, in real life: packs, herds, crowds, colonies – for them all these are nothing more than scientific abstractions, “ridiculous evolutionary classifications.”<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, I insist that the appearance of herd animals in Freud's interpretation is no accident (although it does seem like one). The difference between a herd and a pack is the difference between those who devour and those who are devoured. It is precisely devouring in the given case that facilitates the transition from one condition into another. The wolf in sheep's clothing is not only an

interloper. There will come a time when he will stand up, straighten his legs, and throw off the sheepskin; at the last moment of their lives, the sheep will encounter the naked king, the father-devourer. The alliance between the wolf, the sheep (the kid-goats), and the father, god, leader, who runs along the borders between pack and herd and between human and animal, remains outside the field of vision of Deleuze and Guattari. For us, however, it is of fundamental importance.

In the beginning of his seminar about the sovereign and the beast, Derrida puts together a fantastic series of different cultural representations of the wolf, setting the stage for his quote from Rousseau's *Social Contract* (ch. 2): “It is doubtful, then, according to Grotius, whether the human race belongs to a hundred or so men, or if that hundred or so men belong to the human race: and throughout his book he seems to lean toward the former opinion: this is also Hobbes's feeling. So, here we have the human race divided into herds of cattle, each one with its chief who keeps it in order to devour it.”<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult not to agree that this is one of the most exhaustive descriptions of human communities, where the exceptional position belongs, as Derrida says, precisely to the wolf (who, we should note, intentionally runs across the border between the pack and the herd):

[H]e, the chief, does not keep the beast by devouring it, while devouring the beast (and we are already in the space of *Totem and Taboo* and the scenes of devouring cruelty that are unleashed in it, put down, repressed

31 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240.

32 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1954), 237, cit. by Derrida (quote in Derrida's translation), In: Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. 1, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 11–12.

in it and therefore displaced in it into symptoms; and the devouring wolf is not far away, the big bad wolf, the wolf's mouth, the big teeth of Little Red Riding Hood's Grandmother-Wolf ('Grandmother, what big teeth you have'), as well as the devouring wolf in the *Rig Veda*, etc., or Kronos appearing with the face of Anubis devouring time itself).<sup>33</sup>

This Kronos with the face of Anubis, whom Derrida mentions, was time itself, devouring his children. To say that he devours time is an inversion, making time appear to devour itself. He devours his children when they are still infants, fearing the prophecy that one of them will destroy him. In the end, of course, this is what happens: Kronos eats five infants (according to the myth they are Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon); the sixth, Zeus, manages to survive (his mother Rhea goes to Crete and gives birth to Zeus in a cave, slipping Kronos a stone in his place); Zeus overthrows (and in some versions castrates) his father and releases the other devoured children from his belly.

Thus, we have five devoured children, the sixth survived (hidden in a cave). If we are speaking of the same story, dealing with different versions, then there should be a seventh. Who is this seventh? It is Kronos, himself. He is also part of the pack, part of the herd, a member of the family. He is one of us, just like the leader, who worries about the herd in order to devour it, a member of this herd just like the wolf-father – one of the wolves sitting in the tree in Pankeev's dream. The one who devours and the ones who are devoured or sacrificed are reflected in one another.

What is the bloody drama enacted at this border – a drama narrated in different languages in legends, fairy tales, and the dreams of little Russian schizophrenics? The drama can take different names – the exorcism of demons, the miracle of healing, the nightmare of repression, or, in the words of Freud, "organic repression," the birth of the one out of the multiple (which never existed before), the child becoming an adult, the formation of human society. And here is the moral of the story: the road to the human runs through the wolf.

Let's clear things up a bit. The fact is that on the level of social being we can always determine who is the oppressor and the devourer and who is the oppressed and the devoured. Our ideas about justice, equality, and liberty, which for this reason lay the foundation for our version of how to rebuild humanity, are all on the surface. Say, we can act in solidarity with the oppressed, the repressed, the devoured. We speak about repression in the context of violent state apparatuses, for example.

But what should we do with the other type of repression? The one that each of us enacts on an individual level even before we are aware of it – perhaps, already at that very moment when we recognize ourselves in the mirror, unlike the pigeons? When, appropriating the image of the other, we send into non-being the animal multiplicity from which the unity of our body is formed? The multiplicity, which never abandoned its non-being, but rather had its non-being actualized, acquiring meaning retrospectively in the very act of repression.

Deleuze and Guattari, as mentioned above, reject the negativity, retrospection, and reflexivity of the pack. They populate the plane of immanence with packs, where one series crosses over into another along the borderlines, guaranteeing ontological continuity. But for them the

33 Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 12.

violence practiced in the process of normalization, at the entrance to human society, is clear – the wolves are not allowed to speak, they have no chance. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, it is Freud who is to blame for all of this, himself resembling the papa-wolf, along with the repressive apparatus of psychoanalysis, founded on the almost fascist reduction of multiplicity.

I contend that psychoanalysis plays a somewhat different role here, pinpointing transformations that occur on the border of human society, giving them narrative structure, and thus forcing a certain constitutive act of violence to speak. “They” speak – but “we” don’t like it. The analyst is not so much the subject of this act (which Deleuze sees as discursive violence against the patient) but rather its medium, if one can put it this way, the one who translates it into the language of symptoms. It is not immanent borders that divide the Freudian packs but a painful, traumatic rupture. The rupture was there from the beginning – before the one appeared on this side and multiplicity on the other. It is something like a psychoanalytic Big Bang, from which we, they, and our wolves emerge every time.

We cannot simply get up and return to the wolves, who call to us with their silent gaze, unless we want to be known as real schizophrenics and doom ourselves to isolation. Even this strategy cuts both ways, since there is no authentic, primordial pack waiting for the schizophrenic at the end of his journey – every pack has a border and this border is us, not another wolf. We should speak of the exceptional position not as occupied by certain individuals but by everyone in the pack – recall how Canetti tells us that one’s back is only exposed to something outside of us. From there, from behind our back, we hear the inarticulate speech of the Other.

It is not as if there are some separate, lonely wolves running in the distance who are exceptional (anomalous, to put it in Deleuzian) with regard to the rest, the regular individuals in the pack. All individuals are exceptional, only some, to paraphrase Orwell, are more exceptional than others: the fathers of families, leaders, gods, wolf-devourers in sheep’s clothing – these are illustrative models for how each of us integrates into normal human society. In order to get into this society, it is necessary first to become some of it, to complete organic repression, to drive out, devour, or annihilate.

All of us perform this complex sacrifice, however, with natural ease – and this is why we are all already there (here). We have to go through all the stages of becoming at once: the scapegoat, the son, the wolf-father, driving off the pack, devouring the herd (strictly speaking, the pack of other predators is driven off in order to master one’s own herd and devour it). Simultaneously there is the return of the repressed, the pack, which must first be driven out in order to return to us again, because we are still among its number, or the return of the herd, which must first be eaten in order to be born again from the belly of the predator. Our pack and our herd – the animal, multiple unconscious – will always run after us and frighten us with their silent call.

But how then, it must be asked, can we rebuild a community based on such human material, in which organic repression at the individual level entails oppression and violence at the level of the social? Is a human community ever possible without immediately turning into a nightmare? It is clear that without the presence of repressed elements no separate adult human and no separate society are possible. But repression means the return of the repressed – in gatherings composed of people one by one, each in the final analysis



is anxious, tortured, and haunted by the whole pack of those who have been devoured, driven out, crushed, or not taken on board of the ark – because each remains a part of this pack.

Let's now go back to the point where we began, with the formulation of the question about the community as a question of the unconscious and the real of our desire. We did not invent this desire in order to desire it consciously; something desires for us, behind our back. The pack that runs after us wants something from us. They speak, they address us with a call that we interpret either as infantile drives, as unformed, abnormal child sexuality beyond the ego, or as the inarticulate animal cry, howl, or silent call.

The theory of the community that I am suggesting here revolves around these shadows that follow us, trying to look behind our back. Unconscious desire for communism is probably not the best name for it, but I haven't thought of anything better. Between us, all three of these words are dubious – unconscious, desire, communism. All three are problematic, ambivalent. But in any case this triad is preferable to, say, consciousness, interest, and capitalism (or various others), since it hints at a non-human community. It reminds us of what has not yet been. Of communism with a non-human face.

Jodi Dean writes: “The communist horizon is not lost. It is Real,”<sup>34</sup> while also, by the way, associating the desire for communism with the unconscious. It is precisely in this sense that she calls it Real: not real communism (as we are accustomed to speak, for example, of “really existing socialism”), but communism as the Real, in the Lacanian sense, as a certain traumatic excess that resists

symbolization, which can in no way be confused with reality. The Real of desire does not coincide with those desires that we recognize in ourselves – it stands behind us, just like the horizon of communism, which has never been, behind our back. It stands directly behind our back, right there, forming a border between what has been and what has not. It is as if we have grown into this horizon with our backs, and we are the border ourselves.

Like Jodi Dean, I speak of the Real of the horizon and of the desire for communism, but I want to follow this desire all the way to the level of the unconscious, the animal. One would object, animals do not have an unconscious, and thus they cannot have the Real of desire – they have only drives. That's just the point. As mentioned above, they, our pack and our herd, live in principle for “being” instead of “having,” in other words, they are the unconscious, they are the desire for communism, which exists nowhere in nature, not in the plane of immanence, not among real wolves; but this “not” precisely indicates the negative character of desire, in this “not” we hear that “not yet” and “still not yet” that troubles us so (by the way, in Pankeev's second dream about wolves, analyzed by Freud's student Ruth Mack Brunswick, these animals, again scaring the dreamer, are associated with the Bolsheviks).

Let's replace the plane of immanence with the plane of retrospection, from which the wolves are breathing on our backs. Our desire will be there, in that forgotten pack, which arose along with us and immediately stuck to us. What they want from us is the real of our desire, and this is where we should begin, when we ask the question about the community. “You send sailors on a sinking cruiser to a place where a forgotten kitten mewed,”

34 Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 11.

writes Mayakovsky about the revolution,<sup>35</sup> and I cannot imagine a better image for the program of communism with a non-human face. The community is not for us but for them; it is redemption, a turn, a reactivation of animal negativity – this is the task, and its absurdity is why it really deserves serious discussion, and I hope that sooner or later this discussion will take place.

Translated by Jonathan Brooks Platt

Craig Gent

## With our Backs to the Future

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### Abstract

“The future has been cancelled,” declares the ‘accelerationist manifesto.’<sup>1</sup> But where does this lead us? Concepts such as ‘time’ and ‘the future’ are almost ineffably broad once given a degree of sustained concentration. In this essay, I look to the relationship between temporality (as our phenomenological experience of what is to come) and historicity (in the sense of the direction of society) in order to question how our perception of temporality in the everyday conditions our perception of the horizon of possibilities which comprise the future, particularly

with regard to conceiving or imagining a future which is non-capitalist.

With our Backs to the Future

“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.”

George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four

“Who controls the past now controls the future. Who controls the present now?”

Rage Against the Machine, Testify

### Introduction

‘Time’ is clearly a concept of epic proportions. In the everyday it can be used to refer to the understanding of the monotony of the nine to five or to memorialize a deceased relative. Politically, time can be conceived of in terms of the horizons of possibility or as a tool by which to manage productivity through (post-) Taylorist organization. Time can be thought of as temporality, or the phenomenological grasp we have of the actions around us. Alternatively it can be understood as historicity, or the movement of history. Throughout the canon of critical thought, from Marx to Berardi, the concept of time has been a key area in developing both a critique of the social conditions of capitalism and

1 See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an accelerationist politics,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, May 14, 2013, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>.

an emancipatory project which hopes to transcend it. This is not without foundation: from the organization of piecemeal work on the Fordist production line to Fukuyama's famous declaration that we have reached the 'end of history,'<sup>2</sup> time – both at the instrumental and narrative level – is a central terrain upon which modern capitalist production and politics operates. Since entering the current paradigm of neoliberalism, much has been made of the idea that we have lost the future; that it has been forgotten or cancelled.<sup>3</sup> In the polemic *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Mark Fisher starts from Jameson's frequently paraphrased idea that it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> This idea or problem that opponents of capitalism have seized upon opens up a range of issues which need to be unpacked if we are to 'reclaim' the future as the horizon of possibility in any sense: if the future is cancelled, what sort of present do we find ourselves in? What gives us an overwhelming sense of stasis? What is the relationship between temporality, historicity and directionality? And what sort of temporality would a 'critical theory of the future' seek to achieve for us?

I am interested in developing a critique of linear temporality, which I argue is the dominant mode of

temporal perception within neoliberal capitalism. Starting from Simmel's conception of modernity as eternal present, this article will excavate the ways the multiplicity of 'present time' is perceived by us as simultaneously stable and transitory, particularly in the current cultural paradigm of 'precarity.' Arguing that our phenomenological experience of temporality results in a certain comportment towards the world across incumbent political institutions, I will go on to posit what a critical theory of the future might look like. Through an analysis of Benjamin, Deleuze and Derrida I will argue that a considered separation of 'temporality' and 'historicity' is required to regain a sense of the future, along with an approach of what the latter calls 'messianicity without messianism.' In this way I will argue that in order for us to breach our collective incapacity to imagine a post-capitalist historical future, we need to see a cultural shift in the way we live and perceive phenomenological temporalities. Returning to the political themes around accelerationism, lastly I want to suggest that while the key cultural targets of accelerationism (namely work and technology) are indeed of paramount importance, a meaningful attempt to properly expand the horizons of possibility for the future requires a more coordinated engagement with a broader assemblage of terrains in the present.

### Modernity as eternal present

If we accept Benjamin's observation that with each period of social organisation comes a mode of reception and perception,<sup>5</sup> we must start at the historical root of our current impasse with the idea of modernity. While I have no interest in suggesting any *necessity*

2 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012)

3 For typical iterations of this sentiment see Srnicek and Williams, "#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an accelerationist politics," Franco Berardi, *After the Future*, trans. Arianna Bove et al. (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011); Luke Cooper, "Reclaim the future? An idea whose time has come," *OpenDemocracy*, November 27, 2012, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/luke-cooper/reclaim-future-idea-whose-time-has-come>; Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009).

4 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 1.

5 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood, (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 8.

or causality in the subsequent development of society since the dawn of modernity, I would like to at least keep in mind that modernity provides a rich ground from which contemporary societal forms have emerged. As David Harvey is keen to note,<sup>6</sup> Marx identifies that societal and conceptual development across historical epochs is contingent upon shifts and tensions involving myriad factors across a variety of reciprocal terrains: the relationship of man to nature, the processes of production, our relationship to technology, the processes of social reproduction, the production of social relations, mental conceptions of the world;<sup>7</sup> to which Harvey also points us to a seventh terrain in Marx, our relationship to legal and political superstructures.<sup>8</sup> I do not think, therefore, that it is sufficient to speak of returning to or reclaiming modernity, since modernity has been a force on all of these terrains, and as such is a constitutive factor in all the socio-political configurations we have seen in the last 250 years right up to the present day. Nor do I think pointing to an ‘alternative modernity’ goes very far to resolve the original, unresolved political-philosophical tensions and contradictions with modernity, abstraction and rationalization.<sup>9</sup>

Where Srnicek and Williams take aim at neoliberalism for restricting our view of the future,<sup>10</sup> and I agree in with their target in part, others argue that in fact the

phenomenon runs deeper into the essential traits of modernity itself. Benjamin concurs with Simmel’s idea that modernity presents a “particular mode of lived experience,” arguing that modernity is essentially characterized by a tension between what can be termed ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ culture, which plays itself out in various ways throughout everyday life.<sup>11</sup> In what could be considered a forebear to Lukács’ articulation of reification,<sup>12</sup> Simmel posits that subjective culture—the qualitative, essential realm which we grasp most primordially—becomes dominated by objective culture.<sup>13</sup> For Simmel, objective culture is typified by money: it indicates the objectification and calculation of the total, the rationalization of society into ‘technical perfection.’<sup>14</sup> As Lukács later articulates, this rationalization strips the subjective of anything which cannot be made calculable, reducing it to an abstract, quantifiable form.<sup>15</sup> If we consider the temporality of this process of objectification as Simmel presents it, culture appears to move towards the domination of a “final object,”<sup>16</sup> or ‘objective’ perfection in some sense. As such, the temporality of the present appears lineated to us, directed towards the rational society.<sup>17</sup> As objective culture comes to dominate,

6 David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital*, (London: Verso, 2010), 189-201.

7 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 493f4.

8 Ibid., 175f35.

9 Srnicek and Williams, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO;” For a canonical exploration of these contradictions see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (London: Verso, 1997).

10 Srnicek and Williams, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO.”

11 David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 46.

12 See Chapter 4 - “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” - in Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (London: Merlin Press, 1971).

13 Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 42.

14 See Georg Simmel, “Tendencies in German Life and Thought Since 1870,” trans. W. D. Briggs, *The International Monthly* 5 (1902): 93-111 & 166-184.

15 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 83-7.

16 Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 42.

17 On this point, Simmel noted the significant rise of the idea of ‘social justice’ in the 1880s. See *ibid.*, 101.

it comes to be perceived by us as stable and temporally the present becomes eternalized as constantly immediate through the objective rationalization of time. However the constancy and immediacy of objective culture is at the expense of historic traditional or concrete structures, for objective culture not only eliminates our possibility of an alternative future, but also our ability for the past to imbue the world around us. Just as money is simultaneously stable and transitory,<sup>18</sup> so is objective culture too. On one hand it appears a sure thing, presenting the reality of all around us as an eternalized present, yet on the other the relationships within it – from employment to housing – appear precarious and fleeting. As Frisby states: “If modernity as a distinctive mode of experiencing (social) reality involves seeing society and the social relations within it as (temporally) transitory and (spatially) fleeting then this implies, conversely, that traditional, permanent structures are now absent from human experiences.”<sup>19</sup> For Simmel this phenomenon can be observed in our cultural fixation with fashion, which seeks always the ‘recreation’ of the immediate present. In this way, it appears to us that no other form of social organization is possible: modernity becomes eternal present, or ‘supra-temporal.’<sup>20</sup> It should be noted however that this particular mode of reception – modernity as eternal present – is for Simmel a result of a ‘mature money economy,’<sup>21</sup> or what we might consider industrial capitalism. It therefore seems clear to me that if we wish to understand our *current* perception of temporality we must analyse the contemporary forms of social organisation within an advanced neoliberal framework, or what we might call ‘late capitalism.’

18 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

19 Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 45.

20 *Ibid.*, 47.

21 *Ibid.*, 103-4.

## Linear temporality in the present

The theme of the future (implied as post-capitalist) being ‘lost,’ ‘cancelled’ or ‘forgotten’ has been a recurring theme within Marxian and left activist discourses since the global financial crisis of 2008.<sup>22</sup> The financial collapse called into question issues of accountability, governance and inequality, seemingly going against Fukuyama’s proclamation that neoliberalism and liberal democracy marked the ‘end of history.’<sup>23</sup> However, even after this seismic event austerity measures and neoliberal privatization have continued across Europe under the slogan ‘there is no alternative.’ This presents us with the narrow and linear temporal imaginary that the events of the past which led to the crisis remain in the past, and that austerity measures are a causal effect of that crisis. The political football of ‘dealing with the deficit’ has been the foremost fixture in British politics since 2009, but of course ‘dealing with the systemic causes of the deficit’ has not been quite as fashionable. Indeed, ‘dealing with the deficit’ has been the perfect *modus operandi* for the continuation and even expansion of neoliberal enterprises such as privatization post-crash. Here we can see the ‘stable’ and ‘transitory’ narratives are running simultaneously: while the crisis was transitory, neoliberal capitalism has remained politically stable as an objective constant. Indeed, even grassroots resistance campaigns over the last five years in Europe have centred around a message of simply being ‘against austerity’: rather than challenge neoliberalism they simply focus

22 See Cooper, “Reclaim the future? An idea whose time has come;” and Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams and Armen Avanessian, “#Accelerationism: Remembering the Future,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, February 10, 2014, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/02/10/accelerationism-remembering-future/>.

23 Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*.

– like governments – on growth and progress, but with nostalgic longing for a prior configuration of capitalism, namely post-war social democracy. As Weeks notes, this approach is fundamentally reactive and typifies a politics of *ressentiment* which looks to a lost past, as opposed to a politics of hope which seeks to regain a lost future.<sup>24</sup> When Fisher draws upon Jameson’s adage that it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism,<sup>25</sup> he does so to highlight neoliberalism’s triumph is that neoliberal capitalism is now widely perceived to be the only ‘realistic’ configuration of society.<sup>26</sup> The ‘future’ is then organised around narrow augmentations within the capitalist framework such as ‘growth’ and ‘progress’, which are purposefully vacuous. While giving the illusion of movement, the orientation towards ‘progress’ actually leaves us static within a present which is only ever recreated and upon which we are fixated.<sup>27</sup> Instead of a ‘flow’ of time, we experience ‘*present time*,’ a fundamentally constant form which is only superficially altered.<sup>28</sup> Although it possesses an internal linear temporality, it is static in that it has no external directionality: like the hamster on the wheel, it is simultaneously linear and forward-facing, yet not actually moving at all. Rather, “it is a movement of *time* as

opposed to a movement *in time*.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore there is the sense that issues of the past are not addressed but instead displaced or repressed. Instead of progress representing a learning curve, it resembles a way of forgetting the past which inhibits us from any ‘real’ directional progression from our situation in the present. Marcuse describes this ‘real’ progression as ‘the *break*’; a moment that “would open the possibility of an essentially new human reality.”<sup>30</sup>

The ‘present time’ upheld by neoliberalism should be understood as rhizomatic, in that temporality as currently perceived is manifested as a multiplicity with various material structures and ‘habits’ across society rooting us to this certain mode of perception,<sup>31</sup> conditioning the possibilities and boundaries of our imaginary – namely the ability to think and live in non-linear, non-static temporalities. Deleuze demonstrates how these habits condition us by recalling Hume’s ‘famous thesis’: “Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it.”<sup>32</sup> ‘Habits,’ as conceived by Deleuze, should be understood to operate in terms of signs which imbue our understanding and experience of the everyday.<sup>33</sup> We can see how signs indicate simultaneous transitory and constant temporalities: every five years the government may change but the parliamentary cycle itself is a given, likewise with each term of the school year the pupil ‘moves

24 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, (Durham, CA: Duke University Press, 2011), 199.

25 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 2.

26 This is particularly the case since the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the end of state socialism, which at least provided an example of an alternative form of social organization that we could ‘realistically’ imagine.

27 Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 294.

28 *Ibid.*, 295.

29 *Ibid.*, 294.

30 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 235.

31 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, (London: Continuum, 2004), 96-101.

32 *Ibid.*, 90.

33 Henry Somers-Hall, *Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 65.

forward' but the school always remains a disciplinary institution. Perhaps the most everyday institution is that of work, in which we organize our lives around the work rota. Even with the onset of post-Fordism – marking the dissolution of the formerly-rigid boundaries of the workplace and the erosion of a “stable time structure”<sup>34</sup> – we can enjoy either flexibility or precarity but still our energies must be arranged around the fact of our bills needing to be paid on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. Where once life could be divided between work and our administered “‘technically available’ free time,”<sup>35</sup> we have seen the rise of what Standing calls ‘tertiary time’: time which loses its designation as ‘free’ in any sense, is limited yet always having demands made upon it which we are then “forced to juggle.”<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the development of abstract time (that is, time as rationalized within a standardized framework) is “closely tied to the ‘progress’ of capitalism as a form of life.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore we can see that our experiences of the temporal institutions which surround us contract with each other, implicating and conditioning our overall sense of temporality. This forces us to consider our experience of temporality “from the perspective of the demands placed upon it” by the institutions and structures around us.<sup>38</sup> The content of these structures is intrinsically political: indeed they are the architecture of social organisation. As such they embody certain disciplinary and normalizing strategies

34 Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 119.

35 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 52.

36 Standing, *The Precariat*, 119.

37 Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 213.; I do not intend to imply here that there might not have been abstract time before capitalism, and I feel if pushed Postone would concur, however I am choosing to use the idea here in terms of the ‘intensification’ of time as it makes demands upon us.

38 Standing, *The Precariat*, 119.

which historically correlate with the development of capitalism,<sup>39</sup> thereby reinforcing the idea of what is ‘realistic’ and therefore what we expect of the future. Fisher summarizes that “capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable.”<sup>40</sup>

## A Critical Theory of the Future?

Within this paradigm, our demands become limited. In 2011 the UK Trades Union Congress’ called for an alternative to austerity centred around ‘growth’ and a return to full employment, reflecting the commodity pluralism of Pepsi as an alternative to Coke. Berardi states: “When the collective imagination becomes incapable of seeing alternatives, the future becomes a threat.”<sup>41</sup> How then are we to reclaim the future? Against the backdrop of capitalist realism, a critical theory of the future which proposes an emancipatory project must surely draw upon hope, seeking to transcend the limitedness of demands which surrounds us. If – as Derridians would have it – without hope there is despair, can we have hope without a ‘goal’ for history?<sup>42</sup> And if we require a goal for history, does this not merely play into the linear narrative of the development towards the rational society? In the wake of the global financial crisis, hope has taken two primary forms. Firstly has been the ‘weathering the storm’ approach, characterized in the British context by a fixation on ‘the retro’ and typified by kitsch allusions to prior crises such as the Second World War – the now-ubiquitous ‘Keep Calm and Carry

39 Nathan Widder, *Reflections on Time and Politics*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 159.

40 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 8.

41 Berardi, *After the Future*, 59.

42 David C. Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 142-3.



On' mantra of the mythical 'Blitz spirit' being an example – which reinforce the message that neoliberal solutions will pull us through if we only hold tight. In this sense, the hope of the retro recalls a past that did not exist, or "the future of a particular past."<sup>43</sup> Secondly is nostalgic hope, such as the TUC's 'alternative' harking to bygone days of Keynesian social democracy or Ken Loach's 2013 film intervention *The Spirit of '45*. These approaches act only to put "all one's hope in the past,"<sup>44</sup> conforming with the idea of only demanding or imagining the 'realistic' on the basis that it existed in the past. Both the stances indicated by nostalgia and 'the retro' fixate on a form of 'wishful thinking': they promise a lifestyle of security which allows us to forget the negative factors which led to this point, instead placating our desire of what we wish will be realized. In concerning themselves with repetition, neither of these ideas properly transcends 'present time.' They are expressions of a temporal comportment which is passive to their historical circumstance<sup>45</sup> and which do not give us an account of hope with which to reconstruct the future.

At this point it becomes necessary to make a subtle but important distinction between temporality and historicity in relation to the future. Temporality concerns the individual's sense of the time that is ahead,<sup>46</sup> measured

and experienced in terms of activity.<sup>47</sup> This gives us a more phenomenological grasp of time. Historicity differs in that it refers to "a temporality measured by events,"<sup>48</sup> that is, our broader conception of history. While the dominant mode of social organization informs our experience of temporality, it is our experience of temporality which conditions our account of historicity, and thereby our expectations of the future. In order to reclaim the future, then, we require a new mode of temporal perception which can challenge the mode of social organization. The subtle distinction between temporality and historicity is noted by Derrida, who posits that we can have the former without the latter but not vice versa.<sup>49</sup> This distinction has important implications for a consideration of the future. The French language provides two terms for 'the future': *le futur* and *l'avenir*. Where *le futur* indicates that which is predictable or tangible in the commonly ontological sense, *l'avenir* refers to a possible but unknown future which is bounded by a return to the present.<sup>50</sup> From an idealist perspective, the accounts of historicity incorporate all history, and can be considered either teleological (developmental) or eschatological (disruptive). Benjamin responds to these accounts through his articulation of messianism and as we will see later, Derrida seeks to undermine both these accounts, as well as Benjamin's brand of messianism, in favour of 'messianicity without messianism'.

Benjamin argues that it is a non-linear account of time which is required to salvage hope from the collapse of idealism, which expresses a linear imaginary of the progression of time towards the rational society, either

43 Ibid., 150.

44 Ibid., 141.

45 The ideas of inauthentic and authentic temporal comportments and their relationship to passivity and activity could reasonably take up an entire research project in their own right, and would indeed be an area for further research on this topic. For Heidegger's original account see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), §68.

46 Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 147.

47 Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 211.

48 Ibid.

49 Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 165.

50 Ibid., 163.

by development or destruction.<sup>51</sup> In his 1936 *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, we are introduced to the temporal metaphor of the Angelus Novus, inspired by the 1920 painting by Paul Klee.<sup>52</sup> In Angelus Novus, the angel moves away from the fragments and debris of the past with its back to the future. The key idea is that we are not facing the future forwards. It should be noted that going into the future looking backwards does not indicate a reactionary position, but rather “Benjamin’s critical attitude derives from thinking that forward-looking, utopian visions often overlook massive injustice in the past and present.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, if we are to place demands on the present which hope for a better future – that is, for a broader horizon of possibilities – we need to account for the inequalities and barbarism of the past which led us to this point. In this sense, we are not so much ‘going toward’ but ‘going away from.’ This is a common theme within accelerationism, which places emphasis on understanding and moving away from capitalism rather than ideally constructing communism.<sup>54</sup> The angel is not moving towards the future in the limited sense of ‘progress’ that we explored earlier, and neither is it going backward. Hoy asks: “Are we in fact going backward? No, because we are moving away from where we have been, not back to where we were before. The story is still linear. However, it is difficult to say that we are moving forward.”<sup>55</sup> Note here that while the ‘story’, i.e. our sense of history, is still linear, our temporality is not. Instead, Angelus Novus presents us with a fragmented, disjointed and non-linear temporality instead of a

smooth, linear transition from past to future. The point is that while temporality is rhizomatic, it can still be *directional* in terms of historical change.<sup>56</sup> Benjamin’s account therefore denies us a teleology by providing an account whereby the future only comes from “knowing where we’ve been, not knowing where we’re going,”<sup>57</sup> acknowledging that “progress has carried with itself certain elements of regression.”<sup>58</sup> While Derrida concurs that we ought to salvage a sense of ‘hope,’ he rejects the idea of moving nearer to some remote future ideal and criticizes Benjamin’s account for being weak and too messianic.<sup>59</sup> Although we live in the age of democracy, he notes, “there is not yet any democracy worthy of this name. Democracy *remains* to come: to engender or to regenerate.”<sup>60</sup> Derrida therefore posits the need for ‘messianicity without messianism;’ that is, an account which does not posit the coming of an actual ‘messiah’, but one that is only ever ‘about to’ come. The idea of ‘reclaiming the future’ is therefore misleading, as the future exists only in relation to the present; indeed a future reached ceases to be a future at all. Instead, Derrida’s messianicity eschews idealism while keeping open the “eschatological possibility of an unpredictable, unexpected event that could break into the present at any instant.”<sup>61</sup> In this way, Derrida allows us a non-linear account of temporality which is directional without being

51 Ibid., 142.

52 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York, NY: Schocken, 1968), 257-8.

53 Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 153.

54 Srnicek and Williams, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO.”

55 Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 155.

56 Ibid., 157.

57 Ibid., 155.

58 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume One*, trans. John Moore, (London: Verso, 2008), 229.

59 It could be argued that this is a harsh criticism from Derrida, given Benjamin’s discontent with the Jewish Enlightenment, but this is an area for further research.

60 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 82.

61 Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 164.

teleological and permits us hope without succumbing to an idealist account of historicity.

### Towards post-capitalism

How then are we to use this perception of temporality to construct a post-capitalist future? If “the first step towards a new, more hopeful temporality thus requires that we can first wrestle a viable present from the past,”<sup>62</sup> then we need to be able to use the past in reimagining our present in order to challenge the institutions of social organisation that inhibit a post-capitalist imaginary. As Benjamin notes, historical knowledge is “nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren.”<sup>63</sup> Although this is to say our construction of the future has its basis in the past, it is not to say ‘history repeats itself:’ rather, it is a process of creation which draws upon the past.<sup>64</sup> The political project relies not on us creating, however, but on us transcending the “strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver.”<sup>65</sup> Whereas for Simmel, the dominance of ‘objective culture’ cannot break from the paradigm of eternal present, accelerationists such as Srnicek and Williams argue instead that the processes of modernity as not intrinsically limiting, but instead that modernity needs to be salvaged from capitalism in order to imagine a post-capitalist world,<sup>66</sup> precisely through such a process of creation. This necessarily implicates a non-linear temporality. Acknowledging that “the power of capitalist realism derives in part from the

way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all previous history,”<sup>67</sup> accelerationism posits that, like Benjamin’s Angelus Novus, the past needs to be redeemed and given meaning in order to progress historically. Whereas for example injustices such as the Third Reich could not be understood without consideration of modernity, if we are to understand how those injustices came about in restoring a directional project, we need to challenge institutions such as Potsdamer Platz which seek to forget the past and instead consider the architecture of Auschwitz’s gas chambers.

Lefebvre states: “Above all we must demonstrate the breadth and magnificence of the possibilities which are opening out for man; and which are so really possible, so near, so rationally achievable (one the political obstacles are shattered).”<sup>68</sup> The reconstruction of the future, then, begins in the everyday, and we can understand our domination through time as one such political obstacle.<sup>69</sup> One such dominant institution which appears to be a current site of contestation – through accelerationist and even green discourses – is work.<sup>70</sup> Given that the liberation of time has been a key project for post-capitalist projects,<sup>71</sup> it is unsurprising that movements which have sought to construct the future – such as the futurologists of the 1960s – have placed a great emphasis specifically on the end of work.<sup>72</sup> Simmel’s lens of the quantification of objective culture enables us to see that through work our time is managed and individualized

62 Weeks, *The Problem With Work*, 199.

63 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 260.

64 Indeed, Deleuze’s own use of Nietzsche’s ‘eternal return’ is one such example of creation. See Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 160.

65 Srnicek and Williams, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO.”

66 Srnicek et al., “#Accelerationism.”

67 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 4.

68 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume One*, 229.

69 Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 295.

70 Srnicek and Williams, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO.”

71 Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 380.

72 Edward Granter, *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 99.

(‘in your own time’, ‘on company time’), and indeed the implementation of ‘work bells’ is indicative of the social rise of abstract time.<sup>73</sup> However the struggle over the end of work also has political purchase precisely through both our temporal (generally negative) experience of work, but also through our historical relationship to it and its reduction. Weeks argues the end of work is the most important site of struggle for a critical theory of the future, precisely because of its potential as an emancipatory project as well as its ‘ever present’ critique of the current state of things against mere ‘wishful thinking’. She states: “A utopian demand should be recognizable as a possibility grounded in actually existing tendencies. This is not to say that it should be ‘realistic’ – at least in the sense that the term is deployed in the typical anti-utopian lament about such demands. Rather the point is that it should be concrete rather than abstract.”<sup>74</sup> However, as noted in the early part of this article such terrains as work do not exist separately as realms from other social spheres. Whether it can be said then that work represents the single most important terrain upon which to construct a critical theory of the future is questionable. Existing accelerationist discourse rightly identifies the two-way relationship between work and technology and to some extent our relationship to the environment. However, the assemblage of terrains posed by Marx as the motors for epochal change remains only half-mapped. Just as ‘ever present’ as work, for example, are social relations between one another that condition our basic intersubjectivity, and the relations of social reproduction which make production possible.

## Conclusions

What can we hope for? Challenging our everyday perceptions of temporality has to start precisely from the architectures of social organization. And if we are to construct a new horizon of possibility, this requires the concrete theoretical construction of a rationally-possible society which has its roots in the seeds of the present. In each case, we have to be able to account for and give meaning to the past in order to challenge the narrow temporalities which constrain us in the present. The current conversations about the future which are unfolding around the accelerationist school offer a new horizon of possibility to opponents of capitalism. By positing a future that “neoliberalism is inherently unable to generate,”<sup>75</sup> but one which is firmly rooted in the realities and possibilities of the present, accelerationism is a contemporary movement which is seeking to challenge the limits of the future that are presently offered to us. Similarly, the fact that work has recently become a site of struggle after years of trade union stagnation – although on the grounds of contesting work itself rather than the terms of exploitation – is encouraging from the perspective of challenging the dominant form of social organization. Neither of these sites of movement are necessarily new, by that is not the point. Rather, their repetition is creative and they are able to draw on the past with meaning and construct a future in the present which is entirely directional but not teleological. For accelerationist ideas to be translated into any kind of meaningful project for expanding the horizons of possibilities, however, I would argue that the project of mapping the terrains for change and their relationship between one another is not complete. In particular, I would be keen to see consideration given to the terrain

73 Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 212-3.

74 Weeks, *The Problem With Work*, 221.

75 Srnicek et al., “#Accelerationism.”

which conditions the possibilities of our ability to work (or not work) and produce, and which comprises the foundation for all architectures of social organization from the workplace to the economy. Social reproduction is central to our capacity to work, to produce and to create and sustain both life and society. Yet, as in Leninist discourses, accelerationism so far seems to privilege production as the focal point of analysis, running the risk of demanding a new epoch without fully understanding the wedge driven between production and reproduction which characterized the birth of the present epoch. But I hope we can continue that conversation in future.

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## Organizing for Life

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### Abstract

In this article, I identify the need for intellectuals to organize around the core building blocks of life, air, water, and food. The article examines the lack of such organization on the left and the need to overcome the differences that fragment us. The article then goes on to propose a way of organizing in dialectical terms between protests, revolts on the one hand, and a “base” organized around a school committed to difference, discourse and conversation, and above all democracy.

“Responding to the challenges of capitalism in the world today must take the form of Organization & Ideology” – Alain Badiou

Nearly weekly new reports emerge telling us about the growing disparities in our world. In nearly every instant these reports are as unbelievable as they are ominously true. Here is just one example: Oxfam recently reported that 85 of the richest people on the planet are as wealthy as the poorest half of the world.<sup>1</sup>

1 Graeme Wearden, “Oxfam: 85 richest people as wealthy as

And happily there was a response to this glaring social and economic inequality, which began on September 17, 2011 and spread throughout the globe. This became known as the “Occupy Movement.” For a time, this movement looked very promising and has surely raised a level of consciousness about the central issue of justice. However, the long-term strategic effects of Occupy have faded away almost as quickly as it started. Although the Occupy movement has faded, the central issue of the injustice of extreme inequality not only remains with us but is growing with several detrimental effects. So the question I want to pose here is precisely how and under what means can we organize so that a sustained and long-term organization can be formulated without - and this is crucial - stifling the need to respond in the form of protest actions.

The seminal challenge before us thus can be posed in both positive and negative terms. It is positive, in that the very act of organizing is itself a response to this dangerous trend of the growing storm of injustice. For the alternative is unacceptable namely to idly stand-by

poorest half of the world,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2014, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/20/oxfam-85-richest-people-half-of-the-world>.

doing nothing as more and more resources (the means of production) are being used to undermine the basic requirements for sustaining life: water, food, and shelter. Indeed, many scholars go so far to say that we have reached a moment in history where it is necessary to take a stance against this injustice otherwise we will continue to face increasingly more difficult times as even now laws have been enacted to undermine democratic action.<sup>2</sup> In other words, everyone still has a choice to take a stance, and to fail to do so could mean that our world ineluctably will not be able to sustain life in just a generation or two.

The challenge is negative in that the means and resources for organizing (its premises, values, and practices) are gravely missing from our current common existential equation. A political philosopher and ethicist like Alasdair MacIntyre has conceded that there can't be any universal agreement about what constitutes "reasonable arguments," "[...] because," as Ted Clayton succinctly states, "we cannot agree on the premises of morality or what morality should aim at, we cannot agree about what counts as a reasoned argument, and since reasoned argument is impossible, all that remains for any individual is to attempt to manipulate other people's emotions and attitudes to get them to comply with one's own wishes."<sup>3</sup> And because a universal agreement in terms of *rationality* cannot be achieved, it requires MacIntyre, in a Wittensteinian gesture, to retreat from a dialogical common discourse into a "language game" symbolically organized within the conservative framework of intra-linguistically defined "tradition." Putting aside the basic critiques of MacIntyre's work, I agree with him on the point that to start a conversation

(and action) requires some minimal level of agreement. This raises the question: Is there some form of common agreement we can come to in terms of a foundation, an organization on the bases of which sustained action and intellectual work is possible? Said differently, given the fact that the capitalistic regime of greed is waging a war against the reality of life as such, it is necessary to establish a common front that will protect humanity against this war on life. I believe such a front can and must be organized and there are conceptual and practical resources available for the purposes of constructing this vantage point; a vantage point of life.

Risking the inevitable critique of extremely privileged intellectuals (even and especially the ones who claim to be liberal progressives and there are a lot more than you think), I would like to propose that we can all agree that for life to continue each person, village, city, region and our very planet needs clean (i.e., non-toxic) air and water. Air and water, it's really very simple. To breathe air is essential, but not just air, clean air is essential for health. Clean water too is essential for life, and it is needed every day. Air every moment, and water every day are the essential building blocks of life and health, of all things, social, economic, political, cultural. So, as reductive and basic as it may seem, we must first start with the foundations of life and build from here a way of framing existence, such that a healthy life is not only possible but also sustainable over time and for all people.

But to understand our world in the simplest of terms remains the issue that very few academics are able to focus on. The reasoning for this may touch on how incestuous and neoliberal the academy has become on the level of individual scholarship. New languages and complex symbolic structures are constructed precisely to become increasingly exclusive with each new book or

2 The Patriot Act for example.

3 Ted Clayton, "Political Philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/p-macint/>.



article. Complex and esoteric language systems, much like the original medieval castles, keep academics from confronting the very building blocks of our common life together. And the so-called, “public intellectuals” too often fold to sensational topics in order to sell books to continue making a living. But there are exceptions. For example, Naomi Klein’s recent book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* refreshingly and quite literally comes down to earth: Earth, Water, Air. Klein’s ability to articulate this is extraordinary, as the recent interview with John Tarleton makes clear. Klein bucks the moralism of personal ethics. She decisively frames the approach by saying it’s not about your personal habits of recycling, but rather about the systemic way in which citizens are unable to stop corporations from destroying the environment around their towns. Think of the recent and dangerous trend of hydraulic fracturing or “fracking”<sup>4</sup> which has systematically contaminated the vital water sources of local towns throughout the United States. Klein’s approach is much like Slavoj Žižek’s use of Lenin’s distinction between formal and actual freedom. Formal freedom is the freedom to choose from an already predetermined set of options, like choosing food in a buffet. By contrast, actual freedom is the ability to choose to reject formal freedom, i.e., the buffet itself. So, what Klein is saying is that one’s personal choices to recycle, buy a Prius and so on, lines up with Lenin’s idea of formal freedom. What Klein is trying to get us to think, however, functions on the level of actual freedom.

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4 Fracking is defined as “the process of drilling and injecting fluid into the ground at a high pressure in order to fracture shale rocks to release natural gas inside.” The problem with fracking is that nearby water sources are vulnerable to contamination by the toxins used in the process such as lead, Radium, Methanol, Uranium, Mercury, Ethylene Glycol. <http://www.dangersoffracking.com> (accessed January 3, 2015).

But here is where the challenge emerges: A public intellectual must lucidly communicate complex concepts easily enough for most people to grasp. So when she tries to communicate to us (the public) about the need to direct our energies to challenging the capitalist corporate system, most citizens find this extreme and even alienating. Challenging the “system” is alienating to the citizen for two reasons: first, because the citizen is so imbricated into the logic of capitalism that for them to challenge it requires them to sacrifice their own way of life. Think about it, citizens in capitalist societies have to pay for mortgages, debts, bills, car payments, gym memberships, cell phone bills and so on just to keep functioning and to stay afloat. And in doing this, citizens continue to reproduce the very system Klein is asking us to challenge. So, naturally, someone reading Klein’s argument might like it, but have no resources to enact it, thus leaving a gap between abstract ideas and concrete action. So strangely, what then is required is either we figure out a way to stop capitalism or else before long, the planet will no longer sustain life. But, to do this requires each individual imbued in the logic of capital to radically alter his or her life-styles, but to do so without causing unnecessary harm. Avoiding harm shouldn’t be equated to the conservative stance of doing nothing or even not taking risks. Risks will be necessary to change the system on which much of our life depends. Said differently, we must change our lives soon and very soon or else the future generations of our planet won’t have a chance to breathe.

Academics can continue filling up their studies in peer-reviewed journals all they want, proving facts about the dangers of radical climate change, but unless this message is able to be clearly and coherently communicated to citizens we’ll remain pathologically on the same slide into oblivion. The key here, thus, is communication and

organization. Communication in that the facts needs to be delivered clearly and accurately. But that still isn't enough—action is required. Organization needs to take place on both the local and global level. Organization that has to do with the basic questions of life: water, air, shelter.

The trends of today's capitalist world, the so-called "free market" world does not take into account a standard of health for all people, that is to say, for the planet. The universal for capitalism is profit at the cost of all else, including human beings, the planet and all manner of life. In this sense, capitalism is soullessly pathological because it sacrifices life for material gain for an increasingly smaller demographic. The outcome of capitalist gain is then re-invested for further gain and this logic of accumulation madness is obsessive as it is compulsive. Objectively we can observe this mad logic by the numbers in the surveys in which wealth is increasingly concentrated into the control of fewer and fewer people. Thus, a aristocracy is emerging on the bases of which a new foundation that Philip Goodchild calls a "Theology of Money" has already been erected. And here we must revive what MacIntyre says that we are in a new "dark ages." We are not so much in a new dark age as we are in feudalism in which the church has been supplanted by Wall Street and the capitalist has become the aristocracy of our time. . This axis, something that has been forming from the early 70s, is nothing less than a threat to life as such and we must organize to stop it. But, again, to do this will require great sacrifices and turns on the question: Are the middle and working classes willing (as they are certainly able) to give up the capitalist fantasy otherwise known as the "American Dream" in order to save the future generation from extinction. This should be our task and our mission must begin with the basics of life, water, food, and added to this, shelter.

## Organization, Action & Protest

In light of this new elitism that is now controlling the capitalist world, we have witnessed reactions and protests in recent years. The two main protests have been the "Arab Spring" and the "Occupy Movement."<sup>5</sup> And much good has resulted from these movements, and in the case of the former, much danger has emerged. But, in regards to the latter, no serious social change has come to realization. What then can be done?

Let's begin by assessing the weaknesses of the Occupy movement. There are internal and external weaknesses. The internal one has to do with the liberal politics that infiltrated the movement and turned its radical edge into a conservative stance that finally pandered to the status quo. Instead of occupying public spaces as an act of defiance to the point of breaking the law, the movement decided to cater to the demands of the state. . At the end of the day, only a few and not the common risked standing together against the state. In other words, at the end of the day, the liberal stance of "We'll protest so long as the law maintains its authority" only concedes the law, having precedence over the injustice of the state's axis to the death politics of the wealthy. The point being: the unjust politics of Wall Street continues to function as the state of exception whereas the multitude must be tamed by the law—the very logic that allows the wealthy to continue operating unjustly without accountability by the people.

This is also why liberal politics (that which undergirds and supports the university profit-making system) are impotent. Universities, within the neo-liberal

5 During the Fall, 2014 we have seen more protests and uprisings surrounding the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, which certainly are gaining more and more strength globally.

regime, can only ever reproduce the stalemate of the capitalist culture because although they have a few so-called “radical thinkers” they are often but not entirely rendered powerless by the golden handcuffs of tenure. The psychological fears the college professor experiences are so palpable it too frequently shocks them into a researcher that can only ever complain about identity politics while sipping on gins-and-tonics. This fear must be broken with the courage to speak the truth about our life on this planet, and it cannot be done by just talking about how bad everything is from the forests evaporating to the massive ice melts. These are but symptoms of a much greater and ominous systematic attack by the capitalist regime against our planet. Courage must be conjured, and a call to action must be sounded. This is war, but a war that must be waged on principles of justice and a politics of life and love. But it is also a war whose veneer-fantasy called the “middle-class” cannot see behind their closed doors, fancy cars, in what is already a pathological repression otherwise known as zombie politics.

The external problem with the Occupy movement has to do with sustainability. More strictly, the problem is organizational sustainability. The protest nature of Occupy was unable to sustain itself over a long period of time. If, however, there was an institution established that can sustain itself through long-term organizing and community program development, while at the same time being able to respond to injustice through needed protest then the overall demand for justice by the people can be sustained. The pressure for change, for justice must be unrelenting through a dual strategy of short and long-term action plans. Additionally, this dual strategy will work to help keep the long-term institution from falling asleep and sinking back into apathy and the status quo through protest action, and conversely, the protest

action will be grounded in a sustainable vision so that it doesn't just become a flash-in-the-pan and quickly evaporate leaving no long-term outcome.

### Organizational Form

This raises the question: What “institutional” form should this organization take? There are many options: community organization, a global political party, an organization shaped around a specific issue (women's rights, etc.) and so forth. There are many great strengths to organizing locally, but the biggest weakness is that it isn't connected to the plight of the oppressed around the globe and so whatever changes they bring to the local domains, as good as they are, must also be linked to the global fight for justice. It was Martin Luther King, Jr. who once said “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” And given the advanced technologies we have today at our disposal, we must take advantage of them in order to form a global/local institution so that our struggle for justice and democracy can have both the local and the global connected together into a network of communication and action for the voice of the common. Thus the question becomes: What institutional form would serve these purposes best: (a) sustainability; (b) protest action; (c) local; and (d) global? My proposal is the formation of a school grounded in the pursuit of justice by the perpetual desire to raise consciousness and organize solidarity around justice as well as be able to deploy action to confront injustice in a way that is both sustainable and yet ever unfolding through itself. This action, moreover, must be motivated at all times towards a politics of life and inclusion.

I, along with many comrades, including Katerina Kolozova, have started a school with this strategy in mind. The school is called The Global Center for Advanced

Studies (GCAS). Alain Badiou is the president of this school and it contains leading theorists and activists on the faculty. The great strength of this school, as our President states, is that “It is neither reducible to a party, nor is it strictly an intellectual endeavour.” A school like GCAS can thus unite the oppressed on a global front while deploying local action in the name of democracy and emancipation. Seminar courses can be taught in a way that raises the level of consciousness globally, while also organizing action locally. What is more, because it is a school it must not take up dogmatic positions, but must rather, as Max Horkheimer pointed out in his important book *Traditional and Critical Theory* (1937), become a self-conscious social critique with the mission for emancipation through enlightenment, which does not cling dogmatically to its own foundational assumptions.<sup>6</sup> Closely related to this is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s idea of the “multitude” in which they say,

“...there must be a moment when reappropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event. This is when the political is really affirmed—when the genesis is complete and self-valorization, the cooperative convergence of subjects, and the proletarian management of production become a constituent power.”<sup>7</sup>

With Horkheimer’s call to not dogmatically cling to doctrinal assumptions, but yet continue the process of enlightenment, together with Badiou’s idea of the

Event and with Hardt and Negri’s notion of the coming multitude that hasn’t yet actualized itself, we have a model for a school that can function as a global/local organization, which allows for an infinite diversity, whilst at the same time, a specific sustainable strategy both strategic and tactical (short and long term, global and local).

With this very anemic strategic model in place (which is in great need of being fleshed out), we can start with the school itself as we begin the formation of global and local organizations, and through this school, we can then build a communication network that contains within it the ability to ignite actions and knowledge about the spreading injustices around the world issuing from global capitalism and neoliberalism waging war against the essential elements of life. GCAS and other schools must then be committed to life above all, to health and be a movement not only of resistance and protest, but also of producing a positive unfolding of life.. And finally, such a school is just one proposal among many that already exist and have for some time now. But uniting these different organizations committed to life can form a global community that could, if organized carefully, begin to assist us as we fight and struggle for life, for breath, air, water and shelter for all.

6 Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge University Press, 1981. Page 58). Retrieved from The Frankfurt School Wikipedia entry, accessed September 18, 2014, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt\\_School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_School).

7 Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. Page 411).

Artan  
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## Contracting a radical democracy in the Balkans: The 'return of the people' as a possibility for a leftist inauguration of politics

### Bionote

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### Abstract

My aim is to strengthen the argument against the dereliction of the notion of democracy – as it has resulted in the Balkans and elsewhere and to provide a thesis that a radical political change in the Balkans requires the occurrence of a political event by which a new social contract can establish itself as a genuine expression of the will of the people, or more precisely a new mode of state as a result of a new balance of class antagonisms. Reaffirming the notion of the people against its political correlative – the citizen, I aim to prove that the 'return of the people' – as concept is crucial for the radicalization of the concept of democracy which enables the leftist politics to be inaugurated into the political proper.

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The transition process in the Balkans was aimed at structurally transforming the society through dismantling some of the structures that resembled the socialist mode of organisation and introducing new practices within those that corresponded to the 'western' political mode. This process was carried out under the guise of a universal promise of freedom, a freedom that was repressed by the socialist state apparatuses and which was about to be realized primarily through the implementation of the free market, which as the main societal drive of development would generate and disseminate the freedom throughout the society. This promise of freedom performed the substantial ideological exercise of interpellation for individuals who found themselves not only embracing a new ideology, but also representing the apparatuses of its reproduction. The trouble with the use of the term ideology that the Balkan societies were quite overwhelmed with, was solved through the employment of the already invented vision of post-ideological societies and world, which on the other hand represents the most sublime ideological claim.<sup>1</sup> The main political ideal in the undertaking of

1 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 27–31.

the transition in the Balkans fully embarked on the Fukuyamian claim of the end of history, thus providing itself with a universal legitimacy as a result of the prevailing neoliberal ideology across the globe.

The ideology of 'the end' nowadays establishes itself as a form of obstacle for the collective social progress, since there is nothing better, nothing more advanced to be attempted. Against this claim, it is possible to exploit this idea (of 'the end') for our emancipatory purposes only if we implement this concept within our concrete predicament. And, as a result of it, we ought to introduce a unitary critical position which is inaugurated in the political field as a criticism of a certain end, an 'end' which is the result of the transition in the Balkans, a final result of all that to what our democracy has resulted. Such a position is of utmost political importance today because of what is still being propagated today as a long process of hard social sacrifices in the name of a transition towards a democracy. The manner in which the propagation of democratization is conducted, attaches it the character of a utopian project. On the other hand, there is a tendency to blur the strong presence of current social and political system and hierarchy by announcing simultaneously the new transition for the purposes of European integration. Two decades after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the argument of continuous transition falls short of facts since it ignores the firmly established system of ideological apparatuses and almost the monolithic reproduction of the neoliberal ideology in this period.

My aim is to strengthen the argument against the dereliction of the notion of democracy – as it has resulted in the Balkans and elsewhere and to provide a thesis that a radical political change in the Balkans requires the occurrence of a political event by which a new social

contract can establish itself as a genuine expression of the will of the people, or more precisely a new mode of state as a result of a new balance of class antagonisms. Reaffirming the notion of the people against its political correlative – the citizen, I aim to prove that the 'return of the people' – as concept is crucial for the radicalization of the concept of democracy which enables the leftist politics to be inaugurated into the political proper.

One is undoubtedly troubled by the fact of an almost unanimous acceptance in the Balkans of the new neoliberal ideology against the previous 'communist idea,' a fact that immediately signals two subjective possibilities. First, being the one that a proper subject in Althusserian terms, had occurred as a result of the communist ideology in the Yugoslav society, but that political subject was restricted from expressing its free political will at the moment of the collapse of the socialist regime, thus being left outside of the new social contract that was inaugurated as an ideological *event*. The second possibility is that the communist ideology had failed to produce the socialist ideological subject and therefore the system had to rely heavily on repression in order to insure its proper dogmatic functioning. This would mean that the Yugoslav subject was already interpellated through the neoliberal ideology and it is precisely as a result of its ideological reproduction through the subjects that it produced the failure of the system. The Althusserian concept of interpellation, which I use to describe the subject as a product of ideology, describes the process through which the ideology addresses the abstract pre-ideological subject by what it effectively produces the same as a subject proper.

In order to move inside the current predicament in the Balkans we are confronted with the challenge of providing and a viable political explanation regarding

the political subject, or more precisely, answering the question of the origin of a possible political content in the current Balkan subject. I claim that there was a failure of the socialist system and that was that it failed to incorporate the political will of the citizens that were politically subjectivized through the communist ideology. The system was lacking behind the subjects it had created and it is because of this tension that the people in the Balkans requested a political change in the late 80es.

The expressed will for change by the people in the socialist states was interpreted as a will for a proper ideological change, as a will for the neoliberal system to be installed. It was a resonance of the ideological gesture of faking the popular will of the Eastern Germans gathered at the Berlin Wall. The event of destruction of the socialist system and establishing of the neoliberal system of the free market can be treated as an act of establishing a new social contract because this swift change resembles the Badiouan political event which according to him can occur in the form of a social contract.<sup>2</sup> But, can this social contract which in the formal sense of a change does fulfill the criteria of being a new one, amount to the totality of the expressed wills of 'the people' of the Balkan in the midst of the political change? The answer of this question brings us to two possible modes of treating the social contract. First is that the social contract is always already embedded in the formal political system that is put into place and thus is simultaneously a product and a representation of the social contract. This mode represents the more classical approach to the theory of social contract which in the Balkan context can prove problematic when taking into consideration that large parts of the society have been

initially excluded from the decision on the establishment of the new neoliberal political system and as a result they are nowadays prevented from their capacity to genuinely express their political will. Approaching the Yugoslav project from a gender perspective, we can claim that it was a scene of a grand political battle of emancipation against the traditionally patriarchal heritage of the previous kingdoms and at the same time a sophisticated cultural resistance of the gender asymmetry by the silent nationalisms. Thus the political conditions for the expression of the will for a new social contract remained a captured within the male monopoly of political will. The second mode is that which detaches the social contract from the political system and thus points to the tension between the will of the people and the system which is a 'ban' on the will.<sup>3</sup> This tension at the same time is the perfect field for politics proper to occur. As Ranciere puts it, everywhere where there is tension, where there is friction, there is the site of the occurrence of the political. It arises as a result of the pressure that certain social groups mount on the society and the system in order to incorporate their will and can thus amount to radical and substantial changes in the political system as a result of that will. We can identify two groups as bearers of the potential for a radical change in the Balkans: the first group is a 'traditional' group in the sense of the persistent presence of the potential for radical political change since it is a subject of a constant historic 'ban' and this group consists of the totality of women in the Balkans; the second groups is a 'new mainstream group' in the sense of the reaction reappearing in the labor conditions which resets the situation to the pre-socialist predicament for the workers as a class-group.

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2 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 344–354.

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3 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

In order to gain a preliminary insight on the possible presence of any kind of a social contract in the Balkan context nowadays, I believe we should adopt a non-traditional approach to the idea of a social contract – one that frees itself from the initially constructed constitutive character that precedes any other establishment of structure. Disregarding the formal and temporal requirements, I believe we should concentrate the search on the 'will expressed' of the people, simply because the eventual presence of a will can shed light to the social material required to build the will a home – in the form of a political system. Therefore, my thesis supports the position that rather than betraying the whole concept of the social contract, since societies today function even without a significant presence of a visible contractual event, we should look at the effects of the manifestation of what is most fundamental of the contract – the will. Rather than static search for the initial establishment, I propose a dynamic extraction from the current situation. Such a quasi non-essentialist approach does not render the idea of the social contract irrelevant, but on the contrary it attempts to employ the importance of its most fundamental in the politics of the day. A fundamental which I believe is inherent for any kind of social existence.

Three important questions appear in the immediate undertaking of extraction of the will from the current operational mode of our society, those being: Who expresses the will – where can its source be located? How is the will expressed – where can we read the will? How is it effectuated – if there is no contract, how does the current political system achieve a hegemonic status? The answers to these questions can represent a 'Terms of reference' of the social will, thus enabling us to identify whether a contractual effect is present without an actual contract and whether that effect is properly implemented in the form of a political system.

Pertinent to the questions on the will is the issue of freedom in its formulation and expression. Having again in mind Althusser's concept of interpellation and that it is always the subject proper that expresses the 'will' we can claim that the idea of the social contract is subordinated to ideology. Without entering again into the discussion on ideology, I propose to treat the social contract as a mode of reproduction resulting from the interdependency of social structures. Thus, 'the will' can be formulated as an expression of social relations in existence – expression of a political will of women remains a politics of the liberal market competition ideology: more representation, integration, recognition and affirmation against the hegemony of patriarchy. This again might seem that the contractual effect is merely a reflection of what is already socially established. But, if we try to think this in Althusserian lines we come to think of the dynamics of interplay and interdependence of practice - which is always an expression of will and possesses a degree of autonomy (freedom as the means to freedom), and structure - which creates the legal context for the practice to legally exist, as opposed to establishing the precedence of will over structure. Here we should always bear in mind that the final constitution of the social contract always already represents the total assemblage of competing ideologies within a society, which is always and by no exception class patterned.

Answering the first question requires the answer on the concept of the people. This is because the will is always located at the individual (his/her deeds and practice) and it is immediately linked with the second question of the mode of its expression. This link has to be established in order to be able to identify the will which is a genuine (political) expression for the purposes of a contract – contractual effect. After setting this as a theoretical filter for elaboration of the practices, we have therefore filtered



the individuals (collectives) that through that particular kind of practical political expression (of the will) become 'a people' for the purposes of the contract. We have to go from the second question to the first one. The distinction of the political practice from other human practices makes it possible to identify the presence of a contractual will. While we can claim that all human practice reproduces the dominant ideology, it is only the expression of a particular political will which can amount to a will for the purposes of a social contract, which can be in tension with the established political system. Treating the social contract in the lines of a Badiouan event, I claim that we can equate the concept of people in midst of an event with the concept of people for the purpose of the social contract. When Badiou claims that in the midst of an event, the people is made up of those who know how to solve the problems that the event imposes on them, it seems logical to claim that when social structures are formed, the contract is established by those people who bring those structures into existence. I use the concept of people instead of citizens in order to mark a theoretical/political difference. While the citizen is the one who is defined by his relation to the law/system (established social contract), the people is the pre-law/system subject, the political sovereign proper subject capable of introducing a radical political change. But as explained below, the concept of the people and citizens are correlative, since it is the people who express the will and who by virtue of that will immediately become citizens. There is no subject outside of the political. This difference has practical relevance as well. As long as subjects conceive themselves as people they set up the theoretical horizon for the expression of their genuine political will – beyond the politically restrictive law. Herein, fostering a feminist politics which conceives itself as a politics of the people does not fall within the legal restrictions put on citizens – inaugurated through the

system of maintaining patriarchal asymmetric powers, and therefore enables one to pursue a radical political vision which does not fight for a more progressive law, but for a new society that sets up new laws for its citizens.

We can claim that today in the Balkans we have a social contract which is to be found in the (contractual) effects produced by the expression of the will by those who actively participated in the transition process towards *democracy*. But, is this kind of a social contract in line with the Rousseauian idea and is it not undemocratic to claim that a minority of political elites of man who participate in the political process of establishing the new political system can represent the genuine will of the people!? At this point the Žizekian definition of the today's political challenge that is not the one of representation of the majority, but the creation of a new majority, becomes substantially relevant. This contention upholds the thesis that a social contract always exists, if not clearly established, than at least it can be extracted in the shape of contractual effects. But, what matters is the amount of people included in drafting that contract, or legislating as 'a people.' An invitation for mass participation in expression their political will would amount to masses entering the political sphere and confronting today's mass depoliticization. The effectuation of the will would go through the dynamics of political practice affecting the structures, which on the other hand set up the context for the practice, opening a progressive process of ever expanding process of adding new articles to the contract. Every time an article is added a new contract comes into existence. But what are the other options available for a quite different process of a democratic contracting of political systems in the Balkans!?

It is not only the problem of a minority that through participation in the political event of system change

in the Balkans established what is today conceived as a social contract put in action, but it is the democratic character of this will which is undermined as a result of the substantial change in the capacity of being 'a people' for the purpose of social contract (through political expression of a will) of a large part of the society. I consistently use the term 'people' in order to point out the importance of the act which brings them (the people) into being as such, in a similar manner that Rousseau does in *The Social Contract*.<sup>4</sup> If the social contract emerges as a product of a popular sovereignty through collective expression of will, it supposes that the locus where the act of such an expression takes place is empty of any kind of political system that determines in any way the mode and nature of the expression. It is because of this that the proper expression of the will of the people that establishes a social contract always remains a generic expression which acts as a sovereign will. In that sense, the establishment of the social contract is not a contract that emerges within any established social or political hierarchy, but it is a contract of the body of the society with each of its members. The mode of the transition in the Balkans involved only a small portion of the population (the male political elites) in drafting the new system that was later presented as a result of the general will, while the generic character of the expression of the will of people does not call a certain political action but it only establishes the equality of all persons in the expression of the general will which unanimously addresses the whole of the society.<sup>5</sup> It is relevant to intervene at this point via a feminist critique. The battle between the concepts of people and citizens is radically important for feminist politics. The women historically

have been forced to fight for their equal rights as citizens (the right to vote for example) because their primordial status of being 'a people' has been eternally rejected. The position of the 'people' who expressed their will was always reserved for man – leading to male conditions of politics, within which women had to integrate and fight for more rights.

The sense in which I use the term people also differs from the one in which the terms people and citizen are merely historical inventions as mediating terms for the concept of the Cartesian subject. In contrast to Rousseau who uses the term people to name those who are collectively associated with the sovereign and who individually call themselves citizens, I use the term people in order to address those who become such by way of exercising their free and equal right of expression of their will that counts as a general will for the mode of social organization or political system. It is only after the exercise of that right that the people become citizen by virtue of the law that they have brought into being with themselves. The processes of becoming of the people and the citizen should be correlative in that they establish a legal subjectivity which is equal to the political pronouncement of their will. By adopting such a standpoint I do not refuse Balibar's claim that the universality, as a prerequisite for the expression of a proper political will, could come to the subject only by way of the citizen.<sup>6</sup> The expression of such will, which is outside of the current frames of the 'social contract' produces the tension, which is to be seen as a class antagonism due to the grip on the will expressed by a tiny minority of the elites, can amount to a rise of a new political sphere.

4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1968).

5 Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006).

6 Étienne Balibar, "Citizen Subject," in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991), 45.

Addressing directly the people as a synonym for the people in their Hobbesian state of nature, without the political system to prescribe their positions as citizens, allows us to elevate the discussion on the democratic event in the Balkans from the site of the particular states (which grant the people their citizenship) to the adequate site of the Balkans itself. The necessity for upholding this approach is further explained in the text as a requirement which is crucial for my thesis that the Balkans itself is the lowest instance in which a radical political change can emerge.

In order to be able to claim a new, democratic social contract in the Balkan countries we must take into account that the generic character of the will to be expressed requires this 'equality of all' and it is exactly at this point that we face the greatest political challenge in the Balkans today. Is it possible to draft a new contract that will inaugurate a (new) democracy in the Balkans within the prevailing social and political conditions!? In order to answer this question we must look at the political capacity of the people in the Balkans which is the precondition for their equal and free expression of will that addresses the political system. The conditioning the political capacity (of will) of a great number of people in the Balkans is a direct result the two main drives of the transition: (1) the implementation of *the new* market economy through privatization of the public services and property and commoditization – of the individual life, female sexuality and (2) the maintenance of *the old* traditionalisms in the culture – nationalism and social relations – heteronormativity and patriarchy. A majority of exploited labor, oppressed woman and other social groups being prohibited from belonging to 'the people' put into question the democratic character of the established political structures. In the two decades after the establishment of this system in the Balkan countries

there is an evident tendency to constantly exclude these groups from the policies through a constant decrease of their rights by what their everyday life practices are increasingly illegalized. A direct result of such a process of exclusion is the mass depoliticization of citizens.

A research carried out in Macedonia by the Movement for Social Justice "Lenka" that analyzes the legislation on labor during the transition period from the independence in 1991 until 2010 finds that no matter which political parties were constituting the government, they always legislated laws that shortened the rights of workers and not even once there was a law passed that added to those rights. In an explicit move against the workers, the current political systems in the Balkans have effectively restricted their legal capacity, which within the current hegemonic conviction that the politics in the parliamentary democracy is allowed only within what the law prescribes, has resulted in a loss of sense of politics for thousands.

It is obvious that we are not talking of politics of minority movements, because women's movements have never been such – they represent half of the population. As is the challenge in other parts of the world, feminism in the Balkans is in no way to be essentialised to its locality and culture, since "women, because of their long absence from the scene of knowledge and art, have been incompletely civilized, with no transcendence of their own, and for that reason they still bear within them a coming political potential: they have been integrated into management and into capitalism, but not so much into its political forms."<sup>7</sup>

7 "Sonogram of a Potential," *TIQQUN* #2, no. organ of liaison within the imaginary party: zone of offensive opacity (2001), <https://tiqqun.jottit.com/>.

On 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2010, the Macedonian Parliament passed the law on anti-discrimination which excluded discrimination based on sexual orientation as a legal basis to sue the offenders. From the elaborated perspective of the social contract, this move was defended publicly as if it was against the public will to grant such rights to gays and lesbians. The political system represented in the parliament did claim its sovereign right to legislate in the name of the 'people' while that legislation did not correlate with the will of that part of society to which it explicitly addressed. When Balibar explains the process of how the beings are simultaneously people, citizens and subjects he insists that there must be an exact correspondence between what the citizen legislates (through the expression of the will which establishes the sovereign) and what the citizen obeys (as a subject of the sovereign power).<sup>8</sup> In this case we are confronted with the lack of correspondence between what the citizen surrenders from their natural freedom with what they gain as legal persons. It is here that Agamben's claim that the original political relation is not one that is founded on a virtual social contract, but one that is a ban. He argues that the political system is established by the very operation of the sovereign power which is not founded on a contract and which regulates life even to the point of excluding certain forms of it from what is legally possible.<sup>9</sup>

What we witness today in the Balkans is a great obstacle in attempting to sketch out any kind of theoretical conclusion regarding what is to be termed as a social contract of a general will in the countries, especially because the mechanisms for the people to act as sovereigns are considered to have been consumed with their initial expression of their political will for a change

of the socialist regime. What is currently taking place can be described as a unilateral operation of sovereign powers in the Balkan countries which constantly actualize the political within the societies through Agamben's *ban*. It is exactly the 'ban' that constituted the core of transitional policies in the Balkans that followed the logic of restricting of as much citizens as possible from the access to public healthcare system and public education - through constant cutting funds and changing legislation and expelling the citizens from what used to be a public space and now is a private property. It is through the operation of the sovereign power that the two important aspects of citizen's life (education and healthcare) are constantly pushed beyond the law, into the deregulated competition of the 'free market' where women have to compete as equal men - since the terms of the market are exclusively a masculine ideological construction.

### Radical possibility – the only Balkan possibility

If the current political conditions in the Balkans push us to the conclusion that the social contract is nowhere to be found, then the act that we must undertake is to move forward by analyzing the possibilities of new radical democratic acts which will inaugurate the event of a social contract. How can therefore a new contract come into existence in the Balkans and why it is the Balkans and not the particular countries, the site for the political event which can amount to a new social contract? To start this act we must again go back to the crucial moment of the change of the political systems in the Balkans. If, as elaborated above, this change did not correspond with the proper expression of the will of the people, it would mean that there has not been a genuine political event - therefore no political change in the status of people has taken place. Given the circumstances in which the

8 Balibar, "Citizen Subject."

9 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

change took place in the Balkans, we witnessed the site of the political being hijacked by small political elites, who after this act, have succeeded in their claim that the political system shaped in their interest represents the product of a general will – a social contract. After two decades of building a hegemonic status, the post-transitional political system has failed to fulfill a basic democratic requirement, that of incorporation of the will of people in the very mode of the political structure. They have been thrown again into the bulk of legal networks, into the tiresome process of translation of ideological codes/discourses in order to shape a proper systemically logical/legal leftist politics.

The argument that has been consistently advocated by the ruling elite is that the representation of the general will is duly ensured through the process of free elections. This argument has indeed narrowed the democratic procedure of expression of the political will of the people to a mere choice of the personalities who will exercise the already given sovereign power of the established political system. The will expressed for the representation through elections cannot be equated and cannot count as a social contract. For Rousseau and Badiou, the general will cannot be represented by the available modes of political systems. For them, politics is not an issue of representation through electoral system in a political system, but about the presentation of a people to itself. Thus, the main challenge in our context is the presentation of the peoples of the Balkans to themselves. The dramatic events that occurred throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014 represented such a presentation of the people to themselves. The system was thrown in an out of joint position from which it could not claim the social contract, the established representative institutions, because they were simply burning. What followed was a recuperation of the state institutions

within the space left vacant due to the lack of institution new efficient structures by the people's plenums in the Bosnian cities. But the new social conditions remain in existence, the people of Bosnia now represent something else in relation to the legally defined citizen.

This challenge is to be articulated nowhere else but in the political itself. Given the process of mass depoliticization, the main emancipatory act in the Balkans today seems to be the politicization of the citizens in order to claim the capacity of being a people who express their equal political will as a will that precedes – or in the given Balkan context, is even indifferent to the established political system. The quest for a social contract or a democratic contact in the Balkans thus becomes a genuine issue of re-rendering the political itself. This political issue is to be located exactly in the tension between that what is established as a political system and the will of those who are consistently denied of their capacity to shape it according to their will. This is what Ranciere calls a politics proper when he describes the phenomenon which occurred for the first time in history in Greece when the members of the demos, who had no firm position determined part in the political system, beyond the protest of what they suffered as a result of being expelled and requested that their will be recognized as an equal claim with that of those in power, they claimed that they represented the whole people.<sup>10</sup> Žižek claims that this act of a particular part which is a non-part (I claim that ideologically the women are a non-part of the political - refused in the very act of democracy/politics), from the viewpoint of the system, is the gesture of politicization of those who were left outside of the formal politics. It is in this sense that he claims that politics and democracy are synonymous.<sup>11</sup> Thus the process of contracting a new

10 Jacques Rancière, *La Méésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995).

11 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000).

democracy for the Balkans involves a destabilization of the established system arising from the politicization of those against which the prime political relation is established in the form of the Agambenian ban.

The political subjectivization of those who are banned from the genuine expression of their political will in the Balkans today can only occur as a result of a proper political event. The argumentation that I use here relies on Alain Badiou's concept of subjectivization. Since the will of women and workers and other marginalized groups in the Balkans cannot be represented at all, and even less through the process of counting votes that only aims the legitimization of certain groups to exert power in the name of the sovereign who establishes a rule of the majority against the egalitarian concept of the social contract, it is only that through the opening that a proper political event provides that these groups can be politically subjectivized and thus present themselves as people. A proper political event for Badiou is an event that appears out of the void of the situation, which in the Balkan context is the space left outside the law by the sovereign power, an event which inaugurates a new political truth which means nothing according to the laws of the situation. It is then up to the subjects to recognize this event as such and to link themselves with it eternally via their fidelity to the event that produces them as political subjects, as militants of the new political truth.<sup>12</sup>

Having in mind that after the change of the political system in the Balkans we did not encounter a political subject that would act as a militant of the new truth, but to the contrary, we are witnessing mass depoliticization of citizens, I claim that the change of the systems did not amount to a proper political event, and as such

it could not produce a political truth. One could also argue that those who participated in the event of the change of system did actually represent the whole of the people, but it is precisely the nature of the event that it did not occur out of the void, that it was nothing new (since it was already present in the 'west'), and that the novelty was just a pretext for a minority to exercise the power in the name of the sovereign over the majority, disregarding the egalitarian principle, that renders it insufficient of categorizing it as a proper political event. When a political claim is made by a people in the midst of an event who see themselves as representatives of the whole of the people, this claim is substantially tied to the Universal via the egalitarian idea that all those who agree on the new law will later be equally subordinated by that law.

It is only through political events that the women and labor can claim to represent the whole of the Balkan people and it is exactly through their politicization that a tension with the established political system does amount to a politics proper. This undertaking in the Balkan context is not without its contextual obstacles. Nationalism as one of the main by-products of the transition in the Balkans does play an important role in fundamentally splitting the social material not only in the Balkan as a region, but also inside the separate countries. It is because there was not a political subject born out of the event of the change of the system in the Balkans, that the gap created by mass depoliticization was loaded with nationalism. This loading substituted the political expression of the will of the people with the nationalist idea of ethnicity as a ready given social contract. Since it was not a result of a proper political event, in order to reinforce its status as a social contract of the people belonging to a certain ethnic group, the nationalist ideology had to bring in the historic myths

<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001).

and narratives which were enforced through the image of 'the other.' It is because of the reinforced image of 'the other' in the Balkans that a particular group will always fail in its claim to represent all the people in events that could amount to proper political events, since they are always recognized as being tied to only a certain ethnic group which does not represent all the people. When ethnocentric states re-appeared in the post-Yugoslav political and geographical space, the ethno-nationalist reaction to the feminine was twofold: first as an internal repression within the ethnic groups – in line with the traditional patriarchy which fueled nationalism for centuries and second as external attack on females of 'the other' as a means of warfare during the Yugoslav wars.

I claim that it is not the ethnic composition of the Balkans that influences the political systems which do not represent the will of the people, but on the contrary, the ethnic tensions are a reflection of the political elites attempting to elevate the ethnic aspirations into national ideals and national ideal into regional Balkan politics. Thus, the politics of a new democracy for the Balkans is not to be founded within the solution to the current ethnic tensions as such, simply because they are a product of the political system established against the will of the people. The political challenge in the Balkans today is to recognize the common political ground of people as political subjects who politically express their will that produces the sovereign which is not a reflection of an ethnic claim. The women in all the Balkan states represent a people's potential which trespasses the ethnic boundaries because they have been a victim of the capitalist-nationalist ideology by virtue of their gender and not of an ethno/linguistic identity. The process of entering the true political site is not concerned with the ethnic issues as long as there are ethnic groups that as such are not expelled from the political.

I consistently speak of the Balkans in disregard of particular countries because I consider the Balkans itself as the lowest instance of a possible radical political change for several different reasons. Agamben's description of the original political relations as a relation of a ban and not of a social contract, in the Balkan context means that the establishment of sovereign powers (separate countries after the breakup of Yugoslavia) has aimed at splitting the fabric of the people of the Yugoslav federation exactly for the aim of introducing new sovereigns to be ruled by the political elites. While the people could have properly expressed their will within the existing federation, it was the political elites that refused to keep sharing the federative power and thus forced the people into smaller parts, restricting the site for their expression. Any new political subjectivization of the people in the Balkans would be a novelty in the sense that it radically escapes the splitting logic of the political elites of the Balkans through establishing a new site of the sovereign that would be the Balkans itself.

Another reason that makes this democratic movement into a new political site in the Balkans a viable one is the common inherited consequences of the transition. If the real economic categories of life are similar throughout the Balkans (high unemployment, exploited labor, discriminated women) it is only the logic of the ethnicity that keeps the Balkan people apart, which is the one that has been used to undermine the political capacity of these people through depoliticization, than their political subjectivization should run exactly on a path that escapes this logic. The act of popular expression of the will must always remain tied to a certain locality without establishing a particularity,<sup>13</sup> that means that a political event that occurs in one of

13 Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject To Truth*, 1 edition (Minneapolis, MN: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003), 111–112.

the Balkan countries no matter that remains within the locality where it happens, it has the potential to radically change the political composition of the whole of Balkans. It was recently that the occupation of the Philosophical Faculty of Belgrade by its students has sparked student movement in the Skopje University. This event provides that an act of expression of the will of students as one of the not-counted groups in the Balkan politics, no matter that it is tied to the local circumstances in Belgrade, does speak in the name of all students since it is properly recognized as an event with a universal value by the students from Skopje.

The traditionalisms that were introduced in the post-Yugoslav Balkan context in order to support the nationalist ideology of mutilating the proper political concept of the social contract with the idea of a contract among the people of a certain ethnic group reinvented the heteronormative values in the Balkan society. Before claiming that it is females that are today marginalized in the Balkans, it is rather more important to notice the process of heteronormative prescription of positions within the political system that marginalizes the universal concept of equality of the expression of the will of the people (that is of a group beyond gender identity) which if it had been expressed via a true political event would be maintained through the fidelity to this concept - equality as an axiom. It is because of the absence of the social contract, of the true political event, that the heteronormativity is introduced as a principle in the Balkans, which in the absence of the becoming of the people that introduce politics beyond gender identity, prescribes them gendered asymmetric positions within the political system.

We can claim that today we have a mutation of the concept of citizens because the people have not yet become such (people) via the expression of their will. Without the

people, the necessary correlativity cannot be fulfilled and therefore the citizens cannot be citizens proper, but they are merely such in the sense that they are subjects of law, which on the other hand performs the role of the ban to their citizenship which should be correlative to their becoming a people. The consequences for the women here are obvious – they are not even merely citizens, but rather 'citizens in attempt' since the law that they are challenging is to them a foreign material of which social relations are build. Or as we read in 'Don't Believe You Have Rights': "The difference about being a woman is that woman found her free existence by leveraging herself not on the given contradictions, present within the social body, but on the contradictions that each individual woman had inside her, and which had no social form to them before receiving one from feminine politics. We ourselves, so to speak, invented the social contradictions that make our freedom necessary."<sup>14</sup>

In attempting to think the political in the Balkans in the lines of a new social contract, we should bear in mind Zizek's criticism of the theory of social contract which he sees as a fantasy that covers over the brutal advent of the law. The outcome of the social contract (the free and equal persons) he says is posited as one of its prerequisites in which the constant threat of Hobbesian violence of all against all reappears in contract theory with respect to those who do not consent, who remain outside of it. Put in Balkan context, Zizek's criticism fully supports the argument that the exploitation, heteronormative and ethnic violence is a result of the current social contract. But, against the fetishization of politics without a social contract, I claim that there is a possibility for a social

14 "Don't Believe You Have Rights [translated as Sexual Difference]," *Libreria Delle Donne (Women's Book House)*, 1987.



contract in the Balkans that would be a product of the expression of the political will of the people in the precise sense in which Žižek sees politics as being synonymous to democracy.<sup>15</sup>

Marx corrects Hegel in his claim that history repeats itself twice with the remark that the historical events first occur as a tragedy than they repeat as a farce.<sup>16</sup> The breakup of Yugoslavia was genuinely a tragedy for the will of the people, because the path in which it took place did not leave any space for that will to be politically expressed. The establishment of new countries in the territory of Yugoslavia was a clear farce in relation to the will of the people, because it was based on the interests of a minority composed of political elites that exploited the idea of nationalism in order to conceal the general will within the nineteenth century idea of national state which was supposed to perform as the new social contract of the people who were already deprived of their capacity to be a people. This capacity was substituted with the ethnic capacity through which they derived the subjectivity as citizens. It is that perverse combination of the concept of citizen and ethnicity which through the attempt to establish a kind of political correlativity between those two, resulted in ethnic cleansing and war with the other 'citizens.' Without the universality of the egalitarian principle of political subjectivization, the politics was carried out as a bare militancy of one particular against another.

I will conclude the argumentation on the political becoming of the people in the Balkans as a radical democratic challenge to the established political system, by reiterating the crucial points in my claim that a (new)

social contract in the Balkans is to be achieved through proper political events. It is from Alain Badiou that we understand that real events occur in politics, science, art and love, as unpredictable appearances that originate from the void of the situation and such establish new conditions of the situation, unknown before the event.<sup>17</sup> Does this mean that it is impossible to engage politically for contracting a new democracy for the Balkans since the politicization of the people depends on the political events that cannot be planned, prepared or predicted, that would confirm Lyotard's doubt on whether a revolutionary discourse is possible at all!? If the establishment of a social contract through expression of the will of the Balkan people via which they bring themselves into becoming is of the same order as the true political event, than the political event is immanent in the people. The political challenge in the Balkans today can be formulated as a political undertaking of emancipation that fights the current neoliberal depoliticization. It is only through the political subjectivization that the current Balkan citizens can achieve the correlation with the concept of people which than can ensure a proper democratic drafting of a social contract. This process of politicization that leads to a free and equal expression of the will of the people in the Balkans will no doubt establish a new field for the political as a new political site that is *indifferent* to the particular political systems that cut through the social fabric in the Balkans today and create irrational antagonisms between the citizens of the same people. It is the fight for the political claim to politics as such, that the expelled groups of the void of the Balkan situation, through the local claim of the universal, can speak for the whole of the Balkan people, thus bringing them into being as such in the very Balkan instance.

15 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 189–190.

16 Slavoj Žižek, *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 1.

17 Badiou, *Ethics*.

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## How to Weaken the EU Frame

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### How to Weaken the EU Frame

#### Abstract

Even though the European Union was created to avoid new wars within the continent and promote social integration, it has never questioned its political horizon. This is why legal scholars are continuously reminding us that until our constitution is ratified, the

Union will continue to lack the political debate that is at the center of any mature democracy. But if the Union has now reached a new record of unpopularity it is because of this general neutering of politics, which allows technocrats to prevail over politicians and indifference over democracy. The logic behind our thesis is not that countries cannot leave the Union but that doing so would create more harm than staying. However, this does not imply there is no alternative; quite the contrary, a profound resistance to the Union has not only been discussed but also practiced throughout Europe.

Europe will one day be a single bureau, and those who 'work together' will be the employees of their own bureaucracy.

Martin Heidegger, 1942

Although these words from one of the most important philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sound prophetic today, they must be interpreted together with the concerns of different contemporary intellectuals over the subordination of society to technological measures. As the American economist Paul Krugman pointed out in a *New York Times Magazine* article when the global financial crisis began, the problem with establishment

economists was that they mistake mathematics for truth; they were “seduced by the vision of a perfect, frictionless market system [and] need to abandon the neat but wrong solution of assuming that everyone is rational and markets work perfectly.”<sup>1</sup> The idea that scientists can solve or reform political, economic and social matters sits at the origin of both the European Union’s current austerity measures and its cultural crisis. The right wing populist parties’ success throughout Europe in 2014 elections must be read in this light. Science is not enough. We need more politics, exchange, and interpretation.

Even though the Union was created to avoid new wars within the continent and promote social integration, it has never questioned its political horizon. This is why legal scholars are continuously reminding us that until our constitution is ratified, the Union will continue to lack the political debate that is at the center of any mature democracy. As we all know, these debates have been substituted by technical and bureaucratic agreements in order to allow the Union to function correctly. But if the Union has now reached a new record of unpopularity (as a recent study by the Pew Research Institute demonstrated)<sup>2</sup> it is because of this general neutering of politics, which allows technocrats to prevail over politicians and indifference over democracy.

There is one thing most European philosophers agree upon today: the difficulty the various member countries would have trying to leave the Union. This is probably why thinkers as different as Jürgen Habermas, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Žižek have recently encouraged internal transformations: Habermas calls for a “democratization of the Council,”<sup>3</sup> Mouffe for a “de-bureaucratization of its political environment,”<sup>4</sup> and Žižek for a “socialization of its banks.”<sup>5</sup> While we agree with our colleagues’ suggestions, we can’t help wondering whether these are not other ways to emphasize how Europe has become framed within the Union. The logic behind our thesis is not that countries cannot leave the Union but that doing so would create more harm than staying. However, this does not imply there is no alternative; quite the contrary, a profound resistance to the Union has not only been discussed but also practiced throughout Europe. These resistances are not meant to put an end to our ties with the Union, but to weaken them, that is, to create greater democratic participation in vital social matters. This is why the rise of the Five Star Movement in Italy and Podemos in Spain are going to be an important opportunity to weaken the ongoing industrial and economic policies we’ve been submitted

1 Paul Krugman, “How Did Economists Get it So Wrong?,” *The New York Times*, September 02, 2009, Accessed October 28, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/Magazine/06economic-t.html?ref=Paulkrugman&\\_R=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/Magazine/06economic-t.html?ref=Paulkrugman&_R=0).

2 “The New Sick Man of Europe: The European Union,” in *Global Attitudes Project*, (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, May 13, 2013), accessed October 28, 2014, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/05/13/the-new-sick-man-of-europe-the-european-union/>.

3 Jürgen Habermas, In Bernd Riegert, “A Philosophical Critique of EU Politics,” *Deutsche Welle*, April 27, 2013.

4 Chantal Mouffe, “Five Minutes with Chantal Mouffe: ‘Most countries in Europe are in a post-political situation,’” The London School of Economics Blog: *September, 16 2013*, accessed October 28, 2014, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/09/16/five-minutes-with-chantal-mouffe-most-countries-in-europe-are-in-a-post-political-situation/>.

5 Slavoj Žižek, “The Cyprus Crisis is a Symptom of What is Rotten in the Eu,” *The Guardian*, April, 8, 2013, Accessed October 28, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/Commentisfree/2013/Apr/08/Cyprus-Crisis-Symptom-Rotten-Eu>

to. Together with Alexis Tsipras, they are our change to request a profound social change within the Union's policy.

As we can see, if we are framed within the Union it's not because its technicians remained neutral, but rather because they have chosen sides, as the many neoliberal infrastructure projects and economic measures imposed upon member states demonstrate. While in Italy the government is asked to move on with the construction of a high-speed railway line (TAV), which will link Turin and Lyon regardless of its environmental impact and popular opposition, in Spain, Mariano Rajoy has begun to privatize a number of hospitals and health centers, blocking hundreds of thousands of people from access to medical treatments. These two measures are an indication not only of the Union's indifference when it comes to political decisions but also of its persisting interest in framing Europe financially and physically. But what lies behind these measures? According to a recent study by the Transnational Institute these (and many other) measures are meant to privatize public infrastructures and services as a condition for loans. We don't think these measures should be opposed only because of the devastating effects they had on developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s (when the International Monetary Fund and World Bank called the shots) but also because of the cultural implications. The economic domination of the European Central Bank over these past ten years has affected us at a financial level, but also culturally. In order to promote competition and become more effective, we also had to become less human.

As we can see, the cultural problem of Europe does not lie in the education of its citizens, but in their social sensibility, which the Union is trying to undermine through the privatization of public infrastructures and

social services. However, these same measures have given birth to powerful protest and resistance movements, such as NO-TAV and the "white tide" movement, and these have become spaces for solidarity among concerned citizens. Although the Italian and Spanish governments have begun to take violent measures against these movements as the recent reform of the Spanish penal code (against unauthorized protest) or the militarization of the Val di Susa (where the TAV is supposed to cross), we must support and join these protesters in order to weaken our ties with the Union.

Communism, Lenin once said, was "Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country"; Europe today is "electrification without soviets." The communities of Europe have technological programs but are without power. This power can be restored only when political life prevails once again over the technocrats. This life can be restored through those weak, but visible deputies, that today are represented in the Parliament.

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Tibor Rutar

## The Rise of the Right in Times of Capitalist Crisis: A Materialist Explanation

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### Abstract

In the article we aim to examine two pressing issues for any progressive, anti-capitalist movement or party today. The first concerns the (non-)success of classical Marxist attempts at providing a satisfactory account of workers' rising support for pro-capitalist ideology and political parties in times of economic crisis. The second relates to an updated attempt of a materialist explanation of this phenomenon.

### Introduction

Pro-capitalist parties and movements of all political stripes – Right-Wing, Centrist and Center-Left – are booming even though, or perhaps precisely because, we're in the middle of a very deep capitalist crisis.

As the journalist Robert D. Kaplan puts it in his commentary on the 2014 European elections:

It is undeniable that the right wing is ascendant in Europe. While leftist parties did well here and there in recent elections to the European Parliament, the story over recent years has been mainly about the right, symbolized most dramatically by the soaring popularity of Marine Le Pen's National Front in France. But also in Denmark, Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Serbia, the one commonality is the dynamism of nationalist-style political movements. Right-wing parties in France and Denmark got a quarter of the vote in late May's elections, while the right in Austria got a fifth. Meanwhile, the Jobbik party in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece have garnered headlines the world over for their flamboyant neo-fascist views and popularity among significant swathes of the voting public.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Europe's Deep Right-Wing Logic," *Forbes*, June 04, 2014, accessed October 29, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2014/06/04/europes-deep-right-wing-logic/>.

These parties are not only booming but are even voted for by the working class itself. How can that be? Isn't it true, as Marxists have always contended, that the interests of workers are in direct opposition with the interests of capitalists and therefore in opposition with capitalism itself? Isn't it true that this is especially so in the middle of a serious capitalist crisis, when the exploitative, crisis-prone nature of capitalism is revealed in full? It seems that it isn't true as it looks like workers don't recognize what their interests "truly are," and they decide not to support anti-capitalist, Socialist parties and movements, but instead support various pro-capitalist parties. How come there exists such an apparent contradiction? The classical answers to this puzzle typically refer to false consciousness, manipulation and workers' passivity, or they flat-out deny the puzzle itself and blame the so-called "aristocratic part" of the working-class for the parliamentary success of pro-capitalist politics in general and the Right-Wing in particular. In this article I will show that these classical answers are either too short or just plain wrong. I will also argue that underlying the success of pro-capitalist parties and politics are the *actual* material interests and life-experiences of voters (i.e. workers) and their *rational* behavior.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Let us qualify this statement from the outset so as to avoid possible misunderstandings. Our claim is emphatically *not* that conservative ideology is to be explained wholly in terms of economic interests or, even more preposterously, that its genesis is reducible to "the economy" or "the capitalist mode of production." Our claim is only that a major *part* of the *rise* of pro-capitalist ideology (and, with it, conservatism) can be convincingly explained by reference to material interests and changing life-experiences of exploited agents in times of economic crisis.

## Two Classical Explanations of Workers' Support for Pro-Capitalist Ideology

### (1) *The "Labour Aristocracy Thesis"*

The fact that pro-capitalist ideas and parties are at least sometimes (or even usually) supported by workers has been explained by radical theorists oftentimes by referring to the so-called "Labour Aristocracy Thesis." This theory has many formulations, but in general there are three<sup>3</sup> which have had a major impact: Marx's and Engels', Lenin's and Zinoviev's, and Elbaum's and Seltzer's.<sup>4</sup> All three of them turn on two key points:

First, working-class conservatism is the result of material differences – relative privileges – enjoyed by some workers. Workers who embrace racism, nativism, sexism, homophobia and pro-imperialist patriotism tend to be those who earn higher wages, experience more secure employment, and have access to health-care, pensions and other forms of the social wage. Second, the source of this relative privilege ('the bribe') is a sharing of higher-than-average profits between capitalists and a privileged labour-aristocracy.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Charles Post, "Exploring Working-Class Consciousness: A Critique of the Theory of the 'Labour-Aristocracy,'" *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 3–38.

4 Post summarizes their interpretation thus: "Elbaum and Seltzer argue that the super-profits that account for the material privileges of the labour-aristocracy could not be 'reduced to excessive profit gains from "overseas investment.'" Instead, super-profits resulting from monopoly – industrial concentration and the limitation of competition in key-sectors of the economy – produce higher-than-average wages and more-secure employment for a labour-aristocracy of unionised workers." Post, "Exploring Working-Class Consciousness," 7.

5 *Ibid.*, 6.

The thesis is that pro-capitalist and conservative ideas in general, which make it harder for workers to unite and stand in solidarity with each other, are usually supported by the higher paid, better-off, privileged part of the working class; and that the sources of this privilege is the superprofit<sup>6</sup> appropriated by capitalists in exchange and shared with some workers so as to pacify class struggle. In some versions of the thesis, the source of superprofit is imperialist intervention in less developed economies where labour costs are lower, in others the source is monopoly position of corporations in today's so-called

“monopoly capitalism.” Now, why should higher-paid workers that are nonetheless subjected to exploitative practices in the workplace support pro-capitalist and conservative ideas instead of uniting with other workers and fighting against their common exploiters? According to the supporters of the “labour aristocracy thesis,” it is so because by supporting pro-capitalist ideas and conservatism these higher-paid workers retain their relative privilege. By ideologically<sup>7</sup> supporting capitalists they receive a bribe, a material reward, while at the same time they also help to maintain the stability of the source of their material reward by supporting imperialism, etc.

6 *Superprofit* (or, as originally termed by Marx, *surplus profit*) is an amount of surplus value that is appropriated by a technologically advanced capitalist or monopolist in exchange over and above the average amount of profit. As Marx briefly explains: “Just as a manufacturer who employs a new invention before it becomes generally used, undersells his competitors and yet sells his commodity above its individual value, that is, realises the specifically higher productiveness of the labour he employs as surplus labour. He thus secures a surplus profit [i.e. ‘superprofit’].” Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols. (International Publishing, 1998), 3: 236. In other words, a company that is technologically more advanced than the average company can, in a competitive market, still sell its products at the price of the less advanced, average company (or only slightly under it so as to gain a larger market share). Even though the technologically advanced company's production costs are lower than average – because its technological superiority implies higher productivity – it can sell its products at the price which is set by average production costs of the majority of competing companies. This is so until all other companies in a sector themselves raise productivity through technological innovation. The extra profit enjoyed by the once technologically superior company is gone as all other (or at least the majority) companies also catch up to its level of productivity. To summarize, superprofit is enjoyed by those companies whose production costs are lower than the production costs of average (mean) companies, or by monopolist companies that can artificially boost the prices of their products.

Charles Post has posed a major challenge to all types of this thesis both on theoretical as well as empirical grounds. Firstly, he claims that

[h]igher profits result in higher rates of investment across the economy in the industrialised countries. More investment eventually brings a growing demand for labour (within limits set by investment in newer, more capital-intensive technology), falling unemployment and rising wages for all workers in the industrialised capitalist countries. Put simply, imperialist investment in the global South benefits all workers in the global North – both ‘aristocratic’ steel, automobile, machine-making, trucking and construction-workers, and lowly-paid clerical, janitorial, garment- and food-processing workers as well.<sup>8</sup>

7 In this article the term “ideology” will be used neutrally, simply as denoting any set of beliefs through which agents make sense of the world, no matter how false or true it is.

8 Post, “Exploring Working-Class Consciousness,” 23.



Secondly,

Howard Botwinick's study of wage- and profit-differentials reviewed the literature published since Semmler's work was completed, and found similar patterns. Industrial concentration, again, could not explain profit- and wage-rate differentials. Not only were factors like labour-productivity and capital-intensity of production more important in accounting for profit- and wage-differentials, but many of the highly concentrated industries that had experienced higher-than-average profits prior to 1970 were experiencing lower-than-average profits in the 1970s and 1980s. More recent studies have confirmed the absence of a strong correlation between industrial concentration and higher-than-average profits and wages. Instead, profit and wage-differentials were rooted in the differentials in labour-productivity and capital-intensity of production.<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly and lastly,

[a] systematic review of the history of the workers' struggles in the global North in the past century does not bear out the claim that well-paid workers are generally conservative and poorly-paid workers are more radical. As John Kelly argued, '[h]istorically, the most class conscious and militant sections of the working class have often been those whose earnings, job security and status placed them in a position of relative privilege relative to many of their fellow workers.'<sup>10</sup>

(2) *The "False Consciousness Thesis" or the "Dominant Ideology Thesis"*

Sociological functionalism is a species of explanation that explains the existence of social phenomena by invoking their beneficial effects for, typically, the reproduction of the existing social order (or a certain social group). Functionalism is tightly, however not inextricably, linked to methodological holism, i.e. the notion that we can explain all social phenomena by referring only to social structures, "social facts" and "social laws," not individuals and their action. Holism relies on the explanatory power of social structures and "social facts" – instead of wants, beliefs, needs and interests of individual social agents – because it denies the existence of autonomous human agents or, what is the same, claims that agents are nothing else than the product of social structures, norms, rules and practices.

I have claimed that methodological holists are usually explanatory functionalists. This is so because in sociology there exist, in general, two species of explanations: intentional and functionalist explanations. Intentional explanations invoke agential wants, beliefs, interests and needs. Because holism denies the existence of autonomous agents and sees them wholly determined by "social facts", this type of explanation is ruled out *a priori*. So holists are left with functionalism which, as we've already said, explains a phenomenon by invoking its beneficial effects for the reproduction of some other phenomenon. We can demonstrate how functionalism works by examining Louis Althusser's take on the capitalist state in his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. For Althusser, the state in capitalist society is *capitalist*, i.e. it is tilted toward the interests of the ruling capitalist class,<sup>11</sup> because it simply *has*

9 Post, "Exploring Working-Class Consciousness," 26.

10 *Ibid.*, 28.

11 We've said that holists rarely invoke the needs or interests

to reproduce capitalist conditions and relations of production. Althusser claims that a certain mode of production – say, capitalist mode of production – cannot exist, unless its conditions of existence are constantly being reproduced.<sup>12</sup> This function of reproducing the conditions and relations of production in capitalist societies is done by the state.

[T]he Marxist-Leninist ‘theory’ of the State has its finger on the essential point, and not for one moment can there be any question of rejecting the fact that this really is the essential point. The State Apparatus, which defines the State as a force of repressive execution and intervention ‘in the interests of the ruling classes’ in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat, is quite certainly the State, and quite certainly defines its basic ‘function.’<sup>13</sup>

The state succeeds in reproducing conditions and relations of production by two mechanisms: by the help of repressive and ideological state apparatuses. The

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of *individual agents* because for them individual agents are irrelevant for explaining some social phenomena. Now, as we shall see in the case of Althusser, holists in their functionalist explanations can and do invoke the needs and interests of social *groups* or *institutions*, i.e. the needs and interests of ostensibly supra-individual, *collective* entities.

12 It is not at all controversial to say, as Althusser does, that something can exist only if its existence is being reproduced. In fact, it’s a banal truism. The problem, however and as we shall see, is that it is not at all certain that the existing social order does in fact get reproduced. If there also exists constant class struggle, as Althusser himself affirms, merely claiming that the existing social order has to be reproduced begs the central question of how exactly this is possible.

13 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 137.

latter are the more important for Althusser’s case and will be of more interest to us as well.

[T]he Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.) Thus Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. . . . [I]t is ultimately the ruling ideology which is realized in the Ideological State Apparatuses.<sup>14</sup>

According to Althusser – and consistent with his methodological holism – the ideological state apparatuses via the power of discipline and indoctrination simply construct willing subjects, primed for the reproduction of capitalist conditions and relations of production. Agents are nothing else but the products of ideological interpellation, i.e. the prevailing social norms and rules; they are social constructs, top to bottom. From this we could arrive at a conclusion relevant for our general discussion. Namely, workers are supporting various pro-capitalist parties simply because they have succumbed to the ruling ideology which is being disseminated by the ideological state apparatuses. Because according to methodological holism agents are nothing but social products, this conclusion shouldn’t come as a surprise. Relatedly, according to functionalism the fact that the existing social order is reproduced shouldn’t come as a surprise either – it could never have been otherwise: the system is static.

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14 Ibid., 145–146.

This whole argument is summarized by three theorists who are otherwise sharp critics of the *Dominant Ideology Thesis*:

Through its control of ideological production, the dominant class is able to supervise the construction of a set of coherent beliefs. . . . The dominant ideology penetrates and infects the consciousness of the working class, because the working class comes to see and to experience reality through the conceptual categories of the dominant class. The dominant ideology functions to incorporate the working class within a system which is, in fact, operating against the material interests of labour. The incorporation in turn explains the coherence and integration of capitalist society.<sup>15</sup>

One of the more influential proponents of this thesis and a follower of Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, seems to accept such a characterization. This is what he says: “The dominant ideology, by assuring the practical insertion of agents in the social structure, aims at the maintenance (the cohesion) of the structure, and this means *above all* class domination and exploitation.”<sup>16</sup>

This claim, I would argue, is profoundly mistaken. Firstly, methodological holism was shown to be unsatisfactory both on theoretical and empirical grounds a long time ago. Space limitations prevent us from presenting the main arguments against holism in any detail, but we can at least outline them. One problem with holism is that it cannot explain the transition from pre-social

subject (or, in Althusserian terms, “individual”) to fully socialized subject without presupposing what it set out to prove. This is especially acute in Althusser’s theory of ideology which paradoxically *presupposes* the subject who is “always already” capable of recognizing herself in ideological interpellation, for the very purposes of *explaining* how such a subject is to arise. Another problem is that methodological holists cannot explain one of the most prominent socio-historical facts, which is that, throughout human history, agents of all cultures and societies have constantly struggled against prevailing social structures, norms, rules and practices or have even questioned *all* existing social ways and their continuation. Holists are also unable to explain how agents are able to construct for themselves entirely new ideologies and norms which have hitherto not existed.

Secondly, the applicability of functionalist explanations is much narrower than Althusser thinks. Simply claiming that phenomenon X exists because it has beneficial effects on the existence of phenomenon Y is a *non sequitur*, and such claims by themselves in any case never explain how and why phenomenon X emerged and is being reproduced. There are many social phenomena that have positive effects on the reproduction of social order, but which have emerged and exist independently of these positive effects. Gender inequality, for example, has positive effects on the reproduction of capitalist conditions and relations of production because it divides the working class and acts as a powerful barrier against class solidarity between male and female workers. However, it does not follow simply from this that gender inequality exists and is being reproduced *for this reason*. What is more, even if we accepted this “explanation” of gender inequality for the sake of argument, we haven’t really explained much by it. We haven’t explained neither *how* gender inequality came to exist nor *which*

15 Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), 1–2.

16 Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: Verso, 1974), 209.

(*individual or social*) mechanisms are reproducing it, and how exactly this reproduction occurs.

To conclude, the influential<sup>17</sup> Marxist (and, in a slightly different form, Parsonian) “dominant ideology thesis,” which claims that the ruling ideas in each epoch are the ideas of the ruling class or that the predominant ideology in each society and epoch is such that it successfully legitimizes the existing social order is false. From the mere fact that pro-capitalist ideas in general and Right-Wing ideas in particular have a positive influence on the reproduction of the existing social order, we cannot conclude that they came into existence for this reason, nor can we speculate about the reasons for their persistence and omnipresence.

### Materialist Explanations and Their Critics

We have presented a few reasons for rejecting the classical explanations of working class support for pro-capitalist ideas and parties. I will now present a different, materialist<sup>18</sup> explanation of this phenomenon that avoids

17 In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels have, besides Althusser and Poulantzas, also mistakenly endorsed the *Dominant Ideology Thesis*. So has Terry Eagleton, in their name. See Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5.

18 To avoid confusion it has to be said that the *Labour Aristocracy Thesis* is also a materialist explanation, but it is a materialist explanation that is, as we’ve seen, both empirically and theoretically flawed. The *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, however, is not a materialist explanation, but is rather a normative-functionalist one. The difference between materialist explanations and normative-functionalist explanations is most clearly and succinctly indicated by Parsons: “I am a cultural determinist. . . . I believe that . . . the normative elements are more important for social change than . . . material interests.” Talcott Parsons, *Societies: Evolutionary*

the pitfalls of the classical explanations. In an article from the beginning of 1980s Robert and Johanna Brenner have provided a succinct and convincing starting-point of exactly such analysis. They write:

Workers have moved right instead of left because of what they perceive to be – and what in a limited but important sense really are – their immediate, short-run economic interests (however disastrous this may be in the long-run). It is this development which makes the politics and organization of the right a serious threat.<sup>19</sup>

Below we will try to expand on their essential point by defending the following three theses:

- (a) There exist “good reasons” – i.e. their actual material interests – for workers to support pro-capitalist ideas in general and Right-Wing ideas in particular, especially in times of economic crisis.
- (b) The Right-Wing addresses these true, actual needs and interests of workers, but it does so in a particular way that is, even though it is not simply false, one-sided.
- (c) The Socialist Left should address the same interests and needs, but do so in a different, more forward-looking way than the Right-Wing.

Many theorists – even Marxist theorists, especially the ones who were forged in the holist fire of Althusserianism – are usually skeptical of materialist explanations that

*and Comparative Perspectives* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 113.

19 Robert Brenner and Johanna Brenner, “Reagan, the Right and the Working Class,” *Against the Current* (Old Series) 1, no. 2 (1981), 29.

refer to human needs and material interests. Therefore, let us examine the main arguments against materialist explanations before we continue with providing such an explanation. Post-Althusserian theorist Göran Therborn who sees himself working “on the basis of historical materialism”<sup>20</sup> presents his skepticism towards materialist explanations very clearly:

This notion of motivation by interest assumes that normative conceptions of what is good and bad and conceptions of what is possible and impossible are given in the reality of existence and are accessible only through true knowledge of the latter. In my opinion these are unwarranted and untenable assumptions. They represent a utilitarian residue in Marxism, which should be rejected, explicitly and decisively, once for all.<sup>21</sup>

This charge of “utilitarian residue in Marxism” is exactly what has been levelled against Vivek Chibber, the author of a recent *tour de force* Marxian work *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* more recently. In this most recent work Chibber presented a materialist, interest-based Marxian analysis of Indian peasant and worker resistance.<sup>22</sup> Critics (for example, Bruce Robbins<sup>23</sup>) are claiming – similarly to Therborn’s concerns 35 years ago – that such an impoverished analysis makes out human agents to be pre-cultural rational automata who relentlessly calculate and maximize the personal utility of each and every social interaction and activity.

20 Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1999), 5.

21 Ibid.

22 Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013).

23 Bruce Robbins, “Subaltern-speak,” *n+1* 18 (2013).

However, as Chibber notes in a response,<sup>24</sup> these claims miss their target completely. It is, of course, true that conceptualizing agents in a Weberian way, i.e. as instrumentally rational, is unsatisfactory and mistaken, and it is even true that it was exactly this conception that was adopted by some of the most eminent self-proclaimed Marxists (Jon Elster, John Roemer and Adam Przeworski, to name just a few). But it does not follow from this bitter aftertaste that was left by Rational Choice Theory, Neo-Classical Economics and Analytical Marxism, that *all* references to material interests and their pursuit by “somewhat rational” agents have to be discarded.

To reiterate, agents are not – pace *homo economicus* – instrumentally rational, that is, they are not necessarily self-interested, they do not relentlessly maximize their personal utility and they are not blind to the moral dimension of their ends. However, this doesn’t mean that agents are not at least attitudinally and behaviourally rational. On the contrary, they usually act in a way at least *consistent* with (even if not *optimal* for) their interests and beliefs, and they also tend to eliminate beliefs that are mutually inconsistent. They are, furthermore, not only concerned with the means for achieving an end but also with the ends themselves. If we accept this non-utilitarian conception of agents we can have an interest-based analysis which is crucial for examining the connection between social structures and human agents, without succumbing to the siren song of orthodox rational choice theory that is rightly repudiated by most social scientists.

24 Vivek Chibber, “Subaltern Mythologies,” *Jacobin* (2014), accessed October 29, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/subaltern-mythologies/>.

Now, there are some theorists that go even further than Robbins and Therborn. These theorists deny *the very existence* of material interests, even as conceptualized by non-utilitarian theories of agency. The Post-Althusserian historian Gareth Stedman Jones is a point in case:

The implicit assumption is of civil society as a field of conflicting social groups or classes whose opposing interests will find rational expression in the political arena. Such interests, it is assumed, pre-exist their expression. . . . We cannot . . . decode political language to reach a primal and material expression of interest since it is the discursive structure of political language which conceives and defines interest in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

Something similar was claimed by a notorious pair of Post-Althusserian theorists, Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst: “Objects of discourse don’t exist. Entities to which discourse refers are constituted in it and by it.”<sup>26</sup> And then we have yet another ex-Althusserian, Chantal Mouffe:

“How can it be maintained that economic agents can have interests defined at the economic level which would be represented *a posteriori* at the political and ideological levels? In fact, since it is in ideology and through politics that interests are defined, that amounts to stating that interests can exist prior to the discourse in which they are formulated and articulated. This is contradictory.”<sup>27</sup>

25 Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21–22.

26 Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Mode of Production and Social Formation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1977), 20.

27 Chantal Mouffe, “Working Class Hegemony and the Struggle for Socialism,” *Studies in Political Economy* 12 (1983), 9.

What all of these theorists claim, is that interests aren’t given in advance of their politico-discursive expression. Interests can only be created, not given, and they are created only through political discourse and action. This means that interests cannot be objective and material, i.e. independent of the agent. They are arbitrary discursive constructs that, by definition, cannot be predicted in advance. Any Marxian insistence that all workers who are subjected to exploitation in the sphere of production have a material interest in the cessation or at least a toning down of exploitation is, according to aforementioned theorists, unwarranted. Until workers express their interest in explicit political language and through political action their interest simply doesn’t exist, even though they might be subjected to constant exploitation and oppression.

These Post-Althusserians arrive at such an absurd, idealist conclusion by the help of some very fashionable, yet flawed sociological and philosophical arguments that aim to reject the existence of human nature and metaphysical realism. For the purposes of this article, let us merely “dogmatically” presuppose that there is a real world “out there,” beyond our discourse, and that agents who are systematically exploited and oppressed have an objective interest (one among the many they have) for such an inhumane treatment of them to stop or to at least be diminished, even if they do not express this interest in explicit political discourse and action.

### The Paradox of Workers’ Support for Pro-Capitalist Ideology

We can now turn to our materialist thesis that is in contrast with all hitherto examined ones. I would argue that workers react positively to the promises of pro-capitalist parties because of *real experiences and life-*

*situations*. These experiences that tilt workers further towards pro-capitalist ideology in times of economic crisis are, paradoxically and for the most part, created by the very insecurities of the labour market (i.e. rising rates of unemployment), stagnating or even regressing living standards, rising levels of exploitation in the workplace and the tendency for intensity of work to rise, that emerge from the capitalist mode of production and its law of competition. Said more briefly, one of the main reasons why workers support capitalist ideology is because of their *real* life experiences (not ruling class manipulation) that are themselves produced by the mechanisms of capitalist organization of social production. This seems utterly ironical, if not paradoxical. How is it possible that workers should support the very social order that is oppressive to them, and do so precisely because of experiencing how terrible it is, even though they are not the passive Althusserian “*Träger*” or Parsonian “cultural dopes”? In truth, it should not come as a surprise. Let’s see why.

Pro-capitalist parties of all ideological stripes claim that in order for the unemployment rate to go down and for the new job offers to rise – or: for the crisis to subside – the economy should be growing. But the economy can grow, they say, only if it is competitive enough, i.e. if it is conducive to profit-making. It is only in this case that foreign and domestic investors will be willing to invest in productive activities, and it is only when the rate of investment is rising that all economic actors (capitalists, workers, the state etc.) will see the rise of their revenue and personal income. Finally, it is only in such a booming economic situation that new jobs will be opening up, wages will be rising and the state will be able to sustain and expand its welfare projects and provisions (if this is prompted by struggles from below, of course). This, at least, is what the pro-capitalist parties, movements and

ideologues claim. And we have to admit that they are correct – *at least in the case of capitalist societies*, i.e. in the case of currently existing arrangement of property relations.

It is true that in capitalism new job offers can be made, wages can be raised and the state can expand its welfare programs if and only if the economy is growing, and the economy can be growing only if it is competitive and profitable enough. This is so because the overwhelming majority of social production in capitalist societies is subordinated to the impersonal principle of market competition. This principle ensures that the companies which are not profitable or not profitable enough will, sooner or later, be bankrupt or taken over by other, more profitable companies: that is why no rational company which participates in the capitalist market would invest in non-profitable or not-profitable-enough economic activities. And, most importantly, in capitalism the source of all new revenue (that is profits, rents, wages, social benefits, taxes and so on; i.e. *value and surplus value in Marxian terms*) can only be the expanding economic activity of private companies – or, more precisely, the wage labour of workers employed by those private companies. So, to sum up the argument so far, even from a radical Marxian perspective it is safe to claim that if one wants to get the economy (and consequently the welfare-state) running *in capitalism* one has to get private business to invest in production.

The gradual decline of the general rate of profit, i.e. the ratio of newly generated profit to the value of invested capital, is, in fact, the underlying cause of capitalist crises.<sup>28</sup> This claim is, of course, part of the infamous

28 See, for example, Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production: Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (London: Pluto Press, 2012); Guglielmo Carchedi, *Behind the*

Marxian law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. It goes as follows: in times of economic boom (like the one that was experienced in the two decades after the Second World War) the rate of profit is at first high but then it gradually declines as capitalists introduce technological innovations in their production process so as to gain competitive advantage by raising the productivity of labour, i.e. the amount of produced goods in the same time period or with the same expenditure of labour. Higher productivity allows them to lower per-unit production costs and gain market advantage over the technological laggards. The rate of profit gradually declines because rising productivity – even though it has beneficial short-term consequences for *individual* innovating capitalists – implies disinflation, i.e. falling rate of inflation. This usually means that sales revenue increases by less than production costs increase, which means that the nominal rate of profit falls.<sup>29</sup>

To put it in Marxian terms, by aiming to be more competitive and introducing technological innovations capitalists tend to displace labour-power from production. However, labour-power employed by private companies is the only source of profits (i.e. surplus value) which means that the general profit rate will tend to fall with the relentless introducing of new, labour-saving technology. Now, this displacement of labour-power is no issue for individual capitalists that are among the first to introduce new technology in their production

process. This is so because they are able to appropriate the same or even more value in the sphere of exchange by producing more cheaply than their competitors, while at the same time selling the product at the same price as their less technologically advanced competitors. Displacement of labour-power becomes an issue only after it is generalized across a sector or industry. It is then that the per-unit sales value of product is lowered and the general nominal rate of profit tends to fall.

In other words and to summarize, because under the pressure of market competition – over time – profitability tends to drop (this happens when productivity of labour is rising) and because profitability is the main criterion of investment in capitalism, the rate of investment also gradually tends to drop. At that point all forms of revenue (most importantly, profit) start to decline and the road to economic stagnation is firmly secured. Competition, otherwise the main driver of capitalist productive dynamism, is at once its main retarding force. It is this conclusion that led Marx to claim, most famously in the *Grundrisse*, that capital is inherently contradictory.

It therefore shouldn't be surprising that a large part (especially the least paid part) of the working class is attracted to the rhetoric and ambitions of pro-capitalist parties, which strive to restore profitability and investment. It is not irrational to be attracted to such ideas in the short-run and in the absence of a convincing anti-capitalist alternative.<sup>30</sup>

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*Crisis: Marx's Dialectics of Value and Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Michael Roberts, *The Great Recession. Profit Cycles, Economic Crisis. A Marxist View* (LuLu Enterprises, 2009); Paul Mattick, *Business as Usual. The Economic Crisis and the Failure of Capitalism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

29 Andrew Kliman, *Reclaiming Marx's "Capital": A Refutation of the Myth of Inconsistency* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 129.

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30 Social Democrats and Left-Keynesians (and also some self-proclaimed Socialists) argue that the solution for the crisis and stagnating economies is state-funded investment. Their suggestion is that the economy should be reignited by state-funded investment which is not vulnerable to the profit motive like private investment is. This argument overlooks the fact that state-funded investment is nothing else but investment



Still, it has to be said that an important part of pro-capitalist rhetoric is misleading or at least one-sided. Firstly, even though it's true that new jobs can emerge only in conditions of economic growth and that the economy can grow only in conditions of a pleasant investment climate (i.e. conditions of high profitability),

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which has taxes, i.e. the amount of surplus value produced by workers in private companies and then appropriated by the state, as its source. It should be obvious that state-funded investment can't be the motor of economic growth because such investment is not an independent source but is itself dependent upon the very economic growth that does not obtain in times of crisis. The real source of economic growth in capitalism is profit. State-funded investment that represents, directly or indirectly, *a siphoning off of profit* can be used, firstly, towards capitalist productive activity with the aim of generating as much new profit as possible. In this case the fact that the state (instead of a private company) expended money on production changes nothing, because the capitalist company would do the exact same thing, i.e. it would seek out the most profitable investment. State-funded investment can be used, secondly, towards non-capitalist productive activity which won't generate any new profit by definition as it was not mediated by market competition. In this case the fact that the state expended money on production changes matters for the worse because now money was expended and no new profit which could be reinvested was generated. The only remaining option is the intermediate one. That is, for the state to use money towards *capitalist* productive activity which is less than optimally profitable but which has explicitly beneficial effects on human lives and the environment. In this case the investment would generate, logically, less profit than it would if the state acted like a capitalist and searched for the most optimally profitable activity. The fact that it would have beneficial effects on human lives and environment changes nothing as far as ending the economic crisis goes. (State-funded investment can be, alternatively, financed by the state going into debt. However, borrowing money can't be the means of ending a deep investment crisis, because all debts have to be repaid and the interest rates are usually extraordinarily high.)

this growth is both *limited*<sup>31</sup> and necessarily *cyclical*<sup>32</sup> which means that it goes against the interests of the working class at least in the mid- to long term. In other words and as argued above, every period of sustained economic growth in capitalism is necessarily followed by a period of stagnation and crisis: no amount of state regulation and public investment can prevent this. This is so because, as we've argued above, capitalist crises are fundamentally caused not by contingencies such as wrong political decisions, excessive financial speculation or economic fraud, but by rational and sensible actions of individual capitalist who, under the pressure of market competition, simply *have to* seek out more and more profitable investments if they are to remain capitalists. Capitalist crises cannot be done away with so long as economic activity is run along the axis of market competition. Those who claim so are *not*, contrary to what Milton Friedman and Richard Nixon famously claimed, all Keynesians – there are sound theoretical and empirical reasons not to be one.

Secondly, pro-capitalist rhetoric conveniently overlooks the very important fact that striving to raise the competitiveness of national economy in times of economic

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31 The economy will grow only to the extent that capitalists are willing to invest, and they will invest only if this helps them survive market conditions. It would be irrational for them to increase investment when the prospects are gloomy.

32 As Marx put in *Capital*, Vol. 2: "one could only remark that crises are always prepared by precisely a period in which wages rise generally and the working class actually gets a larger share of that part of the annual product which is intended for consumption. . . . It appears, then, that capitalist production comprises conditions independent of good or bad will, conditions which permit the working class to enjoy that relative prosperity only momentarily, and at that always only as the harbinger of a coming crisis." Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols. (International Publishing, 1996), 2: 409–410.

crisis usually means a notable regression of workplace standards, downgrading of workers' rights and lowering of social transfers. It is only by doing this that labour costs can be lowered and, consequently, competitiveness increased. But the downgrading of workers' rights and lowering of social transfers is especially worrisome as it has disastrous mid- to long-term consequences: once rights are downgraded they have to be again seriously fought for in order to be restored at a later time.

These are two of the most important issues sidestepped by pro-capitalist rhetoric, and usually also overlooked by workers who support it. But to return to an earlier point, let's expand on the reasons that lead workers in times of crisis to increase their support for pro-capitalist ideas in general and Right-Wing ideas in particular.

In capitalism workers have a desperate need for employment. Because they have been stripped of virtually all means of making a living on their own, they usually have to seek out a job if they are to live. In times of crisis workers are more aware than ever of how important having a job really is. Pro-capitalists in general and the Right-Wing in particular seize on and address this desperate, real need of workers by emphasizing the importance of raising the competitiveness of the national economy. This "emphasis" usually takes the form of at least implicit if not explicit nationalism and patriotism. In other words, workers find these ideas at least somewhat appealing because they express – in however one-sided way – something that they really need and feel.

Relatedly, it is the real (not imputed!) experience of the worsening of conditions on the labour market, and the need for improving the position of domestic workers against the "cheaper foreign" labour-power that are at the heart of the sudden rise of workers' anti-

immigrant leanings, xenophobia and discrimination in times of economic crisis. It is again the Right-Wing parties, movements and ideologues who seize on this real experience and need of workers, and propose discriminatory, anti-immigrant policies. It is thus that they strengthen xenophobia and anti-immigrant views among workers, not by outright manipulation and trickery.

Furthermore, it is again the real experience of witnessing many tycoon scandals, financial speculations and rising corruption some years before the crisis hit that pro-capitalist parties grab onto and use to substantiate their quasi-explanation of why the crisis happened. They say it was caused by the supposed disintegration of social (Christian?) values and an inefficient, corrupt juridical system, which *prima facie* seems wholly plausible because state and public-sector corruption, tax havens and greedy capitalist really do exist. In other words, by personalizing the crisis, by blaming it on personal defects of individual capitalist and state bureaucrats they inadvertently mystify the systemic causes behind the crisis, the rise of financial speculations and other bad investment decisions. They are at least partially successful in this because they appeal to real experiences of people. Lastly, the real fact that public debt has increased for most countries just before the crisis is again presented one-sidedly by the pro-capitalist parties. Rising public debt is presented as a consequence of a too large and expansive public sector, while the more systemic factors such as stagnating private investment are glossed over.<sup>33</sup>

33 Kliman presented strong empirical evidence for this last claim, at least for the American case: "[a]ll of the increase in the ratio of Treasury debt to GDP since 1970 is attributable to the falling profitability of U.S. corporations and reductions in corporate income tax rates. . . . [State revenue from corporate income tax rates] fell partly because of a relative decline in

In such circumstances – i.e., general economic crisis and increasing competition *between* workers on the one hand, and a failure of the Socialist Left to rigorously and convincingly address these issues on the other – it is not irrational for the majority of (worse-off) workers to rally behind the pro-capitalist Center-Left and Right-Wing. The needs, material interests and life experiences that motivate their support are not false and imputed. It is, however, true that the Center-Left and Right-Wing are addressing these needs and experiences one-sidedly. Pro-capitalist ideologies, parties and policies can be thriving only when the Socialist Left is down on its knees. Now, this last point is usually not overlooked by Socialists. But what is usually overlooked, is the fact that rising nationalism and xenophobia, to mention just the two most atrocious trends in the last few years, are two depressing phenomena that are, however, expressing *actually existing social circumstances*. They are neither the expression of workers’ false consciousness nor capitalist conspiracy, as is so often claimed by Socialists, if only implicitly.

## Conclusion

Putting this argument aside, it has to be admitted that the Socialist Left has traditionally called for internationalism and solidarity with migrant workers, even though it has often overlooked the real causes behind the rise of nationalism and xenophobia. This call is, of course, wholly commendable. Yet it is not nearly enough, in itself, if it is to be convincing and mobilizing. What

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corporations’ before-tax profits and partly because of reduced corporate tax rates. On average, before-tax profits equaled 11.6 percent of GDP between 1947 and 1969. Between 1970 and 2007, the average fell by almost one-fourth, to 8.8 percent.” Kliman, *Failure of Capitalist Production*, 64; emphasis in the original.

Socialist organizations should do is to continually show (not merely declare) *why exactly* striving to increase competitiveness of the national economy and forcing immigrants out of the country will not in fact improve the economic<sup>34</sup> position of the working class – at least not in the medium and long term.

Socialists should, firstly, convincingly show why supporting pro-capitalist parties and movements will worsen the economic position of the working class in the medium and long term. It has to be shown that market competition itself, not greedy bankers and rich capitalists, primarily causes serious economic instability and non-legitimate wealth inequality. This also means that Socialists who present socialism as a kind of “competitive advantage,” something that will ostensibly solve the current crisis and pave the road to market success are missing the point completely (this is usually how socialism is presented by Social Democrats and Left-Keynesians).

To expand on this first point, let’s briefly examine the case of workers’ cooperatives under capitalism. Richard Wolff, a prominent Marxist economist, has been one of the more outspoken Socialist proponents of cooperatives in recent years. Like the majority of proponents of cooperatives, Wolff is also quick to defend them on the basis of their economic success and the resilience they shown in the face of current economic downturn. This, however, is very problematic. Even though no Socialist would doubt the importance of lower pay differentials that are characteristic of cooperative enterprises, there exist three major problems with regards to cooperatives.

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34 Let alone the cultural and social devastation such conservative ideology leaves behind.

Firstly, cooperatives are usually the exception, not the rule in capitalism. The defining characteristic of capitalism is private ownership of means of production. Capitalists own means of production and are willing to back their right to ownership at first by relying on the law and, if that doesn't do it, by relying on coercion. What is more, as Marx argued in *Capital*, vol. 1, market competition itself tends to, over time, concentrate means of production in fewer and fewer hands as inefficient companies get bankrupt and taken over by the more successful ones. His argument is supported by recent empirical evidence.<sup>35</sup> It is, therefore, unlikely that workers would be able to peacefully convert the majority of traditional capitalist enterprises into cooperative ones.

Secondly, even in the unlikely case of this happening, the mere conversion of traditional enterprises into cooperative ones does not and cannot change the underlying distribution of property relations on which capitalism is based. This means that even the productive economic activity of cooperative enterprises is (or would be) regulated by laws of market competition. In other words, until capitalist property relations prevail *between* cooperatives, these will be subordinated to the profit motive, no matter how kind and nice their supposed non-capitalist owners are. This means that they'll still produce in order to stay afloat on the market even though by doing this they might be threatening the environment, increasing the rate of exploitation of workers, and paving the road to generalized economic collapse.

Thirdly, Wolff himself admits that one of the most noted cooperatives, i.e. Mondragon, is “a stunningly successful alternative to the capitalist organization of production” precisely because it has as “a rule that all enterprises are to source their inputs from the best and least-costly producers – whether or not those are also MC enterprises.”<sup>36</sup> How exactly does sourcing inputs from “the least-costly producers” in order to remain as competitive on the market as possible make Mondragon Corporation an “alternative to the capitalist organization of production” is never explained by Wolff. This lack of explanation should not come as a surprise because Mondragon is not and has never been an alternative to capitalist organization of production.

The upshot of all this is most definitely *not* that workers' cooperatives have no place in the Socialist arsenal. Lower pay differentials are only one of the many progressive characteristics of cooperatives. The upshot, however, is that we should be honest. Cooperatives are not the *alternative* to capitalism, nor are they its end. They are not even an economic mechanism by means of which a serious investment crisis, like the present, can be remedied. But none of this means they are an unworthy short-term goal on the road to improve the living standard of workers.

Returning back to the beginning of this section, it is, secondly, on Socialist organizations to show, by theoretical and practical example, how mass strikes *with the immigrants* can improve even workers' *short-term* economic position. Strikes are one of the only effective

35 See, for example, the figures in William Marsden, “Obama’s State of the Union Speech will be call to arms on wealth gap,” Canada.com, accessible via: <http://o.canada.com/news/obamas-state-of-the-union-speech-will-be-call-to-arms-on-wealth-gap>.

36 Richard Wolff, “Yes, there is an alternative to capitalism: Mondragon show the way,” *The Guardian*, June 24, 2012 accessed October 29, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/24/alternative-capitalism-mondragon>.

tools in securing short-term economic improvements for workers, because it is only by hitting capitalists where they're most vulnerable – their profit-making ability – that some concessions can be granted even when times are tough. This is so because if it is more costly for capitalists to let the strike continue than to end it by conceding to workers' demands, they will go for the latter option. For strikes to be a real possibility workers have to, of course, be guaranteed at least the ability not to lose all their (meagre) personal savings amidst the strike when they're not getting paid by their employer. They also can't stand alone, if they are to avoid imminent defeat. This is where Socialist organizations can come in: by helping to provide a strike fund, and by helping with organizing and spreading solidarity.

In sum, if Socialist organizations are to gain in numbers, if they are to be again recognized by workers, rallied behind and mobilizing, they shouldn't primarily appeal to good faith and revolutionary spirit in times when a revolutionary event seems wholly implausible, if only because there are no revolutionary workers to begin with. They should first and foremost address the actually existing immediate needs and interests of workers (in a way radically opposed to Liberal-Left and Right-Wing proposals), not condemn the so-called "reformist" struggles for higher wages and more jobs as unworthy. Relatedly, they should be honest in their explanation of the crisis, the rise of the Right and in their calls for socialism. The crisis really is a crisis of investment and competitiveness, as some of the ideologues claim; the Liberal Left and Right-Wing haven't achieved such quite large working-class support by outright trickery or magic; for socialism to be back on the agenda, workers will have to rally behind the socialist project, but this can only happen if workers themselves start developing such socialist consciousness through mass strikes, various

"reformist" struggles where solidarity is on display etc. Socialist organizations can't (and mustn't) impute socialist consciousness to workers from above, without it having any anchorage in their real experiences and material interests.

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Zdravko  
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## Trade Unions, Workers and the Protection of Workers' Rights: a Vicious Circle with No Escape?

### Bionote

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### Abstract

The overall problem with the trade unions, workers and protection of the workers' rights is that the workers wait for the trade unions to defend them, protect them and advance their rights, while the trade unions can not achieve that without the workers' support. Without their support, not being able to realistically threaten with a sanction, the trade union representatives go to negotiate with the owners with an empty gun, showing weakness that is simply not enough in order to successfully defend and advance workers' rights. Precisely this inefficiency of the trade unions is a reason enough for the workers to continue distrusting the trade unions. That is how the vicious circle is created. In this analysis we look at the trade unions, then at the workers, we will locate the issues, and in the final part we will offer certain ideas on

how to overcome the problem. Actually, the offering of suggested solutions itself is what differentiates the counterproductive pessimistic approach from the pessimistic approach which criticizes in order to improve.

The title of this analysis is quite pessimistic. It indicates that there is a certain vicious circle connected to the protection of workers' right, created by the trade unions and the workers, from which maybe there is no escape. As a matter of principle, the pessimistic approach to things can often be counterproductive, especially when the view that there is no escape is reproduced when there is a burning issue, and instead of finding solutions, the discussion is reduced to lamentations to why the situation is so bad. However, this is not always the case and therefore the pessimistic portrayal of things does not necessarily end into counter-productivity. If the problems are located to be solved, then the mere locating of the problem is not an overture to lamentation, but rather a necessary initial phase of problem-solving.

The overall problem with the trade unions, workers and protection (as well as defence) of the workers' rights is that the workers wait for the trade unions to defend them, protect them and advance their rights, while the

trade unions (even if they themselves have no additional faults) can not achieve that without the workers' support. Without their support, not being able to realistically threaten with a sanction, the trade union representatives go to negotiate with the owners with an empty gun, showing weakness that is simply not enough in order to successfully defend and advance workers' rights.

Precisely this inefficiency of the trade unions is a reason enough for the workers to continue distrusting the trade unions. That is how the vicious circle is created. The trade unions cannot do anything without the support of the workers and the workers do not give their support until they see the results of the trade unions' work. In the meantime, workers' rights are decreased with the changes in the legal provisions and violated in practice.

In this analysis we look at the trade unions, then at the workers, we will locate the issues, and in the final part we will offer certain ideas on how to overcome the problem. Actually, the offering of suggested solutions itself is what differentiates the counterproductive pessimistic approach from the pessimistic approach which criticizes in order to improve.

### 1) A Look at the Trade Unions in Macedonia

At the moment, in Macedonia there are four trade union confederations and at least five independent branch trade unions which are not part of trade union confederations. Trade union confederations are: Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia [Sojuz na sindikati na Makedonija – SSM], Confederation of Free Trade Unions [Konfederacija na slobodni sindikati – KSS]; Independent and Autonomous Trade Unions of Macedonia [Unija na nezavisni i slobodni sindikati na Makedonija – UNASM] and the Confederation of Trade Union Organisations of

Macedonia [Konfederacija na sindikalni organizacii na Makedonija – KSOM]. They are all made up of branch trade unions, where the SSM has the most branch trade unions - 18. Independent branch trade unions which are not part of trade union confederations are: Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, Union of the Macedonian Diplomatic Service, Independent Union of the Employees of University Clinics, Centres and Clinical Hospitals and other Public Health Organisations, Union of Music and Scene Artists and Union of the Workers of Financial Organisations.

Branch trade unions in their composition have trade union organisations at the level of employees, as the main form of self-organization. In October 2009, in Macedonia, it was legally enabled for the trade union organisations at employer level, to receive the status of a legal person,<sup>1</sup> and with that, to exist as independent syndical organisations that would not be part of a branch trade union (nor of a trade union confederation). However, after two years, in January 2012,<sup>2</sup> this option was revoked and since then, once again it is not legally possible for a syndical organisation to exist at employer level without being part of a branch trade union.<sup>3</sup>

1 Article 23 of the Law Amending and Supplementing the Labour Relations Law, "Official Bulletin of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 130/09.

2 Article 8 of the Law Amending and Supplementing the Labour Relations Law, "Official Bulletin of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 11/12.

3 At the end of 2012, there were around 2,000 syndical organisations in Macedonia. Aleksandra Filipovska "Blocking the accounts of the syndicates that failed to renew their registration", "Dnevnik", 27.12.2012, <http://www.dnevnik.mk/?ItemID=5768726382A01D4F8F25135514316AEB>

Here, we face the first dilemma with regard to finding solutions for improving the image of trade unions in Macedonia. There is a conviction among part of those aware of the syndical realities in Macedonia that the introduction of the possibility to have independent trade union organization on employer level was a tactic of the government to weaken the unpromising president of the most numerous syndical union, SSM in 2009 and the abolition of this possibility in 2012 intended to strengthen the position of the trade union confederations, after replacing the unpromising president with a promising one. Aside from this tactical game with the laws, which unnecessarily wasted a lot of energy of the trade unions on bureaucratic work, is it one of the solutions for the “yellowness” and inefficacy of the trade unions in Macedonia to once again provide legal option to establish independent syndical organisations? At first glance, yes. Independent syndical organisations would not have to be members of branch unions and to give part of the membership fee for syndical bureaucracy in order to enjoy their positions with the workers money, not doing anything for the workers, even harming their interests. Independent syndical organisations could themselves fight for their rights with the employer and use the money from the membership fee for the benefit of the workers. Although it is very possible for an independent syndical organisation to work like this, what one has to be aware of is that in such a case two important issues appear. First of all branch trade unions and trade union confederations, due to the presence of a huge number of independent syndical organisations, would considerably weaken and with that loose part of their potential to win legal changes for the benefit of the workers. This is also important from the aspect of independent syndical organisations, because only part of the workers' problems are due to the violation of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, laws and collective agreements by the

employer. Part of the problems is due to the changing of the legal provisions where the employer, respecting the worsened legal provisions, introduces a practice in the company/institution which is damaging to the workers. The independent syndical organisations can't fight against this without cooperating with the other syndical organisations. Second, the possibility of establishing independent syndical organisations carries the danger of having two, three, four and more syndical organisations wasting energy to take over members of other syndical organisation in the same enterprise/institution, and in respect to the employer, the dividedness to be the reason for the bad efficiency.

It is false to think that the more separate trade unions there are, the more successful the representation of the workers' interests will be. This is regardless whether it concerns syndical organisations at enterprise level or branch trade unions or syndical unions. There is (significant) syndical pluralism in Macedonia, with four syndical unions and several branch trade unions. Has the representation of workers' interests improved regarding the level when there was only one syndical union? Obviously, establishing new syndical unions and independent branch trade unions is not the solution that automatically guarantees that the representation of workers' interests will improve. Of course, that does not mean that one needs to remain part of a corrupted syndical structure at any cost, but it means that splitting of the syndical movement must be the next step following the unsuccessful intention to stand in the way of corrupted and passive syndicalists.

Let's go back to the description of the syndical movement in Macedonia. Now that we know which and how many the syndical unions and independent branch trade unions are, let's see how numerous they are, i.e. how many



employees in Macedonia are members of trade unions. Also, let's see where syndical organisation dominates.

It is difficult to even approximately determine the percentage of the workers who are trade union members. What is definite is that the percentage is low and that it is in decrease. The trade unions themselves don't usually reveal the number of their members mainly because that would indicate how weak they are and how weak they have become. The estimate (which does not have to be very precise) is that in 2014, 120,000 workers were syndically organized.<sup>4</sup> If one has in mind that in 2013 in Macedonia there were 488,110 workers,<sup>5</sup> then we can estimate that around 25% of the workers in Macedonia are syndically organised. Of course, the level of union density in which only one of four workers is a member of an union can not be estimated as good, but it should be taken into account that this level of union density is better than the level of 21 of the 34 member-states of OECD.<sup>6</sup> Macedonia has higher level of union density than Germany (17.7%) and of all Eastern European members of OECD (Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic). It even has a somewhat higher

level that Greece (21.3%), the European example of an organised and militant workers' movement.

However, as with all other rankings of the countries in the world, where Macedonia is in a good position compared to the rest, there is an explanation for that which is not advantageous and that is not revealed by the statistics. Regarding the "high" level of union density, it should be emphasized that this happens, among other things, due to the pressure put on the employees to become a member of the trade unions by the state as an employer and, paradoxically, by the private owners. In both cases, the condition for that is the existence of another, at least a bit active trade union. If such a trade union exists, the state as an employer, and the private owners can start pressuring the employees to become members of the "yellow" trade union that they control in order to, by making it more numerous and representative, "negotiate" with it and make legal changes and collective agreements that realistically don't mean much to the workers. In fact, especially in the private sector, establishing "yellow" trade union and enlarging its membership by pressures, is the reserve plan of the employees for dealing with the authentic syndical organisations. If they don't manage to prevent the workers from realising their constitutional right to form and join an union, and the workers manage to form an union with considerable power, then employers can support the already existing "yellow" trade union or even establish their own "yellow" trade union and in that manner marginalise the authentic trade union from collective negotiation and natural growth. Not completely unimportant, membership in this type of controlled trade unions means a small, but not insignificant, decrease of the salary because that 1% of the salary that is taken for membership in the trade union goes to the employer and not to the workers, so in reality it can not be treated as part of the salary that the workers spend as they see fit.

4 The estimate is mainly made on the data from Mare Ančeva who mentioned that in 2012 SSM had 76,000 members and KSS – 43,000 members. In 2013 a decrease of members is noticed in several larger branch syndicates of SSM. See "Annual reports on labour relations and the social dialogue in South East Europe for Macedonia". <http://www.fessoe.de/srpski/annual-review-2013.html>

5 This is a figure only of the employees, t.e. those that are not employers, self-employed and unpaid family workers, that are also included in the general figure of 678,838 employed persons. See State Statistics Bureau, "Anketa na rabotnata sila" [„Анкета на работната сила], 2013“, June 2014, 47.

6 OECD, "Trade Union Density", [http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN\\_DEN](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN_DEN)

Speaking of union density in Macedonia, it is necessary to mention that there is a huge difference in the union density in the state sector, as opposed to the one in the private sector, where union density is greater in the state sector. Aside for that, in the private sector there is also a difference between union density in the privatised companies and the one in the originally private companies. In the privatised companies, before the privatisation, there was often syndical organisation which often continued to exist even after the privatisation of the company. That is not the case with the originally private companies where trade unions should be established a new and where, as the reality in Macedonia shows, it rarely happens. The main reason for that is that the owners position themselves above the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, but the size of the company is also a factor. Just like in the other countries, in Macedonia there is more often syndical organisation in the companies with more employees than in the ones with fewer employees. And originally private companies in Macedonia usually fall in the category of small and medium companies.

To complete the portrayal of trade unions in Macedonia and as a kind of introduction into the next part of the analysis, we shall determine the position of the trade unions in Macedonia in accordance with the classification of trade unions that can be made based on their dedication to the workers' cause and based on the effect of their activity. According to this classification, the trade unions can be divided into seven categories: 1) "yellow", 2) bureaucratic, 3) inactive, 4) inefficient 5) efficient, but narrowly focused 6) efficient and solidary 7) efficient and anti-system trade unions. In the first category, "yellow" trade unions, are those trade unions that have sold themselves, that don't represent the workers' interests, but are here to protect the interests of the owners or the

government and to control and sway the workers. In the second category, bureaucratized trade unions are those trade unions whose leaders have not sold themselves to the other side, but who do not represent the workers' interests, only their own. The third category, the inactive trade unions are the ones for which it can not be said that they are yellow or bureaucratized, in general they want to protect the workers' rights, but they do little or nothing in reality to achieve this. The next category are the inefficient trade unions which are the trade unions that actually work on the protection of the workers' interests, but due to some reason, there is no big effect from their work. That is not a problem for the trade unions in the fifth category which are efficient in the protection of workers' rights, but are quite narrowly focused - they are interested only in their members' rights. Unlike them, the efficient and solidary trade unions not only efficiently protect the workers' rights, but also express solidarity with other trade unions and workers, and also with other associations and informal citizens' initiatives. Finally, the seventh category of trade unions is of those that are efficient and oriented against the system. They locate capitalism itself as a problem and think that in order for the workers' situation to essentially improve, capitalism needs to be replaced with another, fairer socioeconomic system.

If one has this classification in mind, we can say that the majority of trade unions in Macedonia are "yellow" or bureaucratized, that the majority of them are inactive or inefficient and only a small part of them are efficient, narrowly focused or solidary. There are no anti-capitalist trade unions in Macedonia.

## 2) The Lack of Trust in the Trade Unions and the Reasons for That

The trust in trade unions is weak and in principle it is not necessary to argue that.<sup>7</sup> Convictions such as “trade unions are not worthed”, “they don’t care about the workers”, “they care only about their positions”, “they are one with the government” are dominant in all three categories relevant for the trade unions: the general public, the workers as a whole, and the workers that are syndically organised. There is lack of trust that the syndicalists have the will to act in the interest of the workers, and when that is not questioned, there is lack of trust that they have the power to act in the interest of the workers. Where can we locate the problem related to this situation?

7 The Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation in its report on the trust in Macedonia, determined that in 2010 the syndicates had the trust of only 25.3% of the respondents. From all of the state and public institutions and organisations, only the political parties had somewhat less support (23.3%), and, paradoxically, even the employers’ organisations had higher support than the syndicates (27.2%). See, Saso Klekovski, Emina Nuredinoska, Daniela Stojanova, “Doverbata vo Makedonija” [Сашо Клековски, Емина Нурединоска, Даниела Стојанова „Довербата во Македонија“], МСМС, Скопје, 2010, p.6, <http://www.mcms.org.mk/images/docs/2011/doverbata-vo-makedonija-2010.pdf> According to the same report for 2013, the support for the syndicates shows significant increase (35.9%) and is slightly higher than the trust in the employers’ organisations (35.6%). However, the increase of the distrust in almost all state and public institutions and organisations throws a shadow on the compliance with scientific standards in this research. See Aleksandar Krzalovski [Александар Кржаловски], “Doverbata vo lugjeto I vo instituciite” [„Довербата во луѓето и во институциите“] 2013 (Skopje: МСМС, 2013), <http://www.mcms.org.mk/images/docs/2013/doverba-vo-lugjeto-i-vo-instituciite-2013.pdf>, accessed on August 2013

At first glance, the fault is at the top. The fish stinks from the head. That is definitely true in certain cases, but not always. In general, the reasons for the unsuccessfulness of the trade unions can be located in all four concerned factors: the central syndical management, the syndical representatives, the ordinary trade union members and the unorganized workers. The central trade union management (branch union or trade union confederation) can be “yellow” and/or bureaucratised, not actually doing anything for the workers and acting as an arm of the government aimed at controlling and swaying the workers. However, it can have completely honest intentions and be blocked in its activities by the lack of interest and the apathy of the ordinary members of the trade union. Syndical representatives, i.e. the trade union presidents at the level of enterprises/institutions can be sold, can deal with the owner/employer, use their position as an additional basis for getting extra payment, and nothing more than that. Even if this is not the case, they can, which is also unacceptable, care only about new years’ parcels and pork halves. But on the other hand, union representatives can be the most active syndicalists in the enterprise/institution who are completely dedicated to fighting for workers rights and are ready to dedicate significant time for that purpose and put themselves at additional risk. Concerning the ordinary syndical members, they can be watch dogs of the corrupted syndical representatives, but they can also be uninterested in anything, to avoid and to wait for someone else to do the job for them. In the end, the unorganised workers may be unorganized because they can’t manage, due to the pressure from the employer, to establish or to be members of a trade union, or they do not want to be members of a corrupted trade union at their workplace, but they can also refuse to be members of a trade union because they are taking the side of the owner, wanting to get the rights without effort, or they simply do not believe in the efficacy of collective actions.

It is easiest to blame the union leadership. However, in order to support the blame with arguments, one must first check whether the problem is not with the syndical representatives, the ordinary members and the unorganised workers. Even the best central union leadership can not do much if it is not supported by syndical representatives, if the regular members are passive and if a large number of workers stay aside from syndical actions. All those who criticise must first ask themselves whether they have done what is required of them. This is the golden rule, which, unfortunately, is rarely applied. Concerning the trade unions in Macedonia, the problems are not only at the level of the central union leadership, but also at the level of syndical representatives, ordinary members and unorganised workers. It shows that the problems with the trade unions will not be solved by just putting the “right people” to lead the trade unions.

If we want to speak more precisely, the reasons why the trade unions are so weak in Macedonia are the following:

- a) Low union density. As we have already mentioned, union density is about 25%, it is decreasing and even this percentage is realistically lower, due to the forced memberships in “yellow” trade unions of a certain number of workers.
- b) Lacking mobilisation potential. When the ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE, requires of its members to get involved in a certain partisan activity, the response of the members is huge. Maybe the best example for that was the signing for the candidature of the old-new president Gjorgje Ivanov last year. Not only did the members crowded the offices of the State Electoral Commission, but they didn't waste time to do that. We will not comment at this point what the mobilisation potential of VMRO-DPMNE

is due to. We will only mention that the trade unions in Macedonia are not even close to such mobilisation potential. There is a lack of identification with the trade unions both among the members and the rest of the workers. It is not rare for syndical members not to know which trade union they are members of. As a consequence of the lack of identification of the members, the mobilisation potential of the trade unions is very small. Union leaderships seriously doubt that members of their trade union, not to mention the rest of the workers, will participate in their actions (protest, strike, May Day event etc.), therefore they avoid calling them to take part in such actions, even when they themselves think they should be done.

- c) Weak moral integrity of the syndical leaders. Aside of a few exceptions, the trade unions are dominated by people that either sold themselves to the other side or care much more about their positions than the defence of the interests of the workers that they represent.
- d) Low level of intra-syndical democracy. Again, except for a small number of cases, democracy is just a proclaimed value in the syndical documents. The number of “eternal” syndical functionaries is not small and there are examples of syndical leaders that hold the same position more than 20 years. Someone may have contributed much to their trade union, but if he/she has made himself/herself irreplaceable, then he/she has not managed to create a healthy trade union. In context with the topic of trade unions and democracy, we would only shortly add, with respect to horizontal organisation typical for the leftist organisations in Macedonia, that, although horizontal organising is an important democratic step forward, it should not be recommended to the trade unions. Horizontal organisation has its

advantages, but its disadvantages as well. The main disadvantage is the vulnerability to takeovers. In syndical context, that would mean that the minority dedicated fighters for workers rights within a trade union could be overruled by the majority of workers acting in accordance with the employer's directions. Aside for that, within the syndical movement, it must be insisted that the decision of the majority must be obligatory for all members. If the opposite is allowed, that everyone should decide whether to participate in a certain action, as he/she finds fit, it will additionally weaken and disable effective syndical actions.

- e) Unconditional commitment to social dialogue. It is certainly better to succeed in achieving workers' rights through negotiations than through confrontation. But what if social dialogue can not be achieved through social dialogue? For many trade unions, that is where the fight ends. Simply, if they don't manage to protect the workers interests through dialogue, they give up on taking further steps. What they fail to understand in that process is that the voluntary abdication from "confrontation" measures due to the blind ideological dedication to the "dialogue" is exactly what limits the negotiating power of the trade unions. For a trade union to be successful in the social dialogue with the other "social partners", it must have negotiating power. That negotiating power greatly depends on the ability of the trade union to mobilise the workers to strike or protest in case the employees or the state do not want to fulfil its requirements. Because of that, the negotiating power of the trade union is necessarily dependable on its protesting power. If the trade union limits itself to social dialogue, it cuts the branch it is sitting on. The trade union can manage to achieve the fulfilment of its demands

through social dialogue only if it has the capacity to mobilise a larger number of workers to protests and strikes, in case they are not fulfilled. If it lacks that capacity, or even worse, if it deprives itself from that capacity, then the position of the trade union in the social dialogue can easily be neglected by the other side.

- f) Orientation towards defensive strategy. Due to the orientation of all governments in Macedonia and the employers to decrease workers' rights and violate them in practice, the trade unions are forced to use a defensive strategy, to protect the existing rights and to demand their implementation in practice. This fight for defending workers' rights is so long that it seems as if the trade unions have forgotten to complement their defensive strategy with an offensive one, and aside for defending existing rights, to require introduction of new rights. Limited to only a defensive strategy, the trade unions allow the other side to define the public discourse which instead of introducing a new right, concentrates on the defence of a right that is going to be decreased or abolished.
- g) The trade unions are typical Macedonian institutions with Macedonian mentality. Complaining and lamenting have unfortunately become a national sport in Macedonia. The huge majority of people often complain and lament without trying to change the situation that they are complaining and lamenting about. This complaining and lamenting are so widespread among Macedonian citizens, as well as the insisting that their problems are the greatest; one could easily think that maybe the passion of Macedonians is greater than the one of Christ! Then, these troubles are treated as an excuse enough not to take action. The Macedonian syndical representatives are not the exception from the typical

image of the Macedonian citizen. It often happens, when two Macedonian syndical representatives meet, both of them to explain to each other which and what kind of unsurpassable problems there are in their own syndical activities and what kind of obstacles he/she is faced with. Even when trying to guide the discussion in the direction what, aside for the limitations, can be done, the discussion again and again returns to the issue of the obstacles due to which not even the slightest steps can be taken to change the situation. A good syndical representative is honest and dedicated, but also brave. Surely, one should not go head on, but courage is definitely required, to encourage the other members of the trade union as well, and having in mind all the limitations and risks that appear on the path of syndical action, to succeed in the intention to defend and advance workers' interests.

- h) Dealing too much with issues of secondary importance. Part of the syndical activities, undoubtedly important in conditions of considerable impoverishment of the workers in Macedonia, is the provision of collective consumer discounts for the trade union members. That is not a problem in itself, but it becomes a problem when the whole syndical activity of the union is restricted only to New Year's parcels and pork halves. That practice is so widespread that part of the uninformed citizens think that the trade union is an organisation that deals only with that, New Year's parcels and pork halves. Per definitionem.
- i) The nonexistent or insufficient visibility of the positive aspects of union activities. The trade unions provide free legal assistance to their members, they have solidarity funds for non-refundable monetary assistance and loans without interest for their members, they manage to protect some workers' rights that the government wants to decrease/

abolish, and sometimes they manage to press some boss to respect and advance workers' rights. However, the wider public and the workers are little aware of these rare successes and qualities in the work of the trade unions. Part of the problem is that the trade unions themselves do not dedicate enough attention to the informing of the public, and the other part of the problem is that most of the media does have the will to inform about the positive aspects of the union activities.

- j) Turning trade unions into geriatric organisations. The average age of the syndical members is quite high, especially the one of the syndical leaderships. That is a disadvantage for every organisation. Therefore, as the years pass, the danger of that organisation dying becomes even more real. Although some trade unions have their youth organisations (usually trade union confederations, not the branch unions), they are passive, insufficiently involved in the syndical activities and not aware enough of the current issues of young workers. They are more of an ornament than new blood in the trade union. Although we mentioned this problem of the trade unions of Macedonia last, it is the one that is threatening to become their greatest problem.

### **3) Workers and How they (Don't) Protect Their Own Rights**

The defending and advancing of workers' rights definitely depends on the trade unions, but also on the workers. As mentioned above, without the support of the workers, the trade union can not seriously threaten the employers (the owners and the state) with sanctions in case they refuse to fulfil the syndical/workers' requests. The workers are also one of the factors from which the status of the workers' rights depends. It can therefore not be expected from all others, and especially from the

trade unions, the Labour inspectorate and the political parties, to defend and to advance workers rights, while the workers sit with folded arms. Not only is it morally problematic someone to expect others to fight for their right, without that person giving his/her contribution, but also the other factors often can not manage to achieve someone's rights, even when they really want it, without the contribution of the person concerned.

It is important to underline that the strength of the trade union does not depend only on the union leadership, but on the members as well. Not only the union leadership has to be dedicated to the cause, but the ordinary members as well. The inactive, bureaucratic, and so on, leadership makes the trade union passive, but so do the apathetic members as well. For example, a strike can not be successful with five or six people, however dedicated to the cause they might be. That is why it is difficult for a trade union to be able to complete the task. The leadership should be good, but so should be the members. If only one of the sides has a problem (meaning, the leadership or the members), the trade union shall be unsuccessful.

In Macedonia, not only do the workers have complaints against the syndicalists, but the syndicalists have complaints against the workers. One of the better syndical activists in Macedonia has said that with this kind of workers, even if the best syndicalists in the world would come to Macedonia, they couldn't do anything. It is important to mention that this kind of perception has an effect on the trade unions themselves, i.e. on the amount of pressure that they are prepared to put on the employers.

For everyone that is openly on the side of the workers is uncomfortable to talk badly about the workers. However, without pointing out to the problem, as the first step in overcoming it, no progress will be made. Defending and

advancing workers' rights definitely requires overcoming the typical mentality of the workers in Macedonia, therefore, it is necessary to talk about the problems on behalf of the workers.

- a) Being unaware of one's own rights and lacking interest of learning about them. The typical worker in Macedonia is not acquainted with his/her rights, and even more, does not want to get to know them. Everything else is more interesting than that: football, Turkish series, the name dispute, the abuses of government. The legal language that the workers' rights are communicated in can be difficult to understand, the laws are changed all too often, but all of these can not be regarded as sufficient reason because it concerns issues that directly affect their lives. Aside from that, if the situation in the company/institution is generally good or acceptable, especially if the salary is regularly paid, then, the typical worker in Macedonia is not very interested in whether and which of his/her rights are respected. If it worsens, then the interest rises, but even in that case it is only a concern about one's own rights at the workplace. That the workers' rights can worsen or improve by changing the laws, that it is possible, through influence of political parties, to achieve improvement of his/her workers' rights – is something that the other people should deal with. Concerning the workers' rights of others, there is a readiness to express empathy (if an acquaintance is concerned), but solidarity is something that is simply unthinkable. Typically, 1st May is perceived as the day when we have a barbeque with our family and friends, not as a day to express dissatisfaction from the status of one's own rights and request for them to be advanced.
- b) Passively awaiting help from outside. The typical worker does not see himself/herself as a factor on which his/her workers' rights depend upon and

expects all others, especially the trade unions and the Labour Inspectorate, to serve them their rights on a silver platter. He/she is usually extremely dissatisfied from the efforts and the effects of the activities of the trade unions and the Labour Inspectorate, he/she does not identify political parties as a factor that the status of the workers' rights depends upon, even though, especially when they are in power, have significant power to change the legislation to the advantage or the disadvantage of the workers, and the same is true for his/her own self-perception as a factor that his/her rights depend upon. Very often it happens that the workers exclude themselves as the guilty party for the worsening of their rights and do not include themselves as actors that can improve their rights. It turns out that everyone else is guilty, but them.

c) Taking those that are worse than them as role models, not those that are better. This feature stems from the self-exclusion as a factor of protection and advancement of one's own workers rights, as well as from the tendency to get what one is looking for with minimal personal engagement. In a trade union that does not have "yellow" or bureaucratic leadership, especially when there are syndical actions, such as strikes and similar, the president of the trade union is the busiest, and then follows the rest of the syndical management, and then, the ordinary members. If those lower down in the syndical hierarchy start taking those that are worse than them as role models, instead of those that are better than them, then the syndical actions will probably be destined to fail. Taking those that are worse as role models happens when the other members of the syndical leadership see how the ordinary members are less engaged than them, instead of looking at the syndical president, and when the ordinary trade union members see how

the unorganised workers can without effort and risk get the rights for which they, the members, engage themselves, instead of looking at the engagement of the syndical leadership.

d) Feeling enormous fear. Without any doubt, the workers have enough reasons to feel fear at the work place, from losing their job to lowering the salary and the rights if they try to organise their co-workers to protest against some unacceptable practice of the owner. Due to the high unemployment rate, many workplaces became precarious, uncertain, therefore uncertainty related to the danger of losing job is felt not only by those who are not officially registered as employed, those who are engaged as freelancers, and those that have atypical employment contracts, but also those who have typical employment contracts are de facto precarious workers. However, it is necessary to underline that the feeling of fear can often go beyond reason and become a phobia. Surely it is reasonable for all that are not gamblers to refrain from taking action, if the risk from taking a certain action is 90%. No normal syndical or workers' activist would urge workers to go head on and to act as it is fit to act in vacuum. However, when the risk of consequences for defending ones' rights is 10% and even less, the worker that refrains from taking action, or from joining one, in order to protect his/her rights becomes a phobic worker. In Macedonia, unfortunately, not only do we have a serious problem because a great percent of the workers are precariat, but also because a significant part of them is phobiat.

e) Nurturing false hope. In general, hope is a positive feeling. However, it can instigate action, but it can also block it. If someone has a hope that life can be better than today, then it can motivate that person to help the establishing of a more acceptable reality than the current one, regardless whether it is on a



micro or macro level. The destruction of this type of hope is the reason why the losers of the system largely accept their present situation, although it is to their disadvantage. The typical worker in Macedonia not only lacks this hope, but is inclined to nurture false hope: that the boss will have an understanding for their suffering, that the boss, by definition, working for his/her own benefit, works for the benefit of the employees as well, that things will take care of themselves, there is no need for him/her (the worker) to interfere and to put himself/herself at unnecessary risk. The outcome of this kind of reasoning is almost always: worsening of the workers' situation and getting crumbs from the boss. However, because of self-pity, rationalisation of one's own passivity and believing the boss' propaganda, these crumbs often are enough for the workers not to rebel. This is because hope that things will take care of themselves in the future is strong.

- f) The feeling of powerlessness and distrust in the collective action. The typical worker in Macedonia feels powerless, hopeless. Not only does he/she not believe the organisations and the institutions supposed to help him/her (the trade unions and the Labour Inspectorate first of all), but he/she does not believe in his/her own strength. So, not believing that it is possible to change the situation which is bad and is getting worse, the workers contribute to the worsening of their own situation. The axiom of workers' organisation – that one worker is weak opposed to one owner, but that all the workers together are not - is usually regarded as a nice fairytale. The typical worker is not only unready to solidarise, to take action, for example, when a co-worker unrightfully loses his job, but has also lost his faith in collective action. Convinced that collective resistance against the owner can not be organised

(due to colleagues' snitching, their fear and/or apathy), even when the worker thinks that it is possible, he/she does not believe that it is possible to achieve something through collective action. What the owner is faced with is a mass of atomised workers that have lost their faith in collective opposition, and in such case it is easy for him to violate their rights.

- g) Having no class awareness. Lastly, but equally important, it should be mentioned that the class awareness of Macedonian workers is low. This is true for both the "real" workers and the other ones, of which many (for example, university professors) do not consider themselves as workers, although they work for a salary. Even when there is one, it is what Vladimir Lenin calls trade-unionist, i.e. syndicalist awareness, which shows interest only for the most immediate problems not for the general problems of the working class and its ability to change society. The low awareness of the workers in Macedonia is in the deep shadow of ethnic belonging, which the workers in Macedonia, as the rest of the population, regard as their primary, and even the only identification.

#### 4) What is To Be Done?

As one can see, the vicious circle situation in which the trade unions and the workers find themselves in is quite bad and results with open space for the other side to continue decreasing and violating workers' rights. If one of the factors, the trade unions or the workers, is at the necessary level, then there are chances that it could result in an effective resistance to further violation and decrease of the rights. But, as we have seen, there are serious problems both concerning the trade unions and the workers. The syndicalists, faced with the apathy and passive endurance of the workers, feel unmotivated

to fight for their rights, and the workers, passively waiting for someone else to solve their problems, have considerably lost trust that the syndicalists are ready to help them, and when they have that trust, that they actually have the capacity to help them.

In this kind of situation, it is easiest to give up on the whole project and passively wait for the moment when everything just becomes too much and when the workers riot spontaneously, not because they want to, but because they simply have to. However, all of this is an unsatisfactory and unacceptable “tactics” for all who have engaged themselves on the side of the workers, motivated both by personal interest and dedication. Therefore, in continuation, several suggestions will follow about what should be worked on in order to break the vicious circle that the trade unions and the workers are caught up in.

- a) Gradual improvement of things both with trade unions and the workers, but mainly with trade unions. Trade unions are the ones called to break the vicious circle. No matter how many weaknesses the workers may have, no matter how present the feeling may be that workers do not deserve the dedication of the syndicalists, the trade unions are organised entity and because of that, can more easily prepare action plans. Furthermore, the reason for their existence is the protection of workers' interests, so they are called, however difficult it may be, to earn the money that they get from the workers' salaries as membership fees. What is needed in the first place is to reinstate the workers' trust that the syndicalists want to improve their position. If (when) that trust is established, the trust that they are able to help (or that they are at least working on developing their abilities) should be reinstated.
- b) Building an offensive strategy. So far, trade unions were concentrated (almost exclusively) on defending

workers' rights. That must be changed. The reason for that is not only because in the meantime many rights were abolished or decreased, and there is continuously less rights left to defend, but because concentrating exclusively on a defensive strategy (as in all spheres) means tying your own hands. It is necessary to determine the key demands for improving the current situation of the workers and, in that sense, to start focussing, to make campaigns for their realisation. Usually, the situation is such that it is necessary to improve workers' rights in many spheres. In such a situation, the trade unions equally work (or don't work) in all these spheres. The workers do not know what their representatives are doing and what are their proposals. That is why it is necessary to determine the key demands, to inform the workers why the focus is on them and to try to realise them.

- c) Networking and cooperation of the non-“yellow” trade unions. In Macedonia, advancement in this direction was made in 2013 with the signing of the Syndical Charter by several branch trade unions, a trade union confederation and two organisations that are particularly into defending workers' rights. Among other things, in 2014, they held a successful protest on May Day and came out with a list of three key demands. The cooperation between the signatories of the Syndical Charter continued further on and in the future it should be extended, and eventually other trade unions should be included.
- d) Forming syndical organisations in more companies and institutions. Many companies, especially the originally private ones, are without syndical organisations. It is necessary to establish contact with the employees in the companies without syndical organisation and to try to organise the workers in those companies.

- e) Not hiding the criticism aimed at the workers. When dealing with workers, it is necessary not to hide the things that are problematic in their behaviour, that actually hinder their involvement in the defending of their labour rights. It is necessary to underline that it is neither possible nor morally correct everyone else to deal with their rights, except they themselves; it should be stressed to them that they sometimes fear too much even when the risk from the consequences is not so high; it is necessary to warn them not to nurture false hope, etc. No one likes hearing bad things about one. Therefore, when the syndical and workers' activists mention this type of things, there is a risk that the worker might build a negative image for them. However, if problems are not acknowledged, they simply can not be solved. Defending workers' rights and their advancement is not possible without involving the workers in that struggle. That is why syndical and workers' activists must take the risk of mentioning negative things, even at the price of workers having an impression that they are not on their side. Hoping that the workers will recognize who really works for their benefit.
- f) Making workers believe in themselves. Workers do not believe in their own strength and they do not believe in efficient collective action. Their faith in both must be restored. This can be helped by positive examples of defence of workers' rights, especially through workers' collective action. These examples are maybe not many, but they exist, should be identified and transferred to the workers, to serve them, aside for all the differences, as examples and inspiration.
- g) Participation of the leftists in the establishing of trade unions and taking their entry in already established ones. The leftists, who by definition are on the side of the workers, should not only defend

workers' rights by principle and from outside, but, when they are employed, they should try to form a syndical organisation in their work places or, if there is a syndical organisation, to become part of it. Establishing of a syndical organisation is not at all easy and is not always possible, not due to the lack of engagement by the leftist, but due to the lack of interest or passivity of the co-workers. In such a case the leftist should try to create a climate for establishing a syndical organisation and, when there is a serious violation of the rights, to try to organise the co-workers. In cases when there is already a syndical organisation at his/her work place, unless it is a "yellow" trade union, the leftist should get involved in his/her work and help the union to become better and more efficient. If the union is "yellow", then he/she should work on the establishing of a new syndical organisation. The employed leftists in Macedonia, unfortunately are not involved enough in the trade unions. They often have the same negative opinion about the trade unions, as the other workers. Experience shows that, in the cases when they got involved, it happened that they often came upon a positive feedback from the syndicalists. That is why no assumptions should be made, but conclusions should be made based on personal experience whether a certain trade union is "yellow" and closed or not. Maybe the example with the entry of the Communists in the so called URS unions in the 1930's can serve as a relevant example. Although they had many remarks on the work of the URS unions, especially for their leadership, by the end of the 1930's the Communists in Macedonia massively joined these trade unions and became prominent workers' activists and strike organisers. Many of them later join People's Liberation Army during the World War Two and gave their lives for a brighter future.

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Conversation  
with Richard  
Seymour

## Perspectives of the left in Europe

### Bionote

*Richard Seymour is the author of Unhitched: the Trial of Christopher Hitchens (2012), American Insurgents: A Brief History of American Anti-Imperialism (2012), The Meaning of David Cameron (2010) and The Liberal Defence of Murder (2008). He writes regularly for the Guardian and runs the popular blog Lenin's Tomb.*

### Abstract

There is a general framework that we have to get in mind, and that is the crisis of the Left. And, 2008, the Recession, the credit crunch and everything that followed from that has not been just a crisis of capitalism as we are used to hearing, but most importantly, for our purposes, it's also crisis of the Left. And, if you are a materialist, if you are a Marxist in any way, I think that it logically follows, that you expect that the institutions of the Left being embedded in this social formation that are affected by crisis, would themselves be thrown into crisis.

### Perspectives of the left in Europe

*Transcript of a public talk given by Richard Seymour in conversation with Artan Sadiku on 16<sup>th</sup> January*

*2014 in Skopje, Macedonia. The talk was part of a series of seminars of the School for politics and critique organized by the Institute of social sciences and humanities – Skopje with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation South-eastern Europe.*

**Artan:** *Good evening everybody, let me welcome you all to the School for politics and critique, which is organized by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities-Skopje with the support of Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and which aims to boost the capacities and knowledge of the left wing activists of Macedonia. The School will be organized, as you know, in one to two seminars per month. It is my pleasure tonight to welcome our guest from the UK, Richard Seymour, author, academic, activist, a columnist for the Guardian a member of Left Unity in the UK. Tonight's talk's title is "The Perspectives of the Left in Europe." We believe that we should open the School with this topic in order for us to get a perspective of what are the political dynamics of the Left in Europe and to have a wider perspective while trying to find our political alternatives, our means and strategies for acting. Welcome, Richard, thank you for coming along.*

*Can we start with a brief description of what can be considered today as The Left, the political Left in*

*Europe, while remaining aware of the diversities that exist within the different formations across Europe? Can we give a sort of a general frame of the politics which we might consider a leftist politics in Europe?*

**Richard:** I think before answering that question, there is a general framework that we have to get in mind, and that is the crisis of the Left. And, 2008, the Recession, the credit crunch and everything that followed from that has not been just a crisis of capitalism as we are used to hearing, but most importantly, for our purposes, it's also crisis of the Left. And, if you are a materialist, if you are a Marxist in any way, I think that it logically follows, that you expect that the institutions of the Left being embedded in this social formation that are affected by crisis, would themselves be thrown into crisis.

So, it's three ways in which this manifests itself, which partly answers your question by just talking about it:

First, it sharpens and throws into relief the dimensions of a structural crisis which is already one of the Left. So it's not just a conjunctural crisis, it's a structural crisis in three ways. First of all, the traditional social-democratic left has been losing its base; it's been losing its connection with its voting base, which has been fragmenting across various different directions for about 30 years now. It is been losing its ideological distinctiveness, as is been colonized by neoliberal ideologies and practices, and it has been losing its historic sort of a repertoire of tactics and strategies. In other words, the social democracy has been the major form in which leftist politics has been expressed in constant, and it currently has no ability to answer, to analyse or explain the current crisis of capitalism, or to pose any solutions other than mile diversions of the austerity remedies that the parties of the Right have been pushing. So, that's social-democracy.

Then there's the old communist party. Aging, very sub cultural, they are not the kinds of routines and rituals they are interested in, are the kinds of things that don't interest, particularly newer generations of leftists. They are very conservative tactically; generally speaking politically far more moderate than their rhetoric and their formal ideological commitment would allow. Two examples where communists actually go into government – Cyprus and Moldova. I mean, did you see any serious challenge to market based neoliberalism? I don't think so.

So, you see those parties also experiencing a long turn decline, not just decline in their formal substantive politics, but a decline to their ability to relate to a wider audience in most cases. The various remedies adopted to fix that, Euro-communism being one of them, did nothing really except accelerate and accentuate the crisis.

Then there is the Far Left, the various parties of revolutionary Left which more or less most of them thrived since this 1960-es. At least, I think, in Western Europe, and in the context of revolutions in Southern Europe, but also just general tumult in North-Western Europe too. And, these organizations have singularly failed to respond effectively to the crisis of capitalism. They failed, I think, largely because they did not, in a general way, their analysis of capitalism and neoliberalism was not up to date, that, in order to preserve their ideological purity and rectitude all too often they refused to face up to certain changes taking place in the composition of the working class in the way in which capitalism was organized. So, you had a defence of treasure orthodoxies, rather than an attempt to face up to realities. They started with the good old things rather than bad new things.

There's three sectors of the Left, all of them in a crisis. I mentioned the crisis in far Left, I just want to specify

something. The crisis of the Far-Left is very particular to the Anglophone Far-Left. I don't know much beyond that, but there is a very particular element of it in the Anglophone Far-Left and it's linked up, as some of you have already know, with failures on other forms of politics such as gender politics. Again, the refusals to incorporate and understand the contribution of feminist movements was a largely defensive and reactive posture and attempt to sort of conserve the purity of the Marxist commitment. That has come back in a seriously destructive way. This fragmentation, by the way, is happening in several organizations, not just the Socialist Workers Party from which I come.

**Artan:** *During the crisis of the Left which coincides with the economic crisis throughout Europe, a movement has emerged. It has been spreading as a strategy, as a tactic, as an occurrence throughout Europe and it is consisted of social movements. You have written that these social movements have not succeeded to inflict even a single damage on austerity. You have pointed out to the limitations of these social movements which only focus on kicking off, resisting and advocating for broader alliances with no clear idea of the final outcome. Could you explain the social context in which these movements have emerged, and in particular, their resistance to any form of association with political parties the structures of the left, i.e., the far left?*

**Richard:** This is why I often get called pessimistic: the thing about historic social movements that have been successful, the anti-Vietnam War Movement, the Civil Rights Movement. My examples will be largely American based because that's where my area of study is. But if you look at them, what you find is that there is something that the present day social movements actually lack, and that is an infrastructure – they don't have any infrastructure!

Of course, there are forms of organization, there are ways in which people stay in touch and pull together a large number of people, raise money and produce publicity and so on. But, there is a real breakdown of the institutions that have traditionally been able to sustain political movements, a breakdown of political parties, a breakdown of community based organization in the wake of neoliberalism. Even the traditional role of the churches to mobilize people has run down to some extent. So, what you've get is pathological symptoms. There are two ways in which this is been done: one, there is the NGO-aization of Left-Wing politics. That is, you get small groups of people who are media-savvy and who are tightly nit and reasonably well organized and well branded. And they can project inordinate influence, you literally get NGO-s calling protests like the "Big If" – an anti-poverty thing in London, and they simulate a social movement, there is no social movement, but they simulate the appearance of one! They have celebrities, tele-broadcast and advertisements, and they create a big excitement and there is a big glorious day of reckoning in which everybody meet in a big park, and there is a rock concert, and they have a big orgasmic explosion—"it's happening!"—and then they go home, are apparently satisfied and nothing has changed! This is one of the pathological symptoms. And you get this whit certain kinds of left-wing groups as well.

The other is this, sort of, anti-political. I don't want to be sectarian about this. On the other hand, I am going to be! I think that there is an element of it being a pathology of defeat and fragmentation. That is to say give the historic collapse, or any attempt to form a kind of genuinely democratic form of organization which can fuse significant sections of population, concentrate their interests in a political form, help lead a struggle and so on, given the every single attempt has either failed or has

resulted in some sort of bizarre bureaucratic distortion then logically there is an element of giving up, we don't need that level of organization, we can rely on people's individual initiative and somehow out of the interaction and collective interaction hopefully through internet—you know, this is not a fetish that's come about now—mediated by the Internet, we will spontaneously generate the types of organization that we need.

I feel this overlaps with a kind of neoliberal ideology. A central claim that a neoliberalism makes is that the last thing we need is a social organisation, this necessarily leads to tyranny, it leads to inefficiency, leads to distortion therefore what we need is to allow the spontaneous order of the market to do its job, and if you can create market-like structures in every area of life, from the government to the internet and wherever. People interact on that basis and somehow information is spontaneously accumulated and sent out again in signals a bit like price signals, so on Twitter you have a trending topics, a hash tag. These are almost like price signals; they tell you what's hot and what's not. Well, there is a certain overlap there, there's a way in which people can end up rationalizing the very irrelevance, the very powerlessness that has been inflicted on them. They can end up treating as if it is a virtue, as something to be embraced, rather than a problem.

**Artan.** *Basically you consider that in some sense the Left has retreated from the public space during these social movements across Europe. Do you think there was a genuine withdrawal of the Left from the space in order not to be conceived as sectarian, or as hawks that come in and try to kidnap the movements? How do you think, how do you evaluate the fact that this kind of springs of movements across Europe had their points of increased resistance, disobedience, and then they kind of*

*slowly retrieved or ended up without a significant effect, or as you say – without inflicting even a single damage to austerity? Can we expect that after an eclipse of the social movements and protests across Europe, a new space for the Left will emerge? Can we expect different structures of the Left to take on and build alliances with whatever structures that will remain from these social movements by either incorporating them or building large socially based alliances? I am aware that there are different contexts across Europe. Might this be a moment in which the Left might attempt to use in order to build such coalitions and such blocs?*

**Richard:** I should correct myself. There is one instance where austerity has been defeated, an austerity government implementing a savage austerity measure, and that's in Québec in Canada! You could argue that belongs to a different cycle, that it belongs to the cycle of student protests from the 2000's. Possibly, however, it was an explicitly austerity lead measure, so the question is – how did they win? Because they did win, it was a provisional success. It's susceptible to roll back, there's all sort of problems, but, you could look in what they did. These student movements did have an infrastructure. They had a long history of building a direct democracy, and they had real organisational campuses. So, it wasn't like in United Kingdom. In UK, the national union of students is effectively turning itself into a lobby, it presses a little for students, it's not really democratic institution, it's very difficult to be involved, and its mostly direct political role is to catapult certain ambitious and attractive young students into the role of a Labour Party candidate for the election.

In Québec it was different! They had forms of direct democracy, they set up to build social alliances, and they went out looking for alliances with organized workers.

They could not get the trade union's bureaucracy to actually call strikes and stuff like that, but they could call on solidarity actions from the workers, and they won over working class people in their communities. You had a famous Pots and Pans Protest – a working class people coming out on the streets at night and bashing their pots and pans. This basically signalled that the people are powerfully opposed to it. The Government sent out the police after them. Here is a question: at that point do you try to appease the forces of law and order? Do you try to appease the media? We have a problem – when the government says a protest is illegal, it's not just a treat of violence; it is a normative and ideological pressure not to protest. So, the student movement in Québec said: "no, fuck off!" Not only did they refuse the police to tell where they were going marching, they send the police an image of their route which was rightly (an image of a middle finger). I am not encouraging this behaviour, good Lord! But I am saying that their disregard for how they'll be received from the media, how they'll be received within the consensus of law and order meant that they were able to go and continue to wage a militant struggle which in the end led to the government losing in a serious way. It didn't just lose because of the left nationalist grouping, they were pretty pathetic. Actually the government base split because it was totally incapacitated by the student movement, so its base split between two different parties, one ultra-neoliberal and so on.

So, what I am saying is for us, we didn't have anything like in England; but, generally speaking, the infrastructure of the social movement is much more depleted. The social movement will always dissipate, that's going to happen, the question is what residue, what traces do they leave in the form of institutions that would be capable of sustaining ideas and strategies and certain discussions through difficult times and can help propel new

movements towards success? And generally speaking, they don't help and this is a problem. Therefore, I propose three strategic orientations, they all take time:

Rebuilding of the basic grass-roots from below infrastructure that makes it possible to have a successful social movement. By that, I don't think having a think-tank or something like that, I mean building in communities on issues that count to ordinary people. In the United Kingdom, in working class areas you can build up campaigns against the so called "bedroom tax"... These are a local, very issue specific campaign, but they bring people together in a way that neoliberalism prefers to keep them apart. If you could find spaces like that, you can actually get people to act collectively and in a democratic way together. That can call together a much larger and wider layer of people than those who are explicitly politicized and who know that they are politicized.

I think we need a reconstruction of that symbolic space within which a left alternative is feasible and means something. It's not just 1989. I really think that the classical model of socialism has utterly collapsed, and I don't mean to say that we can just forget about it, we cannot. It's our legacy I think if we are on the Left, and we have to assimilate to it and figure out what went wrong. But there is a traditional three legged vision, there is the ideological normative goal of socialism and there is a general view of what socialism is, whether a state controlled or workers control or something else. There is a long term strategy, whether it is formed through the state or sort of revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, and there is the agency that is capable of implementing it, usually the working class. All three of those layers have been attacked and weakened and I don't think it's just something that's happened since 1989 or even the 1979-



ies. I think it's something to do with the post-war period and the collapse of what used to be called the vanguard. I think rebuilding that space means building in a space where social democracy used to be.

**Artan:** *You talk about the failure of social movements to build sustainable social institutions. On the other hand, we have the traditional social democracy, the reformist left, which is dramatically falling apart all around Europe. Do you consider that the new Left has the capacity to address the social base of the reformist social democracy? Do you think the crisis has made it possible to address this kind of social base with the arguments of the the Radical Left??*

**Richard:** I would say, it depends on what you mean by being pulled to the Right. I think that it depends also on the conjuncture of the social formation, all sorts of things. But, for example in United Kingdom, Left Unity is well to the right of where I am, but I am the member of it nonetheless. The reason, I think, is because if you want to relate to people who are essentially ordinary people who have always voted Labour, they got certain ideas, they believe in public services, they believe in nationalizing key industries, banks and so on. These aren't hugely radical things but they well to the left to the mainstream consensus and they are alienated by the neoliberal direction of the dominant Social Democratic Party. You need to somehow effectively mediate between where you'd like to be and where things actually are. And you need to somehow find a structure that can mediate between your maximalist revolutionary goals and where the people you want to talk to are at the moment. So I think the radical Left formations that have been emerging, the fact that they did start to emerge in the late 1990-s and 2000's is not accidental, it has to do with the defeats that have been inflicted on the Left and the

labour movement in the 1980's and in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and the ideological horizon that that represented. So, that has opened up a space in which it's possible to build radical left organizations. But we can learn a lot of the successes and failures thus far. One model we definitely don't want to imitate is that of the Rifondazione Comunista, and the reason why it's such a disaster is not just that they were to the right wing, that they were of the quite radical, in principle. It's because they joined a government that was neoliberal, they joined the government and they implemented neoliberal policies. They destroyed their whole historic purpose.

**Artan:** *Then there is the model of SYRIZA which basically has inspired some enthusiasm, not only in Macedonia, but throughout the Balkans. But the way in which SYRIZA have managed itself through the political process has brought about a sense of dissatisfaction and demoralization with the easing of their rhetoric. As they went inside the political process, as they went in the elections, and now the latest polls show they are the first party by support in Greece and basically they are a government in waiting, it seems that they have slowly shifted to the right in order to accommodate the different challenges that the political process offers to them. Would you see this model as a viable model for similar parties in contrast to Rifondazione Comunista in Italy?*

**Richard:** Well, we don't know what the viable model is yet. We are only at the beginning of the pedagogical process. What I would say about SYRIZA is two things, first of all, I've spoken to a number of SYRIZA members and their perspective, when I spoke to them, was that the majority of the membership of SYRIZA prior to the elections had not really had to face up to the idea of – what would you do if the sticking to the austerity, or leaving the

European Union? So they were able to go with this slogan of “not one sacrifice to the Euro,” although in practice it was quietly dropped for the elections. But this was the idea, you know, this was the idea that, they were able to slightly sell the whole question of discussing the euro and the Eurozone. Since the elections and the campaign of economic blackmail that was bewitched by the EU rulers in order to prevent SYRIZA being elected, the pressure have been on to SYRIZA to move to the Right in order to not be seen as damaging to the country’s economy and so on and so forth. And the majority of members faced with this issue decided actually, “you know we’ll stick with the Eurozone for all the sacrifices are necessary, we’ll water down the anti-austerity commitment rather than break the commitment with the Eurozone.” And I think that it’s a fundamental weakness, and I think it’s a problem. But it’s not something that can be overcome with exhortations or propaganda. It’s something you have to win by fighting within the organization, or working alongside the members of SYRIZA.

So, is it a successful model? Well, you know, we’ll have to see. But, I suspect that the successful model is yet to emerge. The other thing is that there is the materiality of the state to bear in mind. There is a Right-Wing Poulantzian interpretation of the state which is essentially in my opinion a bastardized version which will basically lead to conclusion that if you get allies within the State, if you work on certain issues within the State apparatus you can gradually convert it to a socialist kind of state, “eventually,” you know – “we’ll get there, somewhat down the road.” I mean this is an argument for a gradualist, performist and reconciliationist project which basically means you will end up with opportunistic measures, like SYRIZA aligning with the Independent Greeks. The sort of Left Poulanzianism, which I think is more correct, at least more correct than the Right one, is that it requires

the creation of crisis within the state apparatuses, and crises within the power block and therefore you have to, and that has to be induced by serious antagonism. And the problem is that SYRIZA is pursuing, you know, I have no idea whether it would be effective for them to try to create some sort of crisis within the State, but I know for sure that there is not going to be any positive result for them, tempering their analysis and watering down their commitments. And the problem is that once they get elected, which is quite possible they will that the most, the people who will be reformed will not be the state apparatus, it would be SYRIZA!

*Artan: So, basically one of the valuable ways for our radical politics is not to choose between these binaries of acting within or outside the state. In case a socialist, revolutionary party takes the power through elections, without a preceding genuine institutional crisis, there will be a lot of sectors within the state working against it. Such a radical party must also maintain a strong degree of level of political activity, struggle and engagement outside of the State. A challenging issue is the sudden raise and increase in popularity of SYRIZA, increase which does not correspond with its social base. Do you think this is a kind of a false image which might crumble if they don’t succeed to build up alliances with social structures which act independently? If the support for SYRIZA crumbles dramatically there will be strong implications to the common European political reference of the (new) radical left politics.*

**Richard:** I think it’s a feature of conjuncture, I mean, given the general depleted state of the Left, given the absence of infrastructure I was talking about. It does become quite easy for, well not easy, but, possible for comparatively small groups, and certainly there are small groups in SYRIZA, if they intervene at the correct

moment with a correct slogan to suddenly acquire huge influence in that situation. I'll give you an example, not as contentious as SYRIZA, in the United Kingdom when the student movement kicked off in 2010. And when I say "kicked off" I mean there actually was a student movement as opposed to there've been nothing. The nature of sort of organized grouping that was doing anything and setting the dates of protest and where they would be, was a small group of people of couple of Far-Left organizations which are actually miniscule. They are marginal, they've got no social win at all, but they launched a couple of front campaigns and they set up the Facebook page, and these kids were coming from poor outer suburbs of London, who just responded to what was posted on the Facebook. And that was the influence they had. The result of this was the leader of one of these fronts, a guy named Michael Chessum, came to believe that if he called a protest, he could have summoned 50 000 people to the streets of London. But essentially this is the sort of situation that conjunction that we are in. There is always going to be an inherently fragile situation until we reconstitute some of that structure.

And SYRIZA is definitely in a paralysed situation. That does offer opportunities. One of the things that you can say is that if SYRIZA were to win, there would be pressure on them to sort of try quieting their base, to try to sort of keep struggles under control and so on. But if they did have a base in a trade union movement, if they did have a serious relationship with several trade unions, I mean serious, in the way that the KKE has historically done, or the PASOC, you know, I mean, if they were able to do that, they would have been much more successful in their struggles. So the weakness of their relationship to social movements and to trade unions and so on, might actually be strategic opportunity, to bear in mind.

***Artan:** You mentioned some issues that I would like to focus a little bit more before we go to the next step. You mentioned the trade unions and we've seen a decline in trade union activity and trade union revolutionary politics throughout Europe. Here we talked about the trade unions, we even had a protest in front of their headquarters because they don't use protest and because they have been occupied by the union's elites which are in tight relation with current government structure, or whatever government, or whatever party is in government in the country. It seems that you kind of advocating for more wider approach to social movements which means that in the context of class war we should not only focus in the unionized workers in the current unions, but we should use wider struggles which spring throughout different issues and try to bring in the class rhetoric, the class argument inside this struggles. You believe that it is still possible to politicise and to mobilize trade unions and unionized workers in alliances with the Left or they should be considered as one of the many social actors, social formations and social movements with which we should work with. Should we still maintain the classical Marxist political praxis of insisting only on the revolutionary politicization of the working class?*

**Richard:** Yes, there is a potential, but I mean, when we talk about the working class, the reality is, I don't know what the situation is in Macedonia, but in the United Kingdom of all private sectors, working places, 90% have never seen a trade union representative. The truth is that the most working class people have never seen a strike, never seen a picket line; don't know what is like to be in the trade union or what benefit you get there. So there is no real historic disconnection there. Even though the trade unions in Britain are the largest social organisations, they have 6 million members (which is

not insubstantial), they are very specialized, and they are particular to certain public sector, an occupation, a little bit of manufacture. So, my answer to you would be that we need first of all, yes, social movements, in order to bring together the broadest possible range of the working class. I mean, we aren't talking about slogans like "the 99%". The 99% we know it's not a 99% of people who are against the austerity, or whatever, but it's a populist slogan. One thing it does, it establishes the idea of the overwhelming working majority and it's the overwhelming working class majority that we need to somehow put together, and since the trade unions are not capable of doing that, and since the majority of people have never seen a trade union and since the neoliberalism have restructured the space of work in such a way to make the trade unions, actually trade unionizing is very difficult. The obvious way is to find a way to organize unorganized workers as well and I think it's another way of the long term reconstruction project we are talking about.

So, that's a long term objective. The other thing about this is that there is three levels that we need to be reconstructing, there is the social movements, there is the Left, or the social-democratic type of organization, there is also revolutionary regroupement, a revolutionary reconstruction. The idea of a fundamental challenge to capitalism has been germinally, basically reborn little bit with the anti-capitalist movement, with the subsequent Occupy movements and so on, but they are still very nebulous, very diffuse. So I think there is a need for process of rethinking, thinking through all the debates and arguments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, working out what is still valuable, what is not. But also, working out how it is appropriate for us to organize in this age, because I cannot believe that the methods of organization that were appropriate in the era of when the mass press

was relatively new, mass literature was relatively new, before the era of the television should be the same as those of the era of the Internet and you know, mass cell communication which is now becoming the norm. So, that's another part of, I think it's progressively narrowing and focused, but I think they are all essential part of the reconstruction process.

**Artan:** *We've seen some kind of resistance towards the European Union, on the part of movements and parties such as Syriza. On the other hand, in Macedonia, we witness the opposite tendency: the largest fraction of the Left, of the people who consider themselves to be leftist, are in favour of joining the EU. You've claimed that the European Union cannot be considered as savior simply because it operates through neoliberal logic and I think last night you mentioned that European Union is an example of the victory of the project of the bourgeoisie in Europe. Can you elaborate your point a bit further?*

**Richard:** I think your problem, what you are addressing is a real one. The question is one of organizing the working class, the subordinate class elements and so on and disorganizing the ruling class. And the problem is: at the moment when there is a social struggle, when there is a question of privatisation or austerity, who comes to implement it? If you are in Greece, it's the IMF and the European Union, European finance ministers, the European Central Bank, they are organised at the European level. But when someone has to resist, it's not the European working class, it's the national working class. In other words, the problem we face is the fact that the European Union is based upon the successful organisation and to a degree a political centralisation of the European ruling class in a sort of hierarchical structure, while maintaining the disorganisation of the European working classes.

So, I mean, one thing you could see underpinning the whole process of Europeanization, the convergence of currencies and so on and so forth, is the development of what sociologists call an interlocking directorate. That means that companies are increasingly sharing directors across different companies and that is expanding across Europe. So you've got this network of firms, large transnational firms across Europe which effectively are dependent on one another for supply chains, for expertise, etc. And they form basis across which the political institutions of, I think, European Union are formed. Labour, organised labour, the working class is by large excluded, I mean, you know, occasionally corporate or some very junior apparatuses and the European Union, and then only on consultative basis. The democratic institutions of the European Union are extremely weak, and that's by design. Increasingly what's happening therefore is that the European Union forms, and it's institutions, forms one of the ways in which electoral potencies of national elected bodies are taken away, delegated upwards to the European federal level, and this has the effect of seriously restricting even the limited choices within the parliamentary democracy.

The question is: can you somehow occupy the European Union? Can you get into their apparatuses, can you join European Union and hope to get elected to European institutions and get your man, and maybe get Tsipras in one of these institutions and thereby hope to reform it? I would say that if you get a national capitalist state is hard to reform, the European Union is going to be way, way worst because of its susceptibility, it's vulnerability from the pressure from below, from the working class. So, it is much, much weaker. It's far more self-consciously, institutionally a ruling class project. So I think it's doomed. You know, Europeanization is possible answer, or a regionalization, but actually I don't

think those two ends are in conflict. Europeanization of the labour movement and of the Left and so on, can be institutionalized in various ways, it doesn't have to take a form of being in favour of the expansion of the monetary union, which if implemented, means that you're going to have a fiscal strait jacket imposed on any state that participates in it. Quite probably, the imperial structure of the system will mean that, you know, you're going to have a German capital, French capital and so on, bashing down the door to get you to lower the wages and so on, but the they'll lead you to buy their stuff, so you'll have to borrow a lot in order to buy their stuff. And eventually at some point you'll find you can't pay the debt and they'll say: "lazy bastards, they can't pay their debts", you know. So, I mean, you're going to end up in a sort of Greek dilemma, I think, if you go down that route. It's surprising that more countries haven't found themselves in that severe crisis, but I am certain that they will.

*Artan: And now we can start taking questions. But before we take the first one, I have just one last question related to the rise of the Far-Right and especially tendencies of its political mainstreaming through the electoral victories throughout Europe. You said that you don't see a kind of direct causality between the crisis and rise of the far left. Is there a link between the rise of the far right and the crisis?*

**Richard:** there is a causality of this, just not a simple and an immediate one. I mean, I think there are the structural causes and the conjuncture causes. The same thing with SYRIZA actually: I mean, the parties of the radical left have been developing for a long time and you get the credit crunch and the crisis and you get the implementation of austerity and that opens the space in which SYRIZA can grow. And, you know, before them the Left Bloc has been growing, Die Linke has been

growing. Same thing with the far right, if you want to look at the far right, the growth of far right parties across Europe, I think you could see that they have roots in something else. Now, there was an old Trotskyist analysis that said that fascism is a chemically pure distillation of the culture of imperialism. And what that means in effect is that if you really apply that analysis in a serious and systematic way, the culture of imperialism today is totally different than it was in the 1930s. In 1930 you still had colonialism as the dominant world system, you still had white supremacy built into the global system, Anti-Semitism was the dominant norm of those imperial blocs.

The far right today is far more predicated upon imperialist culture of the radical right in America. If you look in someone like Breivik, where does he get his ideas from? He gets his ideas from the libertarian right think-tanks in America. You could see that there are various crisis going on, there is a crisis of the collapse of the representation, and representative democracy in neoliberalism, there is the crisis of working class politics which makes it possible in certain formally industrialized areas for struggles to take on a racial dimension which then means that the far right can profit. There is the crisis of imperialism and the fact that the United States undertake so extremely risky interventionist project of trying to remake the world, you know, under the Bush administration. These projects put forward this new kind of Islamophobic articulation, and that becomes the dominant form of racism of the far right. And it doesn't look like the traditional sort of biologically determinist, somatic kind of racism, this one is very culturist and so on. I think Poulantzas is right on the claim of the crisis of the representative institutions which appears as crisis of the traditional authority which is most severe in cases of economic crisis. When the representative institutions are in crisis, there are always

institutions of the far right who come in to substitute the repressive apparatuses. This is exactly what happened in Greece, The Golden Dawn effectively replaced the police, especially in dealing with the migrants and often acted as their formal proxy.

### Discussion with the audience

**Q1:** *You talked about SYRIZA's moderation as they are moving closer to power. I believe this is a strategy not to scare the potential voters off with a radical rhetoric that can also be easily used by the neoliberal propaganda machinery for the same purpose. Do you think there is more space for more radicalism once they get to lead the government in Greece?*

**Q2:** *What is to be done with the social movements and can they be considered as a social base for building a project for socialism?*

**Richard:** Well, it might be a strategy, it might be that they are moderate and the rhetoric will change once they will have the power. The problem with that is, of course, if you do that, and if you are dependent upon popular base, well, you've immediately lost your base, "actually, we lied; we are going to go way further." Then, you risk creating a crisis. Given the arrangements of power within Greece, the media, the state apparatuses, and so on, they would take that government down quite easily. The problem is that the state apparatuses, the materiality of the state is such that it is far more meaningful to pro-capitalist, pro-neoliberal uses than it is to the uses of the radical left, such that if you go in there with the strategy of not trying to offend anyone, of trying to keep broad coalitions going, once you get in there, you are up against tremendous resistance from people who are far more powerful, much more an immediate problem

for you, that the voters. You only have to talk to the voters for a couple of months before the elections. Now you have to talk to the civil servants, now you have to talk to the “Inner Troika” as SYRIZA calls it. And you know that they are congenitally hostile to your goals. Now you are also going to talk to the European Union’s leadership. You’ve got to find some way of not alienating them, and you got to talk to Obama. And this accounts for this curious dance that SYRIZA leadership has been doing. They’ve been trying desperately to say the right things, “if we could send the right signals, yes we are going to try to pursue a project of social justice, no, don’t be frightened, we are not going to affect/offend your fundamental interests, you should actually be in favour of us because only we can deliver a real resolutions to Europe’s problems, austerity can’t deliver a real solution” and so on, and so forth. The problem with this is, of course, they’ve misunderstood Obama, Merkel and all the rest of it. They are not bothered about the solution to unemployment, they are not that bothered about the solution of the social instability, I mean, it’s pain, but they are bothered about the solution for the banks, because ultimately for them the banks are at the centre of any growth strategy, they are at the centre of any future for an expanded European capitalism. And they would be quite happy to have a government implement socially catastrophic policies, policies that would result in considerable political instability, provided that they can actually get away with it, and that’s what they’ve proven. So finally this strategy of moderation with the idea of radicalisation once in power, is one that is likely to fail. The resistance to any attempt to be too radical once you get in to lead the government would be overwhelming, I think that they would have to put up a hell of a fight against the entrenched power of the state and of the international capital, European capital and so on. In that case, who would be their allies? This is another challenge

in that strategy. They will need the social movements, they will need the workers and the problem is that a lot of the people that voted for them will say: “we didn’t vote for you to do this, we voted to implement the moderate policies, and to come along with Washington, and so on.” And I think it would be a strategy that would collapse in incoherence as soon as they get into the government. . And, to be honest with you, I don’t think it is just a strategy, I think they’ve decided that better of something than nothing, I think they’ve decided that for Greece to get kicked out of European Union, or rather of the Eurozone, would be so catastrophic, the only alternative been offered, as far as they can see is some sort of Cuba in the Mediterranean. So they’ve decide, I think, to accept the European Union and the Eurozone sort of dominant policies and to try and mediate between where they want to be and where the European leadership actually is.

On the second question, the challenge is that if you’ve got a social movement that really resonates with the interests of the people with something that has to do with urgent need of theirs, than you would have much more chance of withstanding the attempts to hijack, to control things by small unrepresentative groups. The more you could build up a sort of grass-roots democracies, something from below, the better chance you’ll have for a sustainable thing. The problem is that in trying to find a way to mediate between the fact that we don’t have much infrastructure at the moment, and that we, ourselves are small unrepresentative groups, and therefore for us to be able to reach out to people and help the people to build the kinds of connections and sort of social structures and infrastructures and democratic forms of organisation, we would have to avoid being the kind of manipulative organisations.. So we have to be somehow implanted in struggles, implanted in movements and very much part of them but respecting their specific ecology, respecting

their needs and participating as co-equals, rather than people who somehow want to control it. I think this is a long term project, but I definitely think that if you commit to such a strategy you could start to see some returns relatedly quickly.

On rebuilding the system base of socialism, I would be in favour of building up radical left organisations wherever possible, and radical left means something somewhere between traditional sort of social-democratic reformism and the parts of the revolutionary left. I think they are organizations where a debate can happen, where the answers are not known in advance, because you know, the thing about the revolutionary socialist organisations in the great degree ideological homogeneity, so it's very difficult to have a process of rethinking and reconstructing, when everybody already knows the answers. , I think these are spaces in which it is possible for some sort of dialogue to take place. But also I think that they should embed themselves in the labour movement, in the environmental movement in the feminist movement, among students, if they are able to do this in a way that says "we don't claim to speak for you, we don't think to dominate you, we don't claim to own you, but we want to be with you, we want to work alongside you." And at the same time in that organisation's policy its dominant ideology should also contain the expressed interests and social goals of the various groups that it is inflated into, and I think over time you will build up that new space.

**Q3:** *My question is about the social movements and the broader sectors of society, for example the Quebec protests are primarily led by students, but it looks like a social movement. Is it again an issue of initial agency and then others join in?*

**Q4:** *You briefly opened the question of the European Union and the Left, so my question will be: what is the future of the European Left, would it stay in the European Union and try to reform it from the inside, should we go back to the old model of the national states where conservative's elites would be quite dominant and atrocities of ethnic cleaning might happen or should we build new alliances? For example – rebuild Yugoslavia?*

**Richard:** The difference between Quebec with other movements is that they were able to, precisely as a matter of strategy, consciously bring together diverse constituencies, students, sections of labour, just ordinary people in the streets. They tried to reach out to anybody that could potentially become an ally, but they did so in a way that wasn't as we often hear about building alliances and what it actually means is making friends with the rich and the bourgeoisie and the media and so on. There is some friends that you don't need. So they didn't make friends to the media, they didn't care what the media said, maybe they cared but they didn't sort of pandered to the media they didn't pandered to the rich, they didn't try to make themselves presentable, they were interested in being effective, this comes back to the communicative or disruptive choice. I think that the main thing is that they formed a hegemonic, or contra-hegemonic, in what way you want to fraise it, alliance that was simultaneously majoritarian, and disruptive, disobedient and capable of shutting down the government's plans.

On the matter of the Left and European Union, or even rebuilding Yugoslavia. Nobody is going to rebuild Yugoslavia. If we had the material resources or people to rebuild anything like that, I think we'd had socialism already. The fact of the matter is that we would be lucky to build a local community centre, we'd be lucky to have a parish commune that would remind us of



the Paris Commune. We don't have much choice at the moment about whether to act on the national state or the European Union. But we do have a choice about how we relate to these institutions, and what, my suggestion is that if there is an argument about whether to enter the European Union, don't embrace it, don't say "this could be a way forward for us." It might be, it might, despite everything, hold opportunities for you but the dangers are, actually, I think much more severe. The dangers of being co-opted into the institutional format that actually, more fundamentally and at the more severe scale and long term way stretch your politics. We have this thing, a situation in the UK which is slightly different, we are in the EU but we are not in the Eurozone, and the dominant sort of tendency is eurosceptic. The majority of people in the UK would walk out of the EU because they believe that somehow Britain can return to the glorious private hedges of the 1950s. So we are in a slight different situation, but when pressed on this issue, it is possible to say – "neither the European Union, nor the United Kingdom, neither London, nor Berlin," and I think that you might find that a kind of slogan like that might work for you. In other words, you are not in a position to propose a concrete organization of political authority. Were you in that position, we'd be having a different kind of discussion. But it is about how you relate to propaganda, and I think defining independent niche for yourself which is distinct from nationalism, but also distinct from being servant to the European Union, dependant to the European Union, keeping the independence would be a good approach to that. That's what I suggest.

**Q5:** *Do you think that anarchist practices are disruptive for a social movement?*

**Q6:** *I am wondering with all the new talk of the left, on the issue of the new language of the left, one which will not be elitist and "intellectualized" and will communicate with the ordinary people, those with not too much access in this society, who I believe to be the base of voters for the new left*

**Richard:** I think that anarchist tactics are effective, but I think that some time they can be disruptive in a way that is not useful for the movement. One way in which it can be disruptive is the tendency towards elite actions – "we are going to have an action!" – What does that mean? – well, "there is a group of protesters, we are going to march in the centre and a bunch of anarchist are going to sit down in the middle of the march, we are going to have a sit-down, we are not going to move, and the police is going to have to come down and fight us, and we are going to try to radicalize the march." Now, this is done without any reference to the rest of the march, it's done in an elitist way, it's quite macho and is unhelpful, even if the march from A to B is boring, predictable, easily contained, this way of trying to radicalize the situation doesn't work and is not helpful. That said, I know a lot of anarchists in the United Kingdom and I know the kinds of ways that they are effective, for example there is a lot of road campaigns, and one of the ways that they are good at, I don't know why anarchist are so good at arts and crafts and technology and so on. They form little communities and they are impossible to borrow out and companies who try to sort of build the road find them very difficult to move. Now, they cannot alt their nature and found a mass movement or something like that, they just can't, because it's very individualistic, is very elitist it's a small group of people substituting themselves for a

mass, but they can be effective in certain contexts. Also there are other kinds of anarchists that are very labour oriented and who are also about building up strength from below, I am very much in favour of this. So, I don't want to be indiscriminate about this in condemning anarchists or something, but I just think in general that the anarchist tactics are unworkable, and I do prefer to have forms of centralized organization. There I said it – centralized!

It was said that the Left has lost the fight to connect to the poor, the Left has lost the fight to connect to the ordinary people, to the uneducated, to those that don't speak so well. First of all, the Right does very effectively manipulate the people in a certain way, I think this slogan in the United Kingdom is “treat them like mushrooms, keep them in the dark and feed them shit.” I think we shouldn't overestimate things, but, I can say that in the United Kingdom at least it is not the poorest workers who gravitate to the Right, it is actually a sector of the skilled working class who are not very well educated by large, but they are relatively, within the working class, I don't want to say privileged, but they are better from the most. And a certain petty bourgeois mentality gets in there. So, that's the one way in which the Right can penetrate the working class. There's also a large sector of the working class that is not Right wing, but is politically passive and it's very difficult for the Left to relate do them.

In South Africa there was an experiment in the 70es in which the Communist Party tried to reach out the gangsters, with a feeling that they are the authentic workers, or whatever. It didn't work, it was catastrophic, these well-read communist intellectuals going like – “hello, oh, you got no eye, you've been shot and... well done.” There was a complete cultural gap, no way to relate, it didn't work, so it wasn't effective. In the United

States they tried the same thing, they always talk about the “urban poor,” the idea that we're going to reach out, “maybe we could reach out to gang members,” there was a talk about this during the Occupy thing, - “maybe we could reach out to them, maybe they could organize the community” – gang leaders don't care about organizing the community, they care about exploiting people and murdering them! I don't mean to caricature your argument, I mean what you are saying is a serious thing; there are real objective difficulties in reaching out to sectors of the working class and sectors of the poor who are out of the reach of the Left. The other thing is – we shouldn't be too worried about reaching to the people who are educated, The trend is for larger and larger sectors of the working class to be educated to at least university degree and therefore the social basis of the leftism is changing, so we shouldn't be afraid of being too intellectual, we should be worried if the only people we talk to are the intellectuals.

Were the Right has been able to reach to the poor, I think what they do is to create chains of equivalence, linking the interests of the poor, through nationalism to those big business and to the lower middle class and thus diverse ideological domains can be pulled together through this nationalist project. In the United Kingdom it has to do with immigration, they can reach out to the poor by saying: “these immigrants are coming over here and you know what they are doing– they are taking your jobs and they are pushing down your wages, and even if they are not, we don't want them here, they smell!” – This kind of thing. How do you disrupt that?! How do you pull apart that chain of equivalence? I think you need very precise interventions. Don't ever think that you have to capitulate to these ideas, don't ever think that you have to put a “softer version” of nationalism, you don't have to, it doesn't work anyway, and it only validates the Right

wing when you do that. But the other thing is – there are always antagonisms, these chains of equivalence are very fragile, there are always points where they are weak, so the working class, sectors of the working class are racists, sectors of the working class are nationalists, you can bet on that, that's always going to be that case, some of them are Right wing and buying to competitive ideology. But there is always going to be something, whether it's a privatisation of a key industry or whether there is shocking state of wages, or whether it's the energy prices or something, something that people are angry about, and that's where you can intervene and you can say – that's your strategic moment, you can say: "no! We are not in it together. This is not one big happy nation, we are not a family, this is a struggle, and the people who have been making up, like bandits are the rich, and we need too stand to the poor together, wherever they come from" and that's when you have moments of intervention. So that would be my advice.

*Q7: Can we consider that the last two decades of neoliberalism have changed completely the social environment where the Left cannot find an easy way to mobilize and organize a new project?*

**Richard:** Neoliberalism has brought real changes in the work force, in behaviour, in terms of governmentality, of the way in which people understand themselves. I think that's very true. Actually, because of neoliberalism, the real forces for opposing the system will come from the people that are immersed in that ideology and immersed in that tradition, and who are disaffected and breaking with that, disappointed in some way. We see this in countries with a neoliberal development project like in Turkey, Egypt, Brazil, and to an extent in China. And there are various contradictions arising there resulting in serious social struggle. And there is the other group of

states which are mainly southern European states, where the contradictions of the Europeanization and austerity have reached their highest level. Elsewhere it's not kicking off, it really isn't, and the situation is notorious for the complete lack of any kicking off that takes place as a struggle. And what is the result of everything being left to unorganized and dispersed groups of young people who are basically not rooted in any institutional form, who are not rooted in any party and who don't have any permanent apparatus to relate to, to mobilize?! It is that they get the crap kicked out of by the Police and then they go home and they stop going to protest and they walk away demoralized. The movement dies, and all that it leaves behind is a scar, an intense psychological scar. It's not just the student protests, we saw that the environmental movement, there was a big massive green camp very much organized around NGO's actually, the well-meaning, sort of left wing activists, who went out and formed a green camp. The police infiltrated them, they broke up their organisation and they framed them for conspiracy. And the process of dragging them across the courts, it just ruined them, their organisation and left them at the end of it demoralized and not wanting to do anything. So, I think you need something resilient and therefore although it seems like I am hawking back to a past, some glorious past or something, I can see no alternative but building something of a form of a party and something like a trade union, even if the types and the ways in which they are organized today might have to be quite fundamentally different to the way in which they were organized in the past. That's why, coming from a Marxist background, coming from the revolutionary left, I am very much in favour of rethinking and trying to break with this tendency to solve everything by quoting someone, somebody from the 1920es, 1930es, like they have all the strategic answers to today. They don't!

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