2
2018

Filozofski vestnik

FAIL BETTER: POLITICS AND THE ARTS OF TRAGEDY

Edited by
Jason Barker

ISSN 0353 4510
Letnik/*Volume* XXXIX
Številka/*Number* 2
Ljubljana 2018

ZALOŽBA ZRC

Filozofski vestnik

ISSN 0353-4510

Programska zasnova

Filozofski vestnik (ISSN 0353-4510) je glasilo Filozofskega inštituta Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti. Filozofski vestnik je znanstveni časopis za filozofijo z interdisciplinarno in mednarodno usmeritvijo in je forum za diskusijo o širokem spektru vprašanj s področja sodobne filozofije, etike, estetike, poli tične, pravne filozofije, filozofije jezika, filozofije zgodovine in zgodovine politične misli, epistemologije in filozofije znanosti, zgodovine filozofije in teoretske psihoanalize. Odprt je za različne filozofske usmeritve, stile in šole ter spodbuja teoretski dialog med njimi.

Letno izidejo tri številke. Druga številka je posvečena temi, ki jo določi uredniški odbor. Prispevki so objavljeni v angleškem, francoskem in nemškem jeziku s povzetki v angleškem in slovenskem jeziku.

Filozofski vestnik je vključen v: Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents / Arts & Humanities, EBSCO, DOAJ, IBZ (Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriften), The Philosopher's Index, Répertoire bibliographique de philosophie, Scopus in Sociological Abstracts.

Izid revije je finančno podprla Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije. Filozofski vestnik je ustanovila Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti.

Aims and Scope

Filozofski vestnik (ISSN 0353-4510) is edited and published by the Institute of Philosophy of the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Filozofski vestnik is a philosophy journal with an interdisciplinary character. It provides a forum for discussion on a wide range of issues in contemporary political philosophy, history of philosophy, history of political thought, philosophy of law, social philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of science, cultural critique, ethics, and aesthetics. The journal is open to different philosophical orientations, styles and schools, and welcomes theoretical dialogue among them.

Three issues of the journal are published annually. The second issue is a special issue that brings together articles by experts on a topic chosen by the Editorial Board. Articles are published in English, French, or German, with abstracts in Slovenian and English.

Filozofski vestnik is indexed/abstracted in the Arts & Humanities Citation Index; Current Contents / Arts & Humanities; DOAJ; EBSCO; IBZ (Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriften); The Philosopher's Index; Répertoire bibliographique de philosophie; Scopus; and Sociological Abstracts.

Filozofski vestnik is published with the support of the Slovenian Research Agency. Filozofski vestnik was founded by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Filozofski vestnik

Fail Better: Politics and the Arts of Tragedy

Edited by
Jason Barker
XXXIX | 2/2018

Izdaja | Issued by
ZRC SAZU, Filozofski inštitut
Institute of Philosophy

Založnik | Published by
Založba ZRC

Ljubljana 2018

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

32:1(082)

FAIL better : politics and the arts of tragedy / edited by Jason Baker. - Ljubljana : Založba ZRC, 2018. - (Filozofski vestnik, ISSN 0353-4510 ; 2018, 2)

ISBN 978-961-05-0129-9
1. Baker, Jason
296754944

Contents

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018

Kazalo

Filozofski vestnik | Letnik XXXIX | Številka 2 | 2018

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 5–14

Jason Barker*

Introducing Hell's Bottom

"You can't be a poet in hell," remarks Rimbaud in a manuscript draft of *Une Saison en Enfer*.[1] Strange assertion. The miserablist reputation of the poet as a perennial wanderer who suffers all manner of indignity in the name of art suggests that she must. She can't. She will go on. Hell: such is her lot and her substance. Moreover, her dubious status as artist, the fact that the republic doesn't take kindly to forgers, invests her art with a directly political meaning.

Suffering is not surrendering. We must rescue *pathos* from its Heideggerian perversion, i.e. *pathos* as the reception of the pathetic heart of Christian existence. For Heidegger, *pathos* (*Stimmung*) is being-in-awe and the undergoing of its suffering. The Christian (or Lutheran[2]) legacy proves stubborn in politics and the arts, subordinating human *praxis* to divine nature and the channeling of supernatural forces. Everywhere *pathos* is surrounded and encompassed by God's own *poiesis*, which enjoins the actor to submit to states of mind, moods, dispositions; attunement (*Stimmung*) and "tuning in" to Human Be-In.[3]

Fail Better. This volume aims to investigate the *active* dimensions of *pathos*, those involving tragedy as social contract, and of *poiesis/praxis* pertaining to the arts and politics as *works*. For Alberto Toscano, whose focus is the visual arts,

1 See Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (Oxford: Picador, 2001), p. 352.

2 For the Lutheran (mis)reading of *pathos* and on Heidegger see Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), 2000, esp. pp. 29—32.

3 The reference to Timothy Leary is admittedly superficial, but not altogether irrelevant given his attempt to conceive the ecstatic project of time. Interestingly his manifesto for the sixties countercultural movement was inspired by Marshall McLuhan. As Leary declares: "Like every great religion of the past we seek to find the divinity within and to express this revelation in a life of glorification and the worship of God. These ancient goals we define in the metaphor of the present—turn on, tune in, drop out." Quoted in Philip Zimbado and John Boyd, *The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time That Will Change Your Life* (London and New York: Free Press, 2008), p. 48.

* Kyung Hee University, School of Global Communication, Republic of Korea

the aim is to conceive tragedy through the image-work that grasps the process or project of tragedy's political content—its real mobility, so to speak—without falling into abstractions. If the revolution is frozen then in the context of Toscano's inquiry it would signal quite the reverse of Saint-Just's melancholy downfall. Instead, frozen revolution is the *iconographic seizure* of the uprising.

In politics, something happens in 5th century Athens with the shift to *tragedy* under the aegis of the new idea of *democracy*. In *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet provide a wealth of resources in their truly ground-breaking approach to thinking politics on the basis of a constitutional reform (revolution?) which is equally felt in the sphere of dramatic performance.[4] Plato has his own reasons for abhorring the practical consequences of mimesis. Complex reasons, no doubt. But in any case far from philosophical in the purely intellectual and dispassionate sense that compels us to abhor the beds of the poets. Where in his *Republic* is thought given to the constitutional arrangements of the City of Dionysia, of how this civic festival works in the interests of democracy? Surely the omission is symptomatic; in any case it should be read symptomatically.[5] It seems we can no more reject musical innovation for posing a "danger to the whole State" than reject a tragedy by Aeschylus, since isn't it the case that such works, in working through the tragedy, produce superior designs for life and models for the citizen?

Plato's rejection of poetry on the basis of its intuitive production of an *object* which provides no knowledge of the ideal thing is of course outdated in the sense that modernism renders the antagonism between art and philosophy redundant. So-called conceptual art, Alain Badiou contends, is a *production of truths*, not objects, which philosophy moreover has nothing to do with. Art subverts philosophy in the process of its inventions, "twists" it in accordance with its own designs.[6] If Plato had once conceived the Philosophers as rulers and Truth tellers, for Badiou it is the practitioners and producers of truths them-

4 Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

5 For a speculative account of Plato's hidden allusions in the dialogues to the political events of his day see Michael G. Svoboda, *Plato and the Peloponnesian War* (PhD Thesis). Pennsylvania State University, 2002.

6 Alain Badiou, "Preface to the English Edition" in: *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), p. xxxi.

selves who will "rule," not remotely on merit, but by virtue of the novelty of their inventions. (One might wonder whether this formula takes us back to *ex nihilo* creation, in which no work is produced outside the One's divinity.[7])

As noted above, we don't learn everything from the *Republic*. The complete picture is missing. Could it be that Plato is employing "philosophy" as a euphemism for new forms of poetry (and politics) that only philosophical discourse, in its underground novelty and marginality vis-à-vis poetry, can get away with? Is "philosophy" Plato's Trojan horse? It goes without saying that in its literary form Plato's text is indelibly poetic. As Benjamin R. Tarr notes, the *Republic* might be read as a work of *moral*, if not strictly speaking *poetic*, poetry. In his overturning of Homer, then, might there be cause for reconsidering Plato's *Republic* as the *Republic of Poetry*?[8]

What's missing from Plato's account of music, poetry and drama is that which Aristotle will subsequently address with the term *theoria*. Perhaps Aristotle in his day, i.e. in the aftermath of the Golden Age of Athenian tragedy, is better placed to consider "new forms," of which tragedy is understood to have emerged as the dominant one, and through which the good life is to be attained. The spectacle is for the audience's benefit. The spectator (theorist and ideal citizen) adapts to a city whose spectacle is borrowed from the tragedy for this purpose. And yet the spectator is no passive receptacle for state propaganda. Adapting to the city is to adapt *it*. The Dionysia exists for the purpose of serving its people, of conditioning the "constitution" of its citizens, which they the citizens constitute themselves.

According to Vernant and Vidal-Naquet there is ambiguity in the language of tragedy between the old myths and the new legal discourse, a constitutional ambiguity that must translate to the arts and the spectacle. Tragedy is intended for the public good, for the practice of disinterested contemplation—*theoria*—and the working through—*catharsis*—of pity and fear. The good citizen doesn't

---

7 See Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, pp. 32—33.

8 Benjamin R. Tarr, "Plato's *Republic* as Moral Poetry," *Inquiries Journal*, Vol. 7, no. 9, 2015. Available at: <www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1140/platos-republic-as-moral-poetry> [accessed 17 June 2018].

attend the theatre in search of consolation, nor even to be educated. Catharsis eliminates the ambiguity. It is a clarification; a recalibration of the city.

Somewhat closer to home, the idea of the poet-politician or artist as revolutionary—the one "committed"—encounters difficulties at some point between the tail end of romanticism and high modernity; between Rimbaud and Beckett. Rimbaud's trajectory would appear to bear this out, in the sense that "one is born a poet and dies a businessman."[9] The way of the cross, once the preserve of intellectual terrorists (those who Gilles Grelet dubs "*théoristes*"[10]) and fanatics of all persuasions, has today been wholeheartedly embraced by lifestyle gurus, entrepreneurs and extreme sports enthusiasts.[11] Given that the injunction to "fail better" has been truncated and abbreviated to the point of "invalidity" (what Beckett would have wanted?), there is a part of us all invested in the new biopolitical or leveraged economy, which renders the originality of our "suffering" no less revelatory than a trip in a hot air balloon, or white-water rafting on the Zambezi River.

Without wishing to dwell upon the sad plight of the modern-day militant poet, the more intriguing question is in my view to be found in tragic poetry, rather than modernism per se, as the title of this special issue suggests. We infer no periodization or hierarchy from Greek forms of poetry and the passage to "modern" prose (in passing, we are not becoming more "modern" through politics and the arts, in case anyone should doubt it). The historical passage from epic poetry to tragedy to comedy is, from our perspective, split between two forms of comedy: human (Balzac) and divine (Dante as Beckett's contemporary), the latter drawing on the epic. This of course is to say nothing of modernism's invention of epic theatre, and the equally oxymoronic notion of modern tragedy (Arthur Miller).

9 Robb, *Rimbaud*, p. 362.

10 See Gilles Grelet, "Un bréviaire de non-religion. Du théorisme, gnose rigoureuse comme antidote au nihilisme," in: *Discipline hérétique* (Paris: Kimé, 1998), pp. 182—216.

11 See Mark O'Connell, "The Stunning Success of 'Fail Better'. How Samuel Beckett Became Silicon Valley's Life Coach" in: *Slate* (online), January 29, 2014. Available at: <www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2014/01/samuel_beckett_s_quote_fail_better_becomes_the_mantra_of_silicon_valley.html>.

What are the implications of this jumbled picture? Among them that the innate bond between politics and tragedy, where tragedy is understood as a necessary and universal constraint on politics—a constraint conceived as the very condition of our modernity—must be utterly rejected. Put differently: to adhere to a *certain* loosely Hegelian reading of tragedy is to be seduced into believing that *everything* is political. There are few who better exemplify this position than Judith Butler in her reading of *Antigone*. As M. Doust argues in this volume, for Butler,

> The implicit presupposition is that a pure negativity, a non-representable—the uncanniness of the radiating beauty of a heroine before whom the kinship structure reveals its outer limits and the regime of intelligibility founders—somehow widens the field of new possibilities for social transformation. How can this wish, this fast track from negativity, law and guilt to social transformation, be conceived as intelligible? Why couldn't the opposite be the case, that the play brings forth the closure of the field of possibility, as was probably the case for an Athenian spectator, who would deem the mode of governance in Thebes as too primitive and thus doomed to founder?

Butler appears to have forgotten that nothing will come of nothing. Her position is characteristic of a naïve yet common misconception of abstract generality (recall that for Hegel the "unmediated indifference" of the outside, or nature, is just empty space[12]) according to which "what does not kill me makes me stronger," i.e. where the fall from grace is an affirmation (a measure, even) of self-overcoming, when in actual fact plumbing the depths of hell is a measureless task, and that despite numbering nine circles, Hell's "bottom" turns out to be Satan's navel, which is only relative to the gravitational centre of a falling body in space. A man on his head is the same man when he is finally walking on his feet; history is process without subject or goal; the only historical "goal" is planetary oblivion.[13]

[12] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, § 197: "To speak of points of space, as if they constituted the positive element of space, is inadmissible, since space, on account of its lack of differentiation, is only the possibility and not the positing of that which is negative and therefore absolutely continuous. The point is therefore rather the negation of space." Available at: <www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/na/nature1.htm>.

[13] In my novel *Marx Returns* I tell the hero's life story as a journey through such historical materialist precepts. Jason Barker, *Marx Returns* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2018).

As Justin Clemens observes in his essay on Blake criticism, attempts to "circumvent Enlightenment" soon rebound in a "post-Newtonian world"; a world where, for Butler, asking the question "What is Enlightenment?" is "to show that critique has not stopped happening, and in that sense neither has enlightenment stopped happening."[14] Perhaps Blake, the "visionary anarchist"[15] who, as Clemens notes, grew up entertaining visions of angels and fairies, would have found a fellow traveler in Butler, given the latter's commitment to what she describes as an "inventive elaboration of the self,"[16] and her quasi-revelatory faith in "an ungrounded inquiry into the legitimacy of existing grounds, one that might be understood in Kantian terms as the free and public use of reason but that extends outside the domain of the public to a sociopolitical field that is broader and more complex than the public/private distinction can avow."[17] Butler assures us that:

> The operation of critique and even the subsequent petition can emerge from the interstices of institutional life (which is not the same as emerging from a transcendental field); it may emerge precisely from those interstitial sites where disciplinary boundaries have not been firmly maintained.[18]

Critique in the "sociopolitical field" may of course emerge from almost anywhere at all. However, bearing in mind that the post-Cantorian concept of infinity refutes the existence, never mind the positive diversity, of very small spaces—"the interstices of institutional life"—militants of politics and the arts may be advised to show themselves, to come out on one side or other of the public/private divide. Even pessimism, as Walter Benjamin argued, must be politically organized. "It is the only way," adds Michael Löwy, "we can avoid becoming vapid."[19]

Butler is right to be concerned for the current state of knowledge and the university, which has become a technocratic machine, a branch of the knowledge

---

14 Judith Butler, "Critique, Dissent, Disciplinarity" in: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, no. 4 (Summer 2009), p. 787.

15 See Peter Marshall, *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (London: Freedom Press, 1994).

16 Judith Butler, "Critique, Dissent, Disciplinarity," p. 787.

17 Ibid., p. 786.

18 Ibid.

19 Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, introduced by Donald LaCoss (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 50.

economy, with knowledge as its product. Its by-product, even, since nowadays no one in their right mind believes that the institution is out to serve the public good, or has anything to do with knowledge and learning, or even training. Instead of "know thyself" or "dare to know" (the Kantian version of "yes we can!") perhaps the motto of the modern university should instead be *pathei-mathos*: "knowledge through suffering". Might the answer to the erosion of the "academic freedom" Butler wants to defend be to renew and extend the old struggles for the university beyond "the domain of the public to a sociopolitical field that is broader and more complex than the public/private distinction can avow"? The university: a place beyond. "Organized pessimism" might be a more sensible university motto in the circumstances. Or let's listen to Gilles Grelet, whose attitude towards the complexity of the sociopolitical field—but who's "complex" is it, anyway?—is absolutely uncompromising: "Society owes everything to the university, which owes it nothing."[20] And "with no other responsibility," Grelet continues, "than to save society from itself."[21] Being realistic, demanding the impossible. Building a university that doesn't work.

Today the science and technology war machine stands poised to pulverize the interstices of institutional life, and the last vestiges of philosophy, which makes the survival prospects for our "poetic" language-landscape—"the literality of literature and the meaning of meaning," as Justin Clemens remarks below—look slim. The concept of literature relies for its creativity on communicating with alien discourses, in politics and the sciences, the better to break through the walls of academic specialization. There is nothing more intellectually moribund than the vulgar appetites of the corporate university in its quest for R&D funding, whose commercial rationale can only hasten the transformation of the humanities into the handmaiden of science and engineering: a kind of TESL for autistic programmers. Then again, is it still required that the professional revolutionary adhere to the "reasoned derangement of all the senses" in order to achieve his aims? Rimbaud had shaken off this romantic superstition before he was out of his teens, and while Rimbaud's teens hardly provide a model for a theory of literary production, the "late" Rimbaud's turn to prose suggests that we might

[20] Gilles Grelet, Twitter post, 19 April 2018: "Construire une société autour de son Université, comme instance expressément anti-sociale : vouée unilatéralement à l'institution des hommes, sans autre responsabilité vis-à-vis de la société que de la sauver d'elle-même. La société doit tout à l'Université, qui ne lui doit rien."

[21] Ibid.

wish to attend more closely to the transitions between epic and tragic forms of poetry before inferring, on the basis of a generally assumed decline of literature, a corresponding decline of revolutionary politics as well.[22] One might respond glibly that Rimbaud, in his adolescent pomp, might certainly have embraced the decline of both literature and poetry, welcomed it as a challenge, in his quest for "new forms." In departing for new worlds, literature and poetry might be the means, rather than the ends. If this entails their dissolution, well, so be it. Let the new human being break free from her literary chains!

I am being somewhat facetious. Clearly there is no moral justification for sacrificing literature on the altar of science and technology. But is literature's presumed institutional decline and the question of literary form and composition vis-à-vis scientific invention based on sound assumptions? In briefly addressing this question I shall cite, side by side, two notable thinkers, similar in age, whose contributions to their respective fields are contemporaneous and comparably significant, and each of whom endorses the non-reductive relationship between mathematics and philosophy. First, the mathematician and computer scientist Gregory Chaitin:

> And yes, I'm a mathematician, but I'm really interested in everything: what is life, what's intelligence, what is consciousness, does the universe contain randomness, are space and time continuous or discrete. To me math is just the fundamental tool of philosophy, it's a way to work out ideas, to flesh them out, to build models, to understand! As Leibniz said, without math you cannot really understand philosophy, without philosophy you cannot really understand mathematics, and with neither of them, you can't really understand a thing! Or at least that's my credo, that's how I operate.[23]

And the mathematical philosopher Alain Badiou:

> This is where we find ourselves. On one hand, the ethical pathos of finitude, which operates under the banner of death, presupposes the infinite through tem-

[22] Graham Robb goes some way towards demolishing the "early" versus "late" cliché in his *Rimbaud*. It seems fair to consider the "quality" of Rimbaud's writing in the context of a life's work without appealing to moral judgments of the artistic value or supposed originality of his work vis-à-vis the canon of French poetry.

[23] Gregory Chaitin, *Meta Math! The Quest for Omega* (New York: Vintage, 2006), pp. v—vi.

> poralization, and cannot dispense with all those sacred, precarious and defensive representations concerning the promise of a God who would come to cauterize the indifferent wound which the world inflicts on the Romantic trembling of the Open. On the other, an ontology of indifferent multiplicity that can withstand the disjunction and abasement brought about by Hegel; one that secularizes and disperses the infinite, grasps us humans in terms of this dispersion, and advances the prospect of a world evacuated of every tutelary figure of the One.[24]

Each of these extracts is a broad methodological statement of its author's approach to thinking "randomness" and "ontology" respectively. What role is literary style performing here? Is the form and content of the statement in either case more or less characteristic of the kind of institutional iconoclasm or "open university" capable of tearing down the walls of academic specialization? Chaitin, whose mathematical ingenuity establishes that Turing halting is given by an algorithmically random and incomputable real number, is no less a defender than Badiou of the idea that mathematics is a thought; or, as Chaitin himself says of mathematical ideas: "what is useful varies as a function of time, while 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever' (Keats)."[25] Is it incumbent on the poet to lead the mathematician by the hand, as an enlightened Virgil lead a bewildered Dante, in order to shine a light into "the ethical pathos of finitude, which operates under the banner of death"? Or can the "compossibility" and cross-fertilization of mathematical and poetic truths be put down to the philosopher's prejudice of what constitutes the art of mathematical thinking?

As I have argued elsewhere,[26] a stubborn prejudice of contemporary philosophy consists in thinking the algorithm as intrinsically a question of technology and the technocratic society. An algorithm is the description, using logical (universal) rule-based symbols, of a behaviour. A "computer" is the one, whether it be a human person, persons or machine-apparatus, tasked with following the

---

[24] Alain Badiou, "Mathematics and Philosophy" in: *Theoretical Writings*, trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004).

[25] Chaitin, *Meta Math! The Quest for Omega*, p. vi.

[26] See Jason Barker, "Schizoanalytic Cartographies. On Maps and Models of Capitalism" in: *Filozofski Vestnik*, Vol. 38.3, 2017; "Slow Down. On Benjamin Noys' Critique of Accelerationism" in: *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Vol. 21.2, 2016; "Are We (Still) Living in a Computer Simulation? Althusser and Turing" in: "Other Althussers." Special Issue of *diacritics. A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, Vol. 43.2, 2015.

rules and simulating the behaviour. There is nothing intrinsically "thoughtless" or totalitarian about algorithms. Indeed, they can be *invented* (such invention is a *work*) to describe the infinite complexity—the beauty?—of transcendental numbers. And, inasmuch as each algorithm corresponds to a *unique* behaviour or *practice* (producing or manipulating something from raw input or materials) they are not "abstract". The danger lies in their overwhelmingly dubious and nefarious social applications or "apps": the fetishism of technology.

Can we imagine a world indifferent to such abstract and technocratic narratives? All power to the tragic poet, whose task it is to attend the public festival and seize dramatic works in all their wildly incompressible and random forms. This poet—no less educator and theorist—is on a par with the people, not forgetting that in democratic Athens, Aeschylus was a citizen-soldier first, and a playwright second.

* * *

Fail Better: Politics and the Arts of Tragedy has been rather a long time in the making. I am grateful to my fellow contributors for not being able to go on but going on regardless, and to Jelica Šumič Riha and the editorial board and staff of *Filozofski Vestnik* for supporting its publication.

I. Politics, Art, Tragedy

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 17–40

Alberto Toscano*

The Civil War of Images
Political Tragedies, Political Iconographies

An officer of the Nazi occupation forces
visited the painter in his studio and,
pointing to *Guernica*, asked: 'Did you do that?'
Picasso is said to have: answered,
'No, you did.'
— Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment'

What would art-historical analysis look like if its paradigm
were not the greeting of a friend to a friend, but instead
a mortal enemy slipping by unnoticed, or signalling
cryptically to a co-conspirator invisible to us? ... Lulled
into the illusion that the objects we interpret are our
friends, we struggle to make sense of enemy pictures.
— Joseph Leo Koerner, *Bosch & Breughel*

Introduction

Tragedy has recently emerged as a privileged keyword through which to think the political fate of images, or the fate of political images, in the history of art and media. I am thinking in particular of two projects that make strong claims to reinterpret the history of visual forms from perspectives at once attached to, and variously despondent about, the passionate marriage of politics and poetics – that marriage hailed, under the names of Rimbaud and Marx, by André Breton, and which today is annulled by a quotidian, if spectacular, barbarism. These projects are Georges Didi-Huberman's political recovery of Aby Warburg's morphology of the formulas of pathos – in his book sequence *L'Oeil de l'histoire* (2009–2016), but also in his remarkable film and video installation at the Palais de Tokyo (co-produced with Arno Gisinger), *Nouvelles histoires de fantômes / New Ghost Stories* (2014) – and T. J. Clark's re-reading of Picasso's *Guernica*, in

* Department of Sociology and Centre for Philosophy and Critical Thought, Goldsmiths, University of London

an exhibition at the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid co-curated with Anne Wagner, and especially in a catalogue essay on 'Picasso and Tragedy'. Elsewhere, I have tried to take issue with Clark's framing of 'politics in a tragic key',[1] whereas here I want to explore how the tragic can serve to configure, formally and visually, the constellations of the political.[2]

I will thus move from Didi-Huberman and Clark's partially divergent inflections of the tragic – as *atlas* and *scene* respectively – to explore it, with the aid of Carlo Ginzburg's recent work, from the angle of political iconography. This will then be followed by two explorations of how the political element *par excellence* of the tragic sensibility – *civil war*, be it as Greek *stasis*, Roman *bellum civile*, or a 'global civil war' – can be the object of iconographic depiction and contestation. First, I will explore the ongoing debate over the interpretation of the frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (which I would like to envisage here, to use a crucial concept from the art historian Joseph Leo Koerner, as a kind of *enemy image*[3]). Second, I will touch on some of the political, semiotic and forensic debates orbiting around the iconic images (and the covert or unwitnessed events) that marked the fateful collapse of Italy's 'long 1968' or 'red decade' into the infamous 'years of lead' – debates that involved semioticians like Umberto Eco, film-makers like Pier Paolo Pasolini and Elio Petri, as well as a vast and fractious galaxy of militancy, image-work and counterinformation. Though I will not directly address our neoliberal age and its mediascape, I hope that this methodological and conceptual inquiry can shed some light on how and why 'tragedy' and 'civil war' can become names for our present, but also what they might occlude – indeed, how much the state simulation of civil war, denounced by Toni Negri from prison in the early 1980s,[4] and earlier anatomised by Guy

1 See Alberto Toscano, 'Politics in a Tragic Key', *Radical Philosophy* 180, July-August 2013, pp. 25–34; also available at: <www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/politics-in-a-tragic-key> [accessed 14 June 2018].

2 An earlier and abbreviated version of this paper was delivered at the symposium 'Constellations of the Political: Media and Representation in the Neoliberal Age', University of Maryland, 20 April 2018. Many thanks to Mauro Resmini for his engagement and hospitality.

3 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Bosch and Bruegel: From Enemy Painting to Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

4 Toni Negri, 'Terrorism? *Nein, danke!*' in: *Diary of an Escape*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), esp. pp. 82–3 ('To destroy the image of civil war').

Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti,[5] was a crucial component of that creeping epochal *counter-revolution*, that mutation of the planner-state into a crisis-state, which is at the heart of neo-liberalism.

I. The Tragic Scene, or, The Vanished Fist

At the centre of Georges Didi-Huberman's imposing and compendious series *The Eye of History* lies Atlas, the figure of tragic knowledge that works to anchor Aby Warburg's anthropology of images and provides the *Atlas Mnemosyne*, the unfinished summa of Warburg's method and practice – as well as the chief inspiration behind Didi-Huberman's revitalisation of art history – with its symbol. *The Eye of History* incorporates searching, inventive and erudite explorations of the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Pier Paolo Pasolini, the video-work of Harun Farocki and Brecht's wartime collages – but also Goethe's morphology, the visual evidence of the extermination of European Jews, and the survivals of ancient astrological divination. But Atlas arguably provides *Eye*'s most compressed leitmotiv, and it is one presented under the sign of *tragedy*. In his effort to actualize Warburg's method – not least through another remarkable exhibition at the Reina Sofia Museum[6] – Didi-Huberman draws on Nietzsche, Freud, Bataille, Deleuze and Foucault (as well as Warburg's historical and methodological influences) to present the *Atlas Mnemosyne* as a particularly contemporary image-practice, one redolent with political significance.

At its heart, often occluded by an iconographic tradition of which Panofsky and Gombrich are the key luminaries, is an effort, deeply entangled with Warburg's own psycho-political history (his breakdown at the end of World War 1, after having led a collective project to map images and superstitions of the war, admirably dealt with in volume 3 of *The Eye of History*), to provide a kind of sampled order, an *échantillonnage*, of the chaos that defines (following Nietzsche and Georg Simmel) *modern culture as tragedy*. For Didi-Huberman, Warburg has an unmatched capacity to bind morphology and art history to the knowl-

5 Guy Debord, 'Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*' (1979), available at: <www.notbored.org/debord-preface.html> [accessed 14 June 2018]; Censor (Gianfranco Sanguinetti), *Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy* (1975), available at: <www.notbored.org/censor.html> [accessed 14 June 2018].

6 See the exhibition catalogue: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Atlas. How to Carry the World on One's Back?* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2010).

edge-through-suffering of what Brecht himself saw as a world out of joint, a *dislocated* world; this is a 'dynamographic' knowledge capable of gleaning how forms are birthed by forces, but also how in these forms and images we find survivals of the past – whether vivifying or mortifying. As a thinker of polarities, Warburg is perennially struggling with the relation between an astral reason and a monstrous disorder. Viewed through the prism of his work, the history of images becomes, in Didi-Huberman's estimation, 'the history of an ever-repeated tragedy between the worst of the *monstra* and the best of the *astra*', 'on the one side, the *tragedy* through which every culture makes show of its own monsters (*monstra*); on the other, the *knowledge* through which every culture explains, redeems or untangles the same monsters in the sphere of thought (*astra*)'.[7] This is a history grounded on a temporal understanding of images shot through with survivals, anachronisms and anticipations, which require (as in Benjamin, Bloch and others) new forms of montage, of assembly – ones also capable of capturing and countering 'the disassembly (*démontage*) of time in the tragic history of societies'.[8]

How does this ancient figure – whose gesture is repeated, at times in 'energetic inversions', across the ages – then serve as the emblem of an art-historical method capable of coping with the politics of the image in catastrophic times? For Didi-Huberman, the presence of Atlas – the vanquished warrior, punished like Prometheus for his rebellious hubris – within Warburg's *Atlas* offers an emblem of how power transfigured into suffering can in turn be transfigured into knowledge. His 'formula of pathos' (or *Pathosformel*, a key methodological invention of Warburg's, also at the heart of Carlo Ginzburg's studies in political iconography) is that of the immobilisation of conflict, the form of the latter's survival, combat immobilised by verticalization[9]; in this *figura sforzata* we find 'the dialectical image par excellence of the relation between power [*puissance*] and suffering, irresistible force and the danger of collapse'.[10] Atlas is here a powerful incarnation of a tragic dictum, from no less than Aeschylus himself, which haunts, in varying ways, all the works explored in *The Eye of History*: *pathei mathos*, knowledge through suffering. This is a dictum that Fredric Jameson has

7 Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Œil de l'Histoire – Tome 3: Atlas ou le gai savoir inquiet* (Paris: Minuit, 2011), pp. 84–5.

8 Ibid., p. 179.

9 Ibid., p. 101.

10 Ibid., p. 99.

transcoded into a Marxist, and, in its own non-melancholy manner, *tragic* register in *The Political Unconscious*:

> History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them.[11]

The knowledge of Atlas, which is also Warburg's knowledge, and the one generated by Brecht, Farocki, Godard and other artists revisited by Didi-Huberman (not least in his own installation work on the politics of lamentation at the Palais de Tokyo), is a disquieting, impure, intimate, abyssal and '*tragic* knowledge, a knowledge through contact and pain: everything he knew about the cosmos, [Atlas] drew it from his own misery, his own punishment'.[12] Yet Didi-Huberman also wishes to extract from Atlas a lesson of resistance, not just an aesthetics of lamentation. Or rather, he wants to demonstrate that from (tragic) lament too a politics (of images) may be drawn – in this sense resonating with the compelling pages of Andrea Cavalletti's *Class* on the nexus of lament and struggle, where the Italian scholar writes, citing both Marx and Benjamin: 'lament penetrates every sphere and its absence reveals the class enemy even in the words of the neighbour. The most vivid tendencies of lamentation in fact constantly "come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh". Thus, they "constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers".'[13] Didi-Huberman himself has put this position forth most emphatically in the curation and catalogue essays for the show *Soulèvements* (Uprisings), where his own writing and image selection is accompanied by new pieces from Judith Butler, Toni Negri, Marie-José Mondzain, Jacques Rancière and Nicole Brenez.[14]

11 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002 [1981]), p. 88.

12 Didi-Huberman, *L'Œil de l'Histoire – Tome 3*, p. 94.

13 Andrea Cavalletti, *Class*, ed. Alberto Toscano, trans. Elisa Fiaccadori (Calcutta: Seagull, forthcoming 2018), n. pg.

14 Georges Didi-Huberman (ed.), *Soulèvements* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016).

Didi-Huberman transfigures the artistic, political and media archive of 19th, 20th and 21st century revolts and revolutions into an atlas of *gestures*.[15]

At their core is the very gesture of uprising, of rising or lifting up, which is the direct counterpart to the load-bearing tragedy of Atlas, but never simply emancipates itself from it. While an effort to recover, reconstruct and reanimate a desire for emancipation out of the 'burning memory' of past struggles, Didi-Huberman's is also a retrospect that bathes uprisings in the hindsight of catastrophe and defeat, and in the claustrophobias of our present. In a way, it is attention to the emancipatory force and knowledge intrinsic to suffering itself that provides his approach with its distance from the apocalyptic or defeatist tonality of other contemporaries. If, as he puts it in his long catalogue essay for the *Soulèvements* show, 'Par les désirs (Fragment sur ce qui nous soulève)', it is *loss* (*la perte*) which raises up the world, then revolt is never vanquished. A similar reflection pertains to the association of power as *puissance* (dichotomised with *pouvoir* and linked instead to *impouvoir*) with *pathos*, with a power to be affected, a passion that is not relegated to the domain of passivity (Atlas's compressed power is never dissipated, his virtuality of uplift never exhausted).

But this morphology of revolt – notwithstanding the cognitive power of its montage, the beauty of its icons – is also haunted by the *generality* of 'the tragic' (as a condition, not a process, project or politics), by the way in which gestures can not only be inverted into opposing contents (as Warburg taught) but also become politically illegible in their analogies. Here a detail, albeit a patent one, can animate our doubt: the cover of the catalogue for *Soulèvements* reproduces (on back and front of the hardback) an image, taken from behind, of two youths lobbing rocks in a demonstration, or riot. The caption tells us these were pictures taken by Gilles Caron (a French photographer who disappeared in 1970 whilst covering wars in Cambodia) in 1969, and that they depict 'Anti-Catholic riots'. At first, I wondered how a book and exhibition that leans towards the view that all uprisings – *as gestures* – are on the side of the positive desires of

[15] Here we would need to dwell at some length on the centrality of gesture to Warburg's *Pathosformel*, but also reference the writings on Brecht on *gestus*, of Agamben's on gesture as a crucial element of a politics of pure means, but also Evan Calder Williams's remarkable exploration of the gestures of revolt. See Evan Calder Williams, 'Seven Gestures of Revolt', *Europa, Futuro Anterior.* Available at: <europafuturoanterior.com/en/interventions> [accessed 14 June 2018].

puissance and not for *pouvoir*, and that the solidarity between these gestures is in their also being gestures of solidarity, could have as its icon a Northern Irish Loyalist riot – one whose political orientation would (to most leftists at least) seem problematic. A quick search revealed instead that these are images from the 'Battle of the Bogside' in Derry (Londonderry), where Catholic youths faced up against Royal Ulster Constabulary forces. Anecdotal perhaps, but such an erratum suggests the question: Does an atlas or morphology of political gestures based on the tragic nexus between suffering and uprising really articulate a kind of 'knowledge', a political *pathei mathos*?

Clark's essay 'Picasso and Tragedy' prolongs the political orientation of his plea 'For a Left without a Future'[16] into the domain of art-historical analysis and curatorship. The Reina Sofia exhibition seeks to articulate a different narrative of the painting's genesis, one attuned to how it was prepared by the stylistic, formal and thematic orientation of Picasso's work of the early thirties. This curatorial intervention met with considerable contestation in Spain, where its seemingly 'internalist' approach was viewed as a problematic deviation from the framing of *Guernica* as the political icon of the Spanish Civil War in the museum's (admirably assembled) permanent exhibition. Clark and his co-curator Anne Wagner legitimately retorted that their effort was not to replace the historical-political contextualisation of *Guernica*'s prior presentation, but rather to unsettle, by way of counterpoint, the idea of Picasso as having unequivocally responded to the event of the German slaughter with an image of timeless force. But what I am preoccupied with here is the manner in which this curatorial reorientation takes place under the aegis of *tragedy* – more specifically under the banner of A. C. Bradley's interpretation of tragedy as a unified 'impression of *waste*' and an image of the fated collapse of human greatness into destruction and devastation.[17]

The aim of this effort, like that of Clark's programmatic essay in the *New Left Review*, is manifestly *contemporary*. Indeed, it is introduced to explain the seeming enigma of *Guernica*'s formidable circulation as an icon of violence in our age of neoliberalism – or, to cite the subtitle of the RETORT intervention to which

16 T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', *New Left Review* 74, March–April 2012, pp. 53–75.

17 A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1904]).

Clark contributed, *Capital and Spectacle in the New Age of War*.[18] Clark enlists his art-historical virtuosity to unearth, in Picasso's own trajectory – as well as in the profane illumination of his work by the likes of Carl Einstein, Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris (whose essays from *Documents* are incorporated into the catalogue) – the reasons for how and why *Guernica* could endure as 'our culture's Tragic Scene', one that Clark clearly perceives – for ill and good alike – as bereft of an emancipatory *project*. There is a perhaps unintended irony in this effort, namely that the excavation of the elements, motifs and gestures behind *Guernica*'s composition, the painstaking work of art-historical detection, seems at least in part to sanction a *timeless* view of the painting, of the kind that a certain understanding of the 'horrors of war' (popular-frontist first, left-liberal later) strives to convey.

Clark defines the 'tragic scene', of which *Guernica* is the unexampled instance, as 'the moment in human existence … when death and vulnerability are recognized as such by an individual or a group, but too late; and the plunge into undefended mortality that follows excites not just horror in those who look on, but Pity and Terror – in a mixture that frightens but strengthens'.[19] It is one of the great critical virtues of Clark's essay, and of Clark and Wagner's exhibition, to suggest and to show that *Guernica*'s capacity to both address and transcend its own occasion, and serve as a kind of portable icon of denunciation, has a rather disturbing condition of possibility, namely Picasso's fascination (a term that Clark pointedly traces back to the Latin *fascinus*, erect penis) with sexual monstrosity and violence. This is something that surfaces disturbingly in Picasso's drawings of rape from the early 1930s, as well as in his fall-out with, of all people, Jacques Lacan, triggered by Picasso's plea for the cruel and tragic grandeur of the Papin sisters, whose 'senseless' and eroticised murders were later committed to film by Claude Chabrol. Clark proposes that the path to a politics of tragedy in Picasso is through an identification – itself enmeshed in the darker drives – with monstrosity. To elucidate why Picasso's *Guernica* is the tragic scene of our age would then also be to trace a 'way' – which the itinerary of the exhibition approximates – from 'monstrosity *to* tragedy'. As Clark insists:

18 Iain A. Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso, 2005).

19 T. J. Clark, 'Picasso and Tragedy', in *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path to Guernica*, ed. T. J. Clark and Anne M. Wagner (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2017), p. 22.

'The one must be capable of being folded into the other, lending it aspects of the previous vision's power'.[20]

Thus, by contrast with Clement Greenberg's claim that Picasso could not attain *terribilità*, Picasso's apparently apolitical immersion into the reversible nexus of Eros and Thanatos in the early 1930s could contribute to his singular ability to 'find a way to make appearance truly terrible, therefore pitiful and unforgivable – a permanent denunciation of any *praxis*, any set of human reasons, which aims or claims to make *what actually happens* (in war from the air) make sense'.[21] Passages such as this already suggest how troubled the relation between the tragic and the political is in Clark, since tragedy appears in and as the failure of project and practice, as a way of bringing formal unity to fractured, ravaged waste – in order, in Clark's words, to depict a 'new shape of suffering'. Building on the disquieting amalgam of 'domesticity and paranoia'[22] that marks his art in the phase immediately preceding *Guernica*, Picasso would give us an 'existence transfigured by fear', in which 'Everything is unknown, and therefore hostile'.[23] This hostility attains crushingly epochal proportions (or rather disproportions) in the age of total war, but Picasso's ability to shape and form the present *as tragedy* in such a lasting manner would then depend on drawing on a very quotidian horror, and on an identification and fascination with it. *Guernica* can accordingly be approached as 'a *realization* of horror … knowing horror obsessively and intimately, dwelling with it, being under its spell, recognizing it as part of the self – and certainly part of the history of one's time'.[24]

It is unsurprising then that what permits *Guernica's* endurance as a tragic scene in the age of a 'left without a future' is the subtraction of any explicit political symbolism from the painting, in the guise of the raised fist of the fallen soldier which – as testified by Dora Maar's photographs – is painted out of the painting's final version. Strikingly, if somewhat improbably, tracing an arc from A. C. Bradley, through Einstein, Leiris and Bataille, to Judith Butler's latest thinking on the image-politics of grievable life, Clark suggests that: 'The image of politics *Guernica* ended up proposing [instead of that of heroic communist opposition] was one

[20] Ibid., p. 23.
[21] Ibid., p. 24.
[22] Ibid., p. 32.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 39.

in which the "affiliation" and "collective resistance" there *in* human "vulnerability" – is what can be shown – understood as a shared tragic fate'.[25] Butler, in a now familiar pairing, is here accompanied by the Hannah Arendt of *On Violence*, improbably read as pitting Georges Sorel's image-myth of the general strike as a 'picture of complete catastrophe' against Frantz Fanon's supposedly romantic project of violent decolonisation (it would not be difficult to demonstrate how Fanon is a much subtler thinker of bodily and psychic vulnerability and its dialectic with emancipatory violence, but that is for a different paper).

As in Clark's earlier programmatic call 'For a Left without a Future', this melancholy celebration and repetition of the death of emancipation as project is predicated (as I have argued it is in David C. Scott's related reading of C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins*) on an elision of the intrinsically tragic form that the greatest 20th century thinkers of liberation gave to the communist project – from Sartre to Fanon, Luxemburg to James, Lukács to Césaire. Note here that the effort in this heterogeneous tradition to think violence *from the inside* is precisely what is disavowed by Clark's unwillingness to reflect on the differences (as well as the fateful interlocking) of war 'as such' from civil war or revolution. This is evident, for instance, when he writes that 'the prominence of war in modernity – and the fear it may be modernity's truth – is not a matter of more and more (or less and less) actual conflict, but of violence as the *form* – the tempo, the figure, the *fascinus* – of our culture's production of appearances'.[26]

By way of a politically-enlightening counter to Clark's tragic scene, I want to turn now to Carlo Ginzburg's recent study of the genesis of *Guernica* – a study whose Warburgian take on political iconography would seem to align it with Didi-Huberman's work, but whose political instincts and forensic methodology result in a more pointed critical lesson than the one we can draw from the two contemporary left thinkers of the tragedy of culture with which we've begun. Though his approach differs markedly from Clark's, eschewing catachresis for the sake of formal arguments which, while never short of inventiveness, always

[25] Ibid., p. 53.

[26] Ibid., p. 55. Our critique of Clark here would need to be prolonged with a necessary critique of Didi-Huberman's own elision of the revolutionary character of Benjamin's understanding of politics as 'the organization of pessimism', whose own tragic character is not incompatible, indeed it requires, an uncompromising partisanship – in other words, organization does not vanish into pessimism.

find an anchor in precise clues and traces, Ginzburg's text moves through much of the same terrain, most significantly inquiring into Picasso's relation to the intellectuals around *Documents* (chiefly Bataille and Einstein) and exploring the possible rationales for the excision of the explicitly political iconography of earlier versions of the painting (here Ginzburg nicely recalls Picasso's dictum: 'a picture is a sum of destructions'). While seeking the political ambiguity of Picasso's work of the 1920s and 1930s in his relation to classicism rather than in sexualised monstrosity,[27] Ginzburg takes his cue from some of the Spanish painter's less enthusiastic critics to challenge the very ambiguity (rather than forceful universality) of the painting itself. In particular, he cites Anthony Blunt's early dismissal of the painting's lack of political specificity ('the painting is disillusioning. Fundamentally, it is the same as Picasso's bull-fight scenes. It is not an act of public mourning, but the expression of a private brain-storm'), as well as, and more to the point, Timothy Hilton's judgment that 'Guernica is a *vague* painting', and that it would be 'double-talk' to present its iconographic and thematic uncertainties as 'universal'.[28]

The critical, and political, core of Ginzburg's extremely compelling inquiry into the painting's genesis is a kind of echo of Blunt and Hilton's disillusion, and is bluntly phrased: 'In this icon of anti-Fascist art, Fascism is absent'.[29] The absenting of Fascism is particularly evident in the vanishing of the fallen soldier's fist and the mutation of the sun into a lightbulb. With nuance and conviction, Ginzburg traces these either by way of direct influence or resonance to Georges Bataille, whose journal *Documents* had devoted a special issue to the Spanish painter – with articles by Leiris, Einstein and Bataille himself, all of them operating as crucial references for Clark's own analysis. In particular, Ginzburg sees the metamorphosis of the natural sun into a naked lightbulb as an uncannily precise transposition of Bataille's argument, in his eponymous 1930 essay, about a 'rotten sun' replacing the splendid, natural one of a high-artistic tradition, the sun of production giving way to the sun of decay, an argument climaxing in the vision of 'the horror emanating from a brilliant arc lamp'.

---

27 This is a theme that also emerges in Clark's earlier *Picasso and Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), and is tackled in Malcom Bull's critical review of Clark's book: 'Pure Mediterranean', *London Review of Books* Vol. 36 No. 4, 20 February 2014, pp. 21–23.

28 Carlo Ginzburg, 'The Sword and Lightbulb: A Reading of *Guernica*', in *Fear, Reverence, Terror: Five Essays in Political Iconography* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2017), p. 216.

29 Ibid.

But an even more powerful counter to Clark's melancholy sublimation of *Guernica* is to be found in further evidence of how Picasso may have incorporated Bataille's private mythology into his own, namely the way in which the French philosopher, in a 'Nietzschean Chronicle' roughly contemporary with *Guernica*, deployed his trenchant critique of popular-frontist or humanist anti-fascism in the myth-image of Numantia, the Spanish city that had resisted Roman invasion. Up against the homologous sovereignty imposed by totalitarian states, the only alternative for Bataille was 'the community without a leader, bound together by the obsessive image of tragedy'[30] – in the conviction that a leaderless community could only find its bond in death. Here Ginzburg's unearthing of the Bataillean notes in Picasso's tragic scene can also serve to indicate the potential vacillation of a post-revolutionary politics of vulnerability into a negative anthropology of finitude, whose resources for resistance may be found wanting. As he concludes his essay: 'Bataille's ambiguous critique of the limits of anti-Fascism may throw light on the paradox of *Guernica* – a quintessential anti-Fascist painting from which the Fascist enemy is absent, replaced by a community of humans and animals connected by tragedy and death'.[31] We could ask then, with Ginzburg: is the condition for the appearance of a contemporary, but trans-situational, tragic scene, the erasure of the specific sources of that tragedy, be they fascism, racism or capital? A flattening of social war, imperialist war, civil war onto war *simpliciter*?

II. Pictures of *Stásis*

Agamben's *Stásis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm* is the slim final volume of the *Homo Sacer* series, published, with some architectonic confusion (it is listed as II.2, originally the designation for *The Kingdom and the Glory*) after the compendious *The Use of Bodies*, which closes if not completes the series. *Stásis* is composed of two seminar presentations on a theme, civil war, which has coursed in and out of Agamben's work, and in those of some of his intellectual and political comrades (namely Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee). Here it is dealt with first in a dialogue with the brilliant historian of *stásis* in Ancient Athens, Nicole Loraux, and then, in the essay from which my remarks here take

30 Bataille, quoted in Ginzburg, 'The Sword and the Lightbulb', p. 221.

31 Ibid., p. 222.

their cue, in an attempt to excavate, from an analysis of the 1651 frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, a *philosophical iconology* of civil war.

Agamben's work here is deeply indebted to the scholarly attention recently lavished on the frontispiece, and on the place of the visual in Hobbes's theory of politics, by several scholars, most significantly perhaps the art historian Horst Bredekamp, whose work on the 'Urbild' of the modern state remains the guiding reference.[32] Following Bredekamp, the frontispiece has been the object of investigation by Carlo Ginzburg, in his striking 2008 essay 'Fear Reverence Terror: Rereading Hobbes Today',[33] and, in the same year, in Quentin Skinner's *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*. Where Agamben evokes a yet inexistent science called *philosophical iconology*, Bredekamp and Ginzburg speak with regard to the frontispiece of *political iconography*. In this section, I want to explore some of the iconographic findings and political theses emerging out of this wide-ranging focus on the frontispiece, paying particular attention to the question of how we might think the time and subjectivity of a political interregnum, as a time of unsettled divisions under the shadow of the state.

The frontispiece operates as an emblematic threshold and over-determined allegory of Hobbes's theory of the state. Hobbes participated directly (as he had in the frontispieces of his translation of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* and *De Cive*) in its design (likely by the engraver Abraham Bosse), which is redolent with enigmas, some of which we'll touch on, for instance: What is the meaning of the arrangement of gazes between sovereign and subjects? On what is this '*Mortall God*' standing? The question Agamben homes in on is a different one: why is the fortified city over which this 'android' looms – a *rex populus* in which the *rex* is the head, and the *cives* the *corpor*e – empty? For Agamben, as he remarks in the brief prefatory note to *Stasis*, the 'constitutive element' of the modern state is *ademia*, the absence of a people. At the same time, civil war – precisely because it is rarely *thought* in political philosophy, which lacks a real

[32] Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes visuelle Strategien: Der Leviathan, Urbild des modernen Staates – Werkillustrationen und Portraits* (Berlin: Akademie, 1999). I quote here from the French translation: *Stratégies visuelles de Thomas Hobbes. Le Léviathan, archétype de l'État moderne : illustration des oeuvres et portraits* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2003).

[33] Now in: *Fear, Reverence, Terror*, op. cit.

stasiology – is the 'fundamental threshold of politicisation of the West'.[34] The frontispiece will bring these two theses together.

The fields and city we encounter in the frontispiece are of course not properly speaking empty. Yes, the multitude have been symbolically composed, neutralised and pacified into a people, 'deported' we could say, over the horizon. But there are figures in the landscape. In the main, these are soldiers, patrolling both within and without the city. In a recent paper, Magnus Kristiansson and Johan Tralau have argued that far from being a picture of pacification, the frontispiece subtly indicates a state of war – more specifically, as firing from forts and roadblocks indicate, preparations for an invasion from abroad.[35]

A reflection on Hobbes's place within the horizon of possessive individualism may also want to reflect on the fact that there is no labour taking place in the frontispiece, contrasting greatly with the far less dialectical but more didactic frontispiece of the 1642 *De Cive*, which, following the emblematic literature of Hobbes's day, produces a stark juxtaposition between an Imperium looking over commodious, ordered and improving labour, on the one hand, and, on the other, an image of Libertas, entirely grounded on the equation between the original state of nature and the contemporary figure of the North American 'savage', which stands over a scene in which *stásis* devolves into manhunting. The forgetting of *labour* in Agamben's diagnosis of *ademia*, which resonates with his subtraction of class from his investigation of *stásis*, certainly calls for further investigation.

Following a detail stressed by Francisca Falk and also commented upon, following her work, by Ginzburg, Agamben turns our attention to two figures, 3mm high in the original image, standing beside the church. These are plague doctors, wearing their characteristic birdlike beaked masks. Both Agamben and Ginzburg point us towards the affinity between civil war (*stásis*) and epidemic which Hobbes had encountered and emphasised in his 1629 translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (whose frontispiece also includes a

34 Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. Nicholas Heron (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. ix.

35 Magnus Kristiansson and Johan Tralau, 'Hobbes's hidden monster: A new interpretation of the frontispiece of Leviathan', *European Journal of Political Theory* 13(3) (2014): pp. 299–320.

telling image of democracy as dissension; Hobbes himself was proud of having drawn the map himself). In the Second Book, Chapter 53, Hobbes translates Thucydides' account of the Athenian plague as follows:

> *And the great licentiousness ... began at first from this disease. For that which a man before would dissemble and not acknowledge to be done from voluptuousness, he durst now do freely, seeing before his eyes such quick revolution, of the rich dying and men worth nothing inheriting their estates. ... Neither the fear of the gods nor laws of men awed any man.*

This arresting image of the world upside down, stripped of law, is echoed in the famous passages in the Third Book, Chapter 82, on the *stásis* in Corcyra.

> *The cities therefore being now in sedition and those that fell into it later having heard what had been done in the former, they far exceeded the same in newness of conceit, both for the art of assailing and for the strangeness of their revenges. The received value of names imposed for signification of things was changed into arbitrary. ... A furious suddenness was reputed a point of valour.*

Agamben and Ginzburg alike note the manner in which Thucydides-Hobbes's description of the plague joins *anomia* (translated by Hobbes as 'licentiousness') to *metabole* (here rendered as 'revolution'). Agamben sees the Leviathan's punitive allegory of the body politic as sovereign android as the point of precarious equilibrium in a cyclical movement where *a disunited multitude* generated by civil war (or originarily, by the state of nature) is composed into a *rex populus* which in turn having, so to speak, *evacuated the people into the sovereign*, makes of the multitude under a condition of sovereignty only a *multitudo dissoluta*, ready to tip (back) into civil war.

The dissolved multitude thus appears as an amorphous mass of the plague-stricken. In Agamben's own words, it is as if, 'the life of the multitude in the profane kingdom is necessarily exposed to the plague of dissolution'.[36] Conversely: '*The people is ... the absolutely present which, as such, can never be present and therefore can only be represented*'.[37] The presence of the plague makes the *bio*-politi-

[36] Agamben, *Stasis*, p. 58.

[37] Ibid., p. 59.

cal character of the frontispiece patent, as a symbolic realisation of the central motto of the Hobbesian state (in *De Cive* Ch. 13 and *Leviathan* Ch. 30), recalled by Agamben: *salus populi suprema lex* ('the health of the people is the supreme law'). But, as readers of the volume of *Homo Sacer* that *Stasis* displaced from its position as II.2, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, would know, such a biopolitics is not separable from the state's spectacle of *glory*.

Agamben, curiously, does not really address the manner in which the frontispiece performs the Hobbesian necessity of a 'visible Power to keep [subjects] in awe'. This is instead, at the core of Ginzburg's inquiry, which traces with characteristic nuance, insight and erudition the manner in which the choice of *awe* to translate the Greek verb *apeirgein* (to hold back) – understood as the crucial antidote to the dissolution of the political body – can be traced back to the discussion of religion in a metaphorical travelogue by one of Hobbes's partners in the colonial Virginia Company, Samuel Purchas. Purchas was *criticising* the view of religion as *a continued custome, or a wiser Policie, to hold men in awe* – whereas Hobbes drew the origins of religion precisely from *anxiety* and *perpetuall feare*.

> *And they that make little, or no enquiry into the naturall causes of things, yet from the feare that proceeds from the ignorance it selfe, of what it is that hath the power to do them much good or harm, are inclined to suppose, and feign unto themselves several kinds of Powers Invisible; and to stand in awe of their own imaginations.* (*Leviathan*, Ch. XI)

Agamben, following Bredekamp, treats the Hobbesian state-fetish as a fundamentally *optical dispositif*. As Bredekamp observes:

> one invaluable source for Leviathan is the epic by his poet friend Sir William Davenant, 'Gondibert', which Hobbes compared to the optical technique of the perspective glass. To the extent that the poem developed the *topoi* of civil war and loyalty to a sovereign as fundamental alternatives, it had a similar effect to looking through the perspective glass, according to Hobbes.[38]

In Bredekamp's gloss: 'By optically sacrificing themselves, they form their sovereign.' Following Ginzburg's suggestions, we may want to consider the ways in

[38] Bredekamp, *Stratégies visuelles*, p. 42.

which the *Real Unity* of the Leviathan-sovereign as person is undermined, in a kind of immanent ideology-critique, by this wonderful expression: 'to stand in awe of their own imaginations', a phrase that unsettles the key doctrine of *authorisation* in the Leviathan. As Skinner has it, to the extent that subjects 'have already bound themselves "every man to every man, to Own, and be reputed Author of all, that he that already is their Soveraigne, shall do, and judge fit to be done". If they cast him off, they will simply fall into the contradiction of authorising and repudiating his actions at one and the same time'.[39] Note also how the verb 'to feign' carries across from the materialist critique of religious awe to the political prescription of the necessary representation of the *populus* in the person of the *rex*. As Hobbes has it in Ch. XVI of Book I of *Leviathan*:

> *A person, is he whose words or actions, are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by Fiction.* When they are considered as his owne, then is he a *Naturall Person*: And when they are considered as representing the words and actions of an other, then is he a *Feigned* or *Artificiall person*.

We may suggest then that what joins the biopolitical *ademia* of the Leviathan with the sacred political terror that it is engineered to generate is the very operation of *ideology*, in which subjects do not just *authorise* the sovereign but, so to speak, *stand in awe of their own authorisation*.[40] Contrary to the continuity within a 'political paradigm of the West' that Agamben stresses, a consideration of political iconography can bring out the caesura represented by the frontispiece. Skinner suggestively contrasts the frontispiece to the *Eikon Basilike*, the immensely successful apologia for Charles I, allegedly written by the king himself and published on the day of his decapitation, with Hobbes's frontispiece. By contrast, we can simply focus on the image of the people in the two frontispieces. In the *Eikon Basilikon* it is the 'natural person' of the king which is the

[39] Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 164–5.

[40] It is difficult in this respect not to treat the *détournement* of the frontispiece in a later history of ancient Britain, Aylett Sammes's 1672 *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata*, to represent the ritual of collective immolation in the 'wicker man', as a kind of acerbic commentary on the immanent dissolution of the Leviathan, something perhaps even more ironically attested in the eponymous 1973 film, where it is a representative of church and state, a deeply religious cop, who finds his demise inside this pagan artificial person.

object of reverence and respect. As Skinner notes 'There is no suggestion that the people might have played any role in the instituting of his authority'.[41]

On the contrary, in the explanation of the emblem, we see the people allegorically represented as the waves in the upper left corner crashing against the immobile rock of the sovereign (*furorem / Irati Populi* Rupes immota *repello*). Far from being a distant raging, the people make up the *scales* in the Leviathan's armour. As the doctrine of authorisation suggests, the sovereign is, in a sense, *nothing but its subjects*. That is why we can follow Skinner's suggestion that the Leviathan is a kind of reactive image, one that takes very seriously the novelty introduced by its republican and revolutionary nemesis: its 'representation of sovereign power [is] one that visibly embraces rather than defies the revolutionary changes that had taken place'.[42] Ellen and Neal Wood refer to this process as one of *redefinition* and *neutralisation* of the multitude.[43] This is even testified to by the almost identical arrangement of gazes between the frontispiece and the 1651 seal of the Commonwealth (this is reproduced in Skinner, but not commented upon), though *unlike* the arrangement of the gazes in the hand-drawn frontispiece for the *Leviathan* offered to Charles II, in which the awed faces look directly at the king, or for the 1652 French edition of *De Corpore Politico*, where there is actually communication and dissension, as well as social difference, among the component parts.

While civil war may be a threshold of politicisation, Agamben's over-extension of the Western paradigm of politics tellingly ignores the very revolutionary thought and movement that coursed through the English civil war, interestingly repeating the seeming equation between ancient and modern civil war that Hobbes's translation of Thucydides intimates. The frontispiece, as machine, monster, android, artifice, which is to say *representative*, allows Agamben to engineer his own *logical time* of politics, breaking out of which can only take a messianic form.

41 Ibid., p. 184.

42 Ibid., p. 185.

43 Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *A Trumpet of Sedition: Political Theory and the Rise of Capitalism, 1509–1688* (London: Pluto, 1997).

In this regard, we may instead draw greater inspiration from Bredekamp's suggestion that, among other sources, we should see in the frontispiece the effect of the tradition of the *state effigy*, 'created to fill the period of an interregnum with a quasi-active representation of the state'.[44] As he concludes: 'The idea of confronting civil war with a colossal living statue to represent peace as an "artificial eternity" is one of the most radical consequences of Hobbes's attempt to raise the conflict between the passions of the natural state and the artificiality of reason to the level of a political iconography of time'.[45] Behind this lay the idea of the time of war, of *wartime*. Hobbes's state effigy – the state *as* effigy – was there not to vault a passing interim, but to confront a durable state, memorably described by Hobbes in Ch. XIII of *Leviathan*: 'For *WARRE, consisteth not in battle onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known; and therefore the notion of* Time*, is to be considered in the nature of Warre; as is in the nature of Weather*'. Perhaps Agamben's *iconologia philosophica*, sundering time into the permanent present of representation and the messianic *à-venir*, cannot think this time, a time which is *not* that of the concept but a time of civil war, whose icon might be, as Bredekamp suggests, a melancholy Goyian colossus rather than a Hobbesian one.

III. Civil Wars in Italy

On May 14, 1977 a demonstration is called in Milan by the extra-parliamentary left, incorporating sundry student and worker collectives in the so-called autonomist galaxy – some close to *Rosso*, the newspaper of the Autonomia operaia organizzata that had in Toni Negri its most prominent theorist. The demonstration was in response to the killing – likely by a non-uniformed policeman – of a young woman, Giorgiana Masi, at a mass demonstration called by the Radical Party to celebrate the anniversary of the referendum legalizing divorce in Italy. At a certain juncture, a group of autonomists splits off from the main demonstration, heading towards the local prison (which it seems they intended but ultimately desisted from attacking) and eventually comes upon a division of policemen – at which point a number of the demonstrators, previously organised in makeshift combat cells, begin to shoot at the forces of order. A policeman, Antonio Custrà, is killed.

44 Bredekamp, *Stratégies visuelles*, p. 36.

45 Ibid.

This is not the first time the more radical wings of the 'movement of '77' come armed to demonstrations – and indeed the question of mass armed insurrectionary violence is one of the leitmotivs in the literature of the movement, *Rosso* especially – but it is recognised as a watershed, by militants and detractors alike; it is perceived as the moment in which the collective tumult of a movement that was, in some ways, the culmination (but also the mutation) of Italy's anomalously long '68, fragmented and gave way to an exponential intensification of armed struggle; in which the targeted kidnaps and assassinations of the Red Brigades, Prima Linea and a galaxy of other smaller formations took over from a mass insurrectionary line for which the armed demonstration was on a continuum with house occupations, proletarian self-defense, industrial sabotage, and the like. Now, this moment was not just recorded, but arguably catalysed by a photograph, published the next day in the *Corriere d'Informazione*, showing a crouched demonstrator shooting at the police.[46] This image now graces the Italian Wikipedia page for the 'anni di piombo' (Years of Lead), and has long been recognised as the emblem of the tragic negativity that swallowed up the 'creative' dimensions of the '77 movement (note that in a politically symptomatic iconographic choice, the English counterpart of this page in Wikipedia has an aerial shot of the aftermath of the 1980 bombing of the Bologna train station, an act of indiscriminate terrorism traceable to the collaboration of the Italian deep state and fascist elements).

One of the sources of the iconic becoming of this image was an article published on May 29 by the semiotician Umberto Eco in the weekly *L'Espresso* under the title 'Una foto' (A photo). Basing himself on a hypothesis about what we could call the 'autonomy of the symbolic', the way in which both political positions and everyday life are, as Eco puts it, 'filtered … through "already seen" images', in which we lived through 'interposed communication', he goes on to note that the photo had the effect of both registering and accelerating a process of collective distancing of the broader left vis-à-vis the movement's extremism. The photo could condense a prior unease and effect a transformation because it produced an image that *broke* with the iconographic tradition of the workers' movement –

[46] For a reproduction of the photograph, taken by Paolo Pedrizzetti, and a thorough analysis of the multiple depictions of the 14 May 1977 clashes, see Damiano Palano, '14 maggio 1977. Una foto in Via De Amicis. L'immagine icona degli anni di piombo quarantuno anni dopo', *maelstrom*, 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.damianopalano.com/2018/05/14-maggio-1977-una-foto-in-via-de.html> [accessed 15 June 2018].

an iconography of *collectives* in contexts of oppression or revolt, in which political violence could only be associated with the revolutionary individual in the moment of martyrdom or death (as in the iconic images of Che exposed, Christ-like, by the Bolivian army on a slab, or Robert Capa's image of the dying Spanish Republican soldier). The image of the shooter instead 'did not look like any of the images in which, for four generations, the idea of revolution had come to be emblematised'; this individual anti-hero was no relative, however distant, of the revolutionary hero. His isolation was an echo or symptom of a visual culture which Eco pointedly relates to Clint Eastwood's .44 Magnum in *Dirty Harry* or the lone shooters of American Westerns (more reason for an allergic reaction by a generation for whom these were thoroughly negative figures). Eco concludes that in a society that thinks in and by images the photo was a winning argument; notwithstanding the conditions of its production, even its truthfulness, as soon as it appeared 'its communicative trajectory began: and once again the political and the private were traversed by the webs of the symbolic, which, as it always happens, has demonstrated itself as productive of reality'.

In 2011, a volume was published trying to produce a kind of collective archaeology of this image, and Eco's essay became its critical foil. What several of the authors indicated, especially the two semioticians Paolo Fabbri and Tiziana Migliore, operating on Eco's terrain, is how much that article had itself participated in the construction, the framing of the image as an effective symbol of the collapse of the movement of '77 into nihilistic armed struggle.[47] For Fabbri and Migliore, Eco's extremely cursory description of the image, as one of violent isolation and as the inversion of a left political iconography, is based on an excision of everything that indicates the fact that the shooter was actually part of a collective process – be it the presence of armed and non-armed militants working in solidarity, the visibility of the fleeing demonstrators in the topmost left corner, or political pamphlets strewn on the ground. Eco's article also suffers from an insufficient reflection on the elements making up this icon of civ-

[47] See Paolo Fabbri and Tiziana Migliore, '14 maggio 1977. La sovversione nel mirino', in Sergio Bianchi ed., *Storia di una foto: 14 maggio 1977, Milano, via De Amicis. La costruzione dell'immagine icona degli «anni di piombo». Contesti e retroscene* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2011), pp. 136–41. Available at: <www.paolofabbri.it/articoli/14maggio1977.html> [accessed 14 June 2018]. See also Paolo Fabbri and Tiziana Migliore, 'Col senno di poi. Intorno a "14 maggio 1977. La sovversione nel mirino"', in: *E/C, rivista on-line*. Available at: <www.paolofabbri.it/articoli/sennodipoi.html> [accessed 14 June 2018].

il war, among them the necessary but invisible presence of the opponent (the police) off-screen, but also the Meninas-like *mise en abyme* of the image by the presence of a photographer on the opposite pavement, shooting both the shooter and the photographer (thus creating, as Fabbri and Migliore note, a 'spatial chiasmus' between the shooter-police axis left-to-right and the two photographers). As well as applying a Greimasian semiotic lens to criticise Eco, Fabbri and Migliore also bring to bear the other images of the demonstration (some of which, kept hidden by one of the photographers more sympathetic to the demonstrators, would later serve as evidence in a conviction – the shot that killed the policeman turns out not to have been fired by the shooter in the image). We could also note how political violence and a collective or group iconography were not disjoined in many images of the time, be it in the photograph of the masked and armed high-school students which graced the cover of *L'Espresso* the week before Eco's article, or the picture of the two armed autonomists Paolo and Daddo helping each other after having been shot by the police in an anti-fascist demonstration earlier that year, or, indeed, the way in which the infamous P38, the gun that came to symbolise the armed drift of the movement, was incorporated into a recognisably collective icon in a famous cover of the newspaper *Rosso* under the heading 'You've paid dearly, but you haven't paid for everything' (*Avete pagato caro, non avete pagato tutto*).

Eliding these less simply legible images – not to mention the ones of police violence, the bodies of dead demonstrators, or indeed the police shooters likely behind the death of Giorgiana Masi (in a famous photograph by Tano D'Amico) – and 'cropping' his discourse on a photo, which thus becomes *the* photo of the *anni di piombo*, Eco's framing effectively re-framed the photo, to the point that it is now very often reproduced with the shooter in full isolation from the demonstration from which he emerged. The winning or functioning argument was not so much the photo's own, but Eco's (as Maurizio Lazzarato's critique of the latter noted, the symbolic always requires a whole machinic assemblage of enunciation[48]). But I want to dwell on Fabbri and Migliore's astute reflection on political icons, because it takes us further into a critical reflection on the potentialities of political iconography:

[48] Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Storia di una foto', in: Lanfranco Caminiti and Sergio Bianchi eds., *Gli autonomi – volume III* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2008).

> The effect obtained by great Icons, and especially the Symbols of an epoch or given culture, is opacity. A snapshot – dynamic and intricate in itself – in becoming symbol becomes static and compact. The image transmuted into the condition of symbol slides from its concrete occurrence, which implied density, by way of the survival of things within the sign, into abstraction, which dissipates them. It circulates so much, and is so often reproduced, that consumption vanquishes meaning: it seals its contents, determines a passage from 'species' to 'genera' which makes it 'vague', and wears it away.

Or, as Girolamo de Michele notes, in a review of *Storia di una foto*, 'it is the potential representation of any represented whatever: it seems built on purpose to become a photo-symbol'.[49]

These critical notes on the genesis of the icon of Italy's creeping social and civil war of the 1970s and early 1980s can also lead to a more positive conclusion, one which in a way ties back to Carlo Ginzburg's methodological approach – namely, to put it briefly, that only *inquiry* (a term whose political valence was incidentally crucial to the Italian Marxism of the 60s and 70s) can overcome the limits, the instrumentalisable mythic opacity and vagueness of the *icon*. This inquiry, in the Italian case, took, among other forms, a specifically filmic guise. In 1970, as part of Committee of Filmmakers Against Repression the great director Elio Petri produced a short film (which was joined with Nelo Risi's Giuseppe Pinelli), *Tre ipotesi sulla morte di Pinelli*, in which Gian Maria Volonté and three other actors, in a kind of Brechtian counter-investigation, dramatized the implausibility of the official accounts of the 'accidental' death of the anarchist initially framed for the bombing of the Bank of Agriculture in Piazza Fontana in 1969 (a product of the state-led 'strategy of tension' which reacted to the worker and student insurgencies of the Italian '68 and conditioned the climate of violence of the ensuing years).[50]

[49] Girolamo de Michele, 'Sotto ogni foto c'è una didascalia', *Carmilla*, 12 May 2011, <www.carmillaonline.com/2011/05/12/sotto-ogni-foto-c-una-didascalia> [accessed 14 June 2018].

[50] Petri's short film is available here: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8D9qmofQ_Y> [accessed 14 June 2018]. Ginzburg himself provided a crucial inquiry into Italy's own creeping civil war in a study where his long experience of reading mediaeval inquisition trials was brought to bear on the dismantling of the prosecution's case against his friend Adriano Sofri. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late Twentieth-Century Miscarriage of Justice* (London: Verso, 2002). Sofri, former leader of

In 1972, Pier Paolo Pasolini collaborated with Lotta Continua on a filmic montage of struggle and inquiry, under the title *12 Dicembre* (December 12, after the date of the Piazza Fontana bombing),[51] which combined a counter-forensic element – interviews with witnesses discrediting the official police version – with a set of reports of the insurrections that marked that period, from the strikers of Bagnoli to the uprising in Reggio Calabria (under the heading 'images of a civil war later disavowed'). Notwithstanding the uneven, conflicted character of the film (a product of Pasolini's fraught relation with the movement of '68 and the extra-parliamentary left), it is a striking document of how one could try to hold together the cognitive or forensic moment of counter-information with a kind of poetics of the gestures of revolt but also those of submission – marked in *12 Dicembre* by the counterpoint between the mistrustful shrugs of people in Milan being asked about who might be responsible for the Piazza Fontana bombings and the eloquently inarticulate anger of a disabled worker. Though it could be critically argued that in Pasolini – to hearken back to Didi-Huberman's arguments on tragic knowledge – the *pathei*, the suffering often overwhelms the *mathos*, the knowledge, in *12 Dicembre* we have a rare effort at the montage, the constellation of two dimensions of the political image – the cognitive and the expressive – that cannot be sundered without collapsing either into opacity or indifference.

Lotta Continua, was indicted for the assassination of Luigi Calabresi, the police inspector widely perceived as responsible for the death of Pinelli, and target of a sustained negative campaign by Lotta Continua's newspaper, which famously christened him 'Inspector Window'. Ginzburg's book was the occasion for a compelling documentary by Jean-Louis Comolli, *L'affaire Sofri*, 2001.

51 The film was re-released as a DVD by NDA Press in 2011, accompanied by a booklet edited by the former leader of Lotta Continua, Adriano Sofri. Available at: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXsri6amiMI> [accessed 14 June 2018].

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 41–57

Justin Clemens*

Of Avatars and Apotheoses
David Fallon's Blake

"Fable is Allegory but what Critics call
The Fable is Vision itself"
— William Blake

Somehow an artistic singularity as stellar as William Blake tends to take on the scattered spuriosities of his diverse readers. From S. T. Coleridge to Kenneth Clark, all sorts of critics regularly rediscover themselves in Blake's enigmatic rantings. Whatever your poetical, philosophical or political proclivities, you will most likely be able to find them confirmed by this bad boy, who after an initial show of struggle, quickly caves to give up the confirming symbolic goods. To put this another way: as an indicative recent collection like *Blake 2.0* demonstrates, there haven't been too many selective conceptual reuptake inhibitors at work in the ongoing transmission of Blake's legacy, whether you're talking naïve art, sci-fi, or 90s pop-music.[1] It's open slather on diversifying inspiration out there.

As long, that is, as you never doubt the fact that Blake was a *VISIONARY* (all caps, itals.). The contemporaneous testimonies preponderantly tell the same story, from characters as different as Henry Fuseli and Charles Lamb. Blake's acquaintance Benjamin Heath Malkin waxes lyrical on the subject:

> Enthusiastic and high flown notions on the subject of religion have hitherto, as they usually do, prevented his general reception, as a son of taste and of the muses. The sceptic and the rational believer, uniting their forces against the visionary, pursue and scare a warm and brilliant imagination, with the hue and cry of madness.[2]

[1] See S. Clark et al., *Blake 2.0: William Blake in twentieth-century art, music and culture* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[2] B. Heath Malkin, "Letter to Thomas Johnes" in: H. Bloom (ed.), *William Blake* (New York: Infobase, 2008), p. 9.

* School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, Australia

There you have it. By 1806, it turns out that the Blake Jelly had already set. No further wobbling is going to collapse the mould-hugging form of *this* sweet dessert. All the key trigger-words and their apologia are present: the visionary (that is: incomprehensible) imagery is to be defended against the charges of enthusiasm (that is: bordering on *Schwärmerei* or fanaticism) and madness (that is: explicable only as "outside" the bonds of rational society).

Yet "visionary" is a word whose signification and resonances rapidly fray into a chaotic coherence the moment you try to pin it all down. Blake had famously had "real visions" from the time he was a child, whether it was angels in a field or fairies in the garden; here, the visions are present and continuous with an agreed-upon social reality, even if they contravene its basic dictates. Blake also proffers literary or artistic visions of other times and places; here, the visions are out-of-joint with such a reality, flagrantly deranging and unreal, yet retain some claim to verisimilitude. As John Milton almost puts it in *Paradise Lost*: in heaven, a prophecy is simply a report of a fact that hasn't yet happened. Finally, the visionary is a mode of discourse that remains irreducible to any reality insofar as it presents images that, unstable themselves, can not only find no stable referent, but may even have lost any sense of reference. It's worth underlining that this triplet scrambles temporality, reality, and affect: each moment is internally rent by different kinds of continuity and discontinuity, yet each moment presumes its others.

This at-least triple aspect of *visionariness* (and cognates) operates throughout the dominant lines of Blake criticism. If you're not satisfied by David Erdman and John Grant's classic anthology *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic* or John Beer's *Blake's Visionary Universe*, there's always Harold Bloom or A. D. Nuttall on Blake's radical gnosticism to tide you over, or Steven Vine on Blake's *spectral visions* or....[3] The list could go on (and on), but the point is not merely that Blake's supposed *visions* and *visionary* character prove the still point of the turning worlds of Blake studies, but that the relation to this triplicity remains irreducible and generative.

[3] D. Erdman and J. Grant (eds.), *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); J. Beer, *Blake's Visionary Universe* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1969); A. D. Nuttall, *The alternative trinity: Gnostic heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); S. Vine, *Blake's Poetry: Spectral Visions* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

If there's anything different about Blake studies in the twenty-first century, it's not because it tampers with this fundamental compact regarding the visionary *per se*, but because it descends to micrological scales. Which is where the most impressive scholarship pursues its demonstrations. Many recent studies drill down with unprecedented detail into the singularities of Blake's elucubrations, their editing, their editions, their emendations. For instance, in his examination of the *Four Zoas*, Peter Otto concentrates with extreme attentiveness on the problematic of transcendence in Blake, following his own earlier work on "constructive vision and visionary deconstruction" (there's that word again).[4] Then there's Hazard Adams's dedicated study of Blake's annotations of some of his reading: Johann Caspar Lavater, Emanuel Swedenborg, Francis Bacon, Joshua Reynolds, William Wordsworth, and others.[5] Or take Susanne Sklar on the "visionary theatre" of *Jerusalem*. Sklar declares:

> Embarking on this Edenic journey may seem 'perfectly mad' until we enter the world of the poem on its own terms. We have to understand its fluid characters, shifting settings, and strange words and images. We have to attend to what Blake calls the Minute Particulars (or the unique and specific details) of the poem. This requires analysis and critical thought; we need to *know* what, where, how, and why things are in order to *experience* how they interrelate. Entering imaginatively into *Jerusalem* involves close textual reading and analysis — and close reading and analysis depends upon imaginative engagement with the text. *Jerusalem* asks its readers to be both critical and creative.[6]

So, alongside the ongoing grand thematic investigations of gender, race, nation, class, empire and religion in Blake, we also have this concerted contemporary scholarly micrology regarding the specifics and development, the "Minute Particulars" of Blake's own "visionary" character. Part of the problem for contemporary Blake scholars, then, is tracing a route between this accelerated hyper-

4 P. Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence: Love, Jealousy and the Sublime in The Four Zoas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction: Los, Eternity, and the Productions of Time in the Later Poetry of William Blake* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

5 H. Adams, *Blake's Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations* (Jefferson and London: McFarland, 2009).

6 S. M. Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1–2.

trophy of miniscule details and the external demands of great themes, between the necessity to find a new seed in the near-exhausted ground without tampering with the incontrovertible conviction of Blake's visionary character.

David Fallon's solution in *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*[7] to such a difficult situation is, as his subtitle proclaims, to focus on a seriously specific, if highly significant term: *apotheosis*. This strategy is at once ingenious and tendentious, for reasons that will hopefully become clear shortly. The word itself is clearly of extreme interest. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following etymology and definitions:

> Post-classical Latin apotheosis deification (late 2nd cent. in Tertuallian), ascent to heaven of a saint (a1508) < Hellenistic Greek ἀποθέωσις deification < ἀποθεουν to deify (<ancient Greek ἀπο- APO – prefix + θεουν to make a god of < θεὸς god: see Theo- comb. form) + σις – SIS suffix.
>
> 1. An apotheosized person or being.
> 2. Ascension into heaven; spiritual departure from earthly life; resurrection (lit. and fig.); an instance of this. Also used in the titles of paintings, sculptures, or other works of art depicting this; (hence) a work of art of this kind.
> 3. The action, process, or fact of ranking, or of being ranked, among the gods; transformation into a god, deification; elevation to divine status. Also: an instance of this.
> 4. a. Glorification or exaltation of a principle, practice, etc. Also: an instance of this; a glorified ideal. b. Attribution of more or less divine power or virtue to a person; glorification or exaltation of a person. Also: an instance of this.
> 5. The best or most highly developed example of something; the highest point or culmination, the acme.

As this definition already makes clear, the word simultaneously compresses mythical, religious, political, and generic actions, hinging on the transformation of a human figure into a divinity, and of a concomitant transumption of place, from an earthly to a non-mundane realm, from a potential or hypothetical state to a categorical one. Its pertinence to Blake's work should immediately be evident: from early to late, Blake is clearly obsessed (the word is not too strong)

---

7 David Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment: The Politics of Apotheosis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

with the operations of apotheosis, of the relation of the human to the divine, of how the human can become, or has already become, divine. Insofar, then, as apotheosis is integrally linked with questions of myth, religion, politics, and art, it may not only be a pertinent but a *privileged* trope to reopen questions regarding the visionary nature of Blake's work. Its sharp, regulated definition gives it a kind of chisel-like quality; inserted into the right fault-lines, it promises to crack apart what had previously been taken for a seamless face.

And this is precisely Fallon's strategy. According to the simplified received images of the phenomena in question, the myth-intoxicated Romantic visionary is stringently distinguished from — indeed, opposed to — the sceptical neo-classicizing figures and forces of Enlightenment. The work of Northrop Frye, especially his *Fearful Symmetry*, is perhaps the scholarly *locus classicus* for this position.[8] There seems abundant evidence for such a position in some of Blake's best-known works. Take the famous anathemas of *Mock On*:

> Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau
> Mock on Mock on! tis all in vain!
> You throw the sand against the wind
> And the wind blows it back again
>
> And every sand becomes a Gem
> Reflected in the beams divine
> Blown back they blind the mocking Eye
> But still in Israels paths they shine
>
> The Atoms of Democritus
> And Newtons Particles of light
> Are sands upon the Red sea shore
> Where Israels tents do shine so bright[9]

8 N. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

9 W. Blake, *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake, Newly Revised Edition*, ed. D. V. Erdman with commentary by H. Bloom (New York: Anchor Books, 1982), pp. 477–8.

The sands of quantitative rationality, of scepticism, mechanism, and atheism, blind their own adherents, as they provide the prophetic gemstones upon which Israel will stake its tents on its messianic path. Voltaire, Rousseau, Newton become the synecdoches of vain and impotent scientism, subject to a form of deflationary anti-apotheotizing (if that's a word) on Blake's part.

What Fallon seeks to do in this book, however, is to displace and revise these old, familiar and—it should be admitted—still widely-accepted judgements. For Fallon, Blake is not simply anti-Enlightenment, but critical of a reactionary trend that inhered in Enlightenment itself, which Enlightenment attempted to criticise but was unable to fully purge; moreover, in his own critique of this failure, Blake takes up certain features of Enlightenment itself, not least its own creative and critical relationship to myth. This means that the popular images of Enlightenment as mechanistic scepticism and Romanticism as visionary correction must be revised.

Certainly, many eminent accounts—including the now-classic work of John Beer—had already noted the difficulties in any simple attempt to circumvent Enlightenment, even if one sticks to the usual equipment. For if one is to criticize Enlightenment as a dark and dreary divagation, such a critique has to squarely face the real challenges Enlightenment presents. In an Enlightened world—certainly, a post-Newtonian one—the heavens were hardly really either high or immutable. On the contrary, *up there* was now governed by just the same laws as *down here*, just as *up* and *down* had lost any real signification in an infinite universe.

What literary or artistic imagery could cope with the revelations being transmitted to the public regarding the heavenly visions of the new grand telescopes and scientific theories? On the one side, deflationary Enlightenment produces new kinds of knowledge that trope sublimity as *quantitative* immensity or infinity — for instance, through calculus or the stellar distances — before which any attempted sublimity through imagery-inflation alone tends to collapse into reactionary or superstitious fancies. On the other side, attempts to squeeze some vital human pathos out of the mechanistic reduction betray their irrelevance with every pitiful gasp.

So Fallon's argument needs to engage in an intricate triple movement. First, he has to demonstrate that myth is continuous with religion is continuous with poetry in Blake's poetry. This is perhaps the easiest part of the job, because it doesn't contravene any of the fundamental principles of Blakeans's Visionary Inc. As Fallon asserts: "Apocalypse is the most mythical mode and genre in the Bible, and Blake's fusion of apocalyptic figures and motifs, especially from Isaiah and Revelation, with mythological material, drawn from sources as varied as Hesiod, Ovid, *Northern Antiquities*, Ossian, and Milton, suggests he perceived continuities between myth and religion".[10] So far, so good.

Second, Fallon needs to show that these continuities are also at play in the very Enlightenment modes that perhaps seem to reject them. Here, he draws upon diverse critical studies not only of Blake, but on accounts of myth and Enlightenment more generally. A rapid invocation of Ernst Cassirer, Peter Gay, and Jonathan Israel is at hand: yes, the Enlightenment did indeed seem to reject myths in the name of an "exit from a self-imposed immaturity" (to quote Immanuel Kant), but it delighted in demystificatory conjectural histories of religion. Furthermore, if we turn to recent authorities on the structure of myth — Claude Lévi-Strauss is a notable absence, presumably being too "structuralist" (a.k.a. rationalist) for Fallon's purposes — we find that Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Ricoeur offer several proposals that render myth not only a mystifying, but a *critical* discourse. Myth at once provides a hermeneutic of suspicion *and* a hermeneutic of restoration. It is also the case that, as process and praxis — not as an achieved or completed project — Enlightenment relied on certain forms of mythico-poetic expression for its new thoughts, perhaps most obviously upon *allegory*. In sum, on the basis of these positions, Fallon proposes that myth was indeed deployed in the service of the Enlightenment, that the relation to myth is uncircumventable; that myth is divided and divisive; that its dynamism is linked to this divisiveness; and that this dynamism is simultaneously critical and creative.

Third, it is not only through a reexamination of the *gestes et opinions* of the Enlightenment and Blake on myth that their solidarity can be revealed; it is through a very specific operation, that of "apotheosis." I have already listed the definitions of this term above, but Fallon's ambition is to establish a much stricter historical context and connections than any dictionary can make avail-

[10] Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, p. 6.

able. In this regard, there are a number of significant contextual inflections to be marked.

First, and second: as a student at the Royal Academy, Blake had access to an extraordinary range of prints, from Raphael to Rubens. These no doubt included many Renaissance ascensions of Christ, Mary and the Saints, who sometimes look like they're being shot into the empyrean like accelerationist god-rockets. Rubens, the very emblem of Counter-Reformation ambassadorial servility, was of course a dab hand at deifying diverse masters, above all by apostrophizing and apotheosizing them, Medicis and Stuarts alike. When Rubens is holding a brush or pen, no lord or lady will go without halo or chorus of plump putti to sing them to their eternal life in the glistening cerulean. Catholic, servile, self-interested: Rubens was, as Fallon quotes Blake's patron William Hayley, the very anti-type of the great unimpeachable revolutionary artist John Milton. So, apotheosis was not only an ancient genre, but one which had acquired — at least from Blake's perspective — deleterious political and religious connotations.

Third, the ancient tradition of apotheotic art (to which Rubens was of course self-consciously contributing) was contemporaneously undergoing a commercial boom. A John Flaxman redesign of an apotheosis of Homer from a vase sold by William Hamilton to the British Museum was adapted for "a celebrated relief in white jasperware which Wedgwood reproduced on mantelpieces and vases".[11] No self-respecting bourgeois personage would surely be without one of these highly-sought after luxury items, etc.

In addition to these artistic, political, and commercial aspects, we also find, fourth, a contemporary satirical tradition of Gillray cartoons and Augustan raillery. If these drew on classical, predominantly Ovidian models of glorifying Imperium, they did so to flagrantly critical and caricatural ends. In this regard, apotheosis is also an exemplarily *comic* genre, aimed against precisely the attempted self-glorification of degraded political actors. In the hands of the satirists, sanctification was shown up as sanctimony.

But there is yet another, absolutely crucial aspect of apotheosis in the context, which returns us directly to the deflationary polemics beloved by Enlighten-

[11] Ibid., p. 34.

ment. As Fallon puts it: "Apotheosis was widely understood as a major source of pagan deities, with founders of states, political and military leaders, inventors, and benefactors all regarded as divinities. The critical correlative to this practice was Euhemerism, which [...] has received less attention from Blake critics than it merits".[12] Apotheosis's links to Euhemerism are indeed fascinating.

Euhemerism is a program that rereads myths as fictionalised accounts of real figures. If instances can be found in many ancient sources, including Herodotus and Plato, it now takes the name of the mythographer Euhemerus. Christianity has always had serious issues regarding the status of non-Christian myths, which it has generally to read as demonic lies. In order to assimilate these myths, then, two strong programs proved their doctrinal worth. Euhemerism enables the genetic deconstruction of the origins of all myths into a forgotten and covered-over reality; its figurative relative typology enables the rereading of non-Christian myths and the Hebrew Bible as presenting un-knowing temporal anticipations of Christ.[13]

Yet what is absolutely determining for Christianity — as distinguished from almost any other religion, and certainly the other major monotheisms — is that the New Testament is basically a tradie's account of a bloke-who-was-*already*-the-one-and-only-God, a Man-God who, at least one crux (so to speak), doubted his own divinity. Jews are still waiting for the Messiah, the Prophet is not a deity for Muslims, and there is no necessary or absolute prohibition in many non-monotheistic religions regarding the traversal of this threshold between human and divine. In a very particular sense, then, the doctrines of almost all orthodox forms of Christianity are at once very close to Euhemerism — a real historical figure became its Godhead — yet also very, very far. Jesus was not a man who became God; he was the Word become flesh.

By Blake's time, Euhemerism had itself undergone some radical transformations. If it had supported early Christian polemics against the pagans, then been adapted by Protestants raging against the Catholic beatification of saints and papal infallibility, the Enlightenment had finally turned Euhemerism into an

---

12 Ibid., p. 15.

13 See the still-incomparable essay of Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in: *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1959).

atheistic strategy against Christianity *tout court*. If "[t]he predominant eighteenth-century approach to apotheosis was as a form of error, either a deformation of an originally pure theism or a stage in the evolution from primitive polytheism to monotheism",[14] Voltaire and Hume and Baron d'Holbach had shown how so much of what passed for true religion turned out to be the illicit, superstitious, and often simply flagrantly outrageous glorification of hypocrites. For these Enlightenment chaps, nature corrupts nature to gods for humans. What began as human, all-too-human, becomes, over the course of generations of transmission, distorted into pretentious fictions. Of course, this could make modern Enlightenment atheism itself seem a form of dejected or degenerate Christianity — if, that is, you are somebody like William Blake. Atheism, in such a view, could even be a distressed hyper-critical Christian child. As Fallon points out, in *Milton* Blake names Gibbon, Hume, Newton, Voltaire, Rousseau, et al. not only as "unconscious agents of religion," but as "complicit with the orthodox religion they attack".[15]

Together, then, these five heterogenous local inflections of apotheosis — artistic, political, commercial, satirical and historical — come to constitute an indispensable resource for Blake, enabling him to play off the Euhemeristic as affirmation of critical history against the typological resonances of imaginative redemption. Or so Fallon's argument goes, at least to some extent. Apotheosis becomes primarily *an act of fantastic interpretation*, generating apocalyptic cosmic figures who embody political events as natural phenomena, thus undoing the opposition between man and nature in a kind of post-Bultmannian extraction and recrudescence of the kerygma, while providing a set of dramatized power-figures for potential affective interiorization that resist the horrors of philosophical abstraction.

Fallon tracks Blake's alleged deployment of *apotheosis* through a sequence of studies of the latter's key writings — *The French Revolution, America a Prophecy, Europe, Urizen*, *The Four Zoas, Milton*, and others—in Blake's development from the 1780s to 1820s. So it is thus that the forging of new myths of apotheosis enables Blake to literally engrave imagistic and poetic links between "real" revolutionary events and "visionary" inhuman forces, and, particularly, to draw

14 Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment,* p. 32.

15 Ibid., 247—8.

upon revolutionary *figures* of his own present in this peculiar way. Hence the shock or surprise that readers often confess to experiencing when they find Tom Paine and George Washington rubbing portentous shoulders with Albion's Angel and Urizen.

Moreover, the ambiguities of the "real" actions, events, and persons cannot be reduced. Regarding Blake's unfinished *The French Revolution* (1791), Fallon notes that "Voltaire and Rousseau hover above the army, driving out spectral monks who insubstantially 'dash like foam' against the army. Whilst they lead the enlightened dissolution of superstitious religious orders, the philosophes loom over the soldiers like sky-gods... Blake's imagery paradoxically mythologises Voltaire and Rousseau's demystificatory power".[16] As for Lafayette —"America's favourite fighting Frenchman," as Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical *Hamilton* has it—it's possible that he, first envisaged as the republican hero of Blake's contemporary epic, was rapidly revealed as a reactionary re-establisher of representation-in-Revolution. The trope fails to take.

But if you're dealing with anyone other than Christ or, perhaps, Mr. Milton, one presumes that part of the volatility of apotheosis, which is also part of its force, and one of the conditions that make it available for poetic use in the first place, is due to the fact that turning local heroes into stars can too often reveal their clay feet (and your own). Fallon quotes from a notoriously servile apotheosis, known to Blake, Edmund Burke's ludicrous invocation of Marie Antoinette in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*:

> It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in,—glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy. Oh! what a revolution! and what a heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! [...] I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.—But the age of chivalry is gone.[17]

16 Ibid., p. 81.

17 Cited in Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment,* p. 71.

This passage, much mocked by Burke's contemporaries (Fallon charmingly names it "an adulatory peroration"), at the very least demonstrates how easily apotheoses can undermine their own use. What separates Blake's use of apotheosis from Burke's is not simply that the latter's are paroxysms of reaction, but that they are so because, in their defence of the indefensible, they try to close up the gap between political and artistic representation. Here, the problem of the representation of the people becomes paramount. As Peter Hallward notes regarding a fundamental division in uses of "the people" in political discourse:

> When we slide from one conception of the people to the other, we don't just shift from a singular to a plural definition of the people as a grammatical subject. We also move between two profoundly antithetical conceptions of political power, and of what is involved in the taking and exercising of such power. The first conception of the people, the people as realm, is one that most oligarchies can happily embrace, since it incorporates the differences that secure their status; the second poses an existential threat to *any* form of elite and has been consistently decried as such across the whole of recorded history. More precisely, to privilege realm over masses is to ensure that appeals to the people must proceed through mechanisms of representation that are adequate to the diversity and complexity of all the disparate groups, regions and concerns that compose it, such that legitimate power then rests in the hands of those who can best claim to represent the interest of this elaborate whole, and in particular of its 'prevailing part'. The alternative recognises, by contrast, that for obvious reasons the poor majority can only overpower an ordinarily powerful or dominant elite if they are able to mass together and concentrate their power, in both time and space—at particular moments, in particular places.[18]

As we know, Blake was "enthused by the agency of the popular will in the original act of resistance",[19] not by "the people as realm." Yet, to present the people in their revolutionary aspect — that is, at moments unable to be recuperated by any form of political representation — and not merely as a subordinate realm of the masters, requires a concomitant derangement of the powers of aesthetic

---

[18] P. Hallward, "Concentration or representation: the struggle for popular sovereignty," in: *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2017. Available at: <www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311983.2017.1390916?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

[19] Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, p. 69.

representation. The trope of apotheosis here shows its bonds to sublimity, that is, "an aesthetic mode in which Blake could attempt to express uncontainable popular energies".[20]

If all the evidence is there to support Fallon's contentions regarding the centrality of apotheosis in Blake's work, why did I call this attention *tendentious*? Because, as Fallon himself admits, Blake uses the word himself only once. I quote: "It may seem surprising to focus on the term 'apotheosis,' which Blake used just once. In advance of his 1809 exhibition, his advertisement foregrounded three works, including 'Two pictures, representing grand Apotheoses of NELSON and PITT.' Nevertheless, apotheosis is a recurrent image and idea throughout Blake's oeuvre".[21] It is of course entirely in line with acceptable hermeneutical principles that the non-mention or apparent marginality of a term can, under certain circumstances, provide a magical key to the arcana of prophetic poetry.

Such keys can be of a variety of kinds, if, no matter the kind, there is always something necessarily projective about the claims made for them. After all, arguing from an absence is always a little risky. Today, the ungrounding volatility of conspiratorial interpretosis means that a simple non-mention can be parleyed by assertoric force into systemic exclusion: you didn't mention me, therefore you have deliberately oppressed me. But there are obviously more plausible forms of interpretation-by-absence. Otto, for example, definitively demonstrates the abiding influence of Swedenborg on Blake, well after the latter's explicit violent rejection of the former.

Here, precisely as Milton proclaims about his muse Urania in *Paradise Lost*, the point is in "the meaning, not the name I call" (7. 5). If the word was used only once by Blake, I don't think there's any doubt after reading Fallon's book, that apotheosis provides a very useful way to approach Blake's oeuvre. "Apotheosis" — at least in the self-reflexive and self-occluding form that (Fallon argues that) Blake gives it — enables precisely a particular person to be raised up, while simultaneously, by drawing attention to the peculiarities of any such troping, de-particularizing that person into the clash of forces traversing the people.

[20] Ibid., p. 81.
[21] Ibid., p. 3.

By doing so, Fallon strongly implies that Blake in fact offers *an apotheosis of apotheosis*. This would suggest that, in Blake, apotheosis is deployed to undermine itself, its common uses and history, as it gathers together the diverse history of its manifold uses in order to revivify its properly messianic aspects for us. The celebrated "Human Form Divine" would be just one of the many pleonastic oxymorons which, bound by Blake to a form of apocalyptic apotheosis, convoke the powers of the people beyond any appropriate forms of representation, political or artistic. Hence Blake's demystificatory mythopoesis resists any direct decodings.

Yet certain issues remain. Following Fallon, I have spoken of the trope of apotheosis as having a five-fold or pentagrammic character in the late eighteenth century: aesthetic, politico-religious, commercial, satirical, and historico-critical. It is also, as I have noted, deployed by Blake as a self-undoing trope. Indeed, it is paradoxically perhaps the *comic* aspects of apotheosis that made it available to Blake as particularly propitious for his own purposes in the first place. Yet part of the problem that arises here is the accompanying personification or prosopopeia: giving a face to something that does not have one cannot but run the risk of providing certain protrusions for phrenological speculation. In doing so, Blake himself veers towards an unconscious complicity with forms of representational binding he might prefer to avoid.

For as Blake mobilises apotheoses, he also proliferates physiognomies. As Fallon remarks: "While physiognomy may now seem like Romantic quackery, Johann Caspar Lavater's aspiration to produce a universal study of human nature that could become a science places him within the tradition of the European Christian Enlightenment".[22] Lavater was also a friend of Blake's friend Henry Fuseli, about whom Blake once wrote:

> The only Man that eer I knew
> Who did not make me almost spew
> Was Fuseli he was both Turk & Jew
> And so dear Christian Friends how do you do?[23]

[22] Ibid., p. 7.

[23] W. Blake, *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, p. 507.

But the interest here concerns the status of the phrenological, which we can perhaps agree is back today in the contemporary totalitarian projects of face-recognition software, big data, and proprietary identity politics. For Blake, despite himself, cannot entirely avoid the ancient problems of representation — including the relations between inside and outside, micro- and macrocosm, of immanence and transcendence — not least because in this he comes close to another enemy, philosophy or, more particularly, Plato.

G. W. F. Hegel, another great contemporary enamoured of progressions-through-contraries, was, like Blake, very attentive to phrenology. In his extended commentary on the phenomenon in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel remarks of Plato's organology that: "Plato even assigns the liver something still higher, something which is even regarded by some as the highest function of all, viz., prophesying, or the gift of speaking of holy and eternal things in a non-rational manner."[24] That Blake himself died of liver failure at the age of 69 is not really my point, although one can still find little medical Platonists today drawing connections between Blake's productivity and his bodily ailments. The point is rather that Blake cannot altogether evade the "purely rational analysis" he cannot abide.

This is why, when Fallon emphasises how Blake rejects Platonic myth as "abstract allegoresis",[25] he simultaneously has to note Blake's own elective affinities with Plato. In doing so, however, Fallon doesn't discuss Plato's *Symposium* at all, which, in a book dealing extensively with myth and apotheosis, seems like some kind of omission. After all, it is the famous myth of the genealogy of Eros and the mind's ascent through love that is assigned by Plato to Diotima in that dialogue — a form of apotheosis that is not convincingly reducible to "ab-

[24] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, analysis J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 196. The whole section is worthy of attention in this context, not least for Hegel's (perhaps surprisingly) excellent sense of humour: "It is of course undeniable that there remains the *possibility* that a bump at some place or other is connected with a particular property, passion, etc. ... One can imagine the man who is living under the same roof as the murderer, or even his neighbour, or, going further afield, imagine his fellow-citizens, etc. with high bumps on some part or other of the skull, just as well as one can imagine the flying cow, that first was caressed by the crab, that was riding on the donkey, etc. etc.," p. 203.

[25] Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, p. 292.

stract allegoresis" and which, moreover, offers mythico-conceptual resources to Enlightenment and Romanticism that are often overlooked.

And it isn't just rival forms of ascent that go under-examined here; it's the going-down too. The word "avatar" — deriving from the Sanskrit for the manifestation of a deity — is ubiquitous today due to the dominance of computer games, perhaps in place of "incarnation," which, due to its close ties with institutional Christianity, has presumably become unavailable for quotidian use. Blake's own term —"emanation"— designates, among other things, a literal *pendant* to apotheosis:

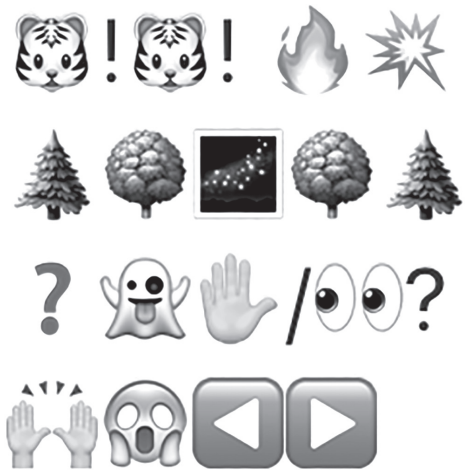
> Like as a Polypus that vegetates beneath the deep!
> They saw his Shadow vegetated underneath the Couch
> Of death: for when he enterd into his Shadow: Himself:
> His real and immortal Self: was as appeard to those
> Who dwell in immortality, as One sleeping on a couch
> Of gold; and those in immortality gave forth their Emanations
> Like Females of sweet beauty, to guard round him & to feed
> His lips with food of Eden in his cold and dim repose!
> But to himself he seemd a wander lost in dreary night…[26]

Perhaps this would be the logical next study for Fallon: the integration of the counter-movement of emanation with apotheosis?

Finally, where are we with Blake's revolutionary apotheoses today? On 18 August 2017, Nadja Spiegelman and Rosa Rankin-Gee proposed an emoji poetry contest for *The Paris Review*: be among the first ten people to decode three extracts from famous poems that had been translated into emojis to win a prize.[27] The very first ideogram was the following:

[26] From "Milton," in: Blake, *Complete Poetry & Prose*, p. 109.

[27] Available at: <www.theparisreview.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/emojipoem1.png>.



Following on the near-immediate shock of recognition — "Tiger Tiger burning bright/in the forests of the night"— one could perhaps be forgiven for feeling that the comedy of this ingenious image has less-than-utopian implications. My friend Bryan Cooke once remarked to me that emojis are the dialectical sublation of ideographic and alphabetic script, but which, contra the usual account of the operations of Hegelian negation, preserve only the worst aspects of both. Irony aside, part of the point is that emoji threaten both the literality of the literal and the meaning of meaning; that is, their conditions in global electronic media mean that they are part of a dissolution of the powers of linguistic expression. It's not only unreconstructed logocentrists who might be legitimately mournful about such a development. To be sure, breath and voice are evacuated, but so too are any bonds to the French Revolution. And this is where the contemporary avatar and its emojis seem to catastrophize Blake's own catasterisms: an enforced descent into the algorithmic transcendence of proprietary virtuality, not a mythopoetical expression of the revolutionary powers of the people.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 59–80

Jason Barker*

First as Farce, Then as Tragedy: Louis Rossel and the Civil War in France[1]

Introduction

In his study of the Commune published in 1936 Frank Jellinek devotes a chapter to the "coldly puritan" Louis Rossel. The author concludes that "it was chiefly due to the perpetual state of war, as well as to the personal ambitions of Cluseret, Rossel and Rigault, that more social legislation was not carried through [by the Commune]."[2] Lissagaray is far from fraternal in his opinion of Rossel, describing he who presided over the militarily disastrous first week of May 1871 as "the ambitious young man" who "slunk like a weasel out of this civil war into which he had heedlessly thrown himself."[3] In Marx's interview with the *New York Herald* published on 3 August 1871—he would repudiate it shortly thereafter—Rossel was "apparemment un grand ambitieux."[4] That word again: ambitious. However, in her biography of Rossel, Edith Thomas puts forward the opposite thesis: stranger to ambition, enemy of all hierarchy, such was the somewhat perplexing character of Louis Rossel, blindly patriotic to a cause which, by his own admission, he struggled to understand.[5]

The purpose of this essay is not primarily to take issue with the accusations of bad faith levelled at Rossel by adversaries of every political persuasion. This would be to pay undue heed to the controversy which raged during the Commune itself regarding its democratic accountability. The main accusation of leading members of the Commune during his nine-day tenure of the War Min-

1 This work was supported by the Kyung Hee University Research Grant (KHU-20160587).

2 Frank Jellinek, *The Paris Commune of 1871*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937. Scribd digital edition), p. 455.

3 Prosper Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, trans. Eleanor Marx (New York: New Park Publications, 1976), n. pg. Online edition: <www.marxists.org/history/france/archive/lissagaray/>.

4 Karl Marx, "Deux Interviews de Karl Marx sur la Commune," in: *Le Mouvement social*, Janvier—Mars 1962, no. 38, p. 18.

5 Edith Thomas, *Rossel: 1844—1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

* Kyung Hee University, School of Global Communication, Republic of Korea

istry was that Rossel failed to grasp the meaning of "citizen army,"[6] a profound failing which, moreover, undermined his attempt to lead the National Guard against the Versailles army.

Rossel was a professional soldier and a graduate of engineering of the Ecole Polytechnique. Promoted in December 1870 to the rank of colonel—he had turned twenty-six that September—and appointed chief engineer of the military base at Nevers, Rossel would eventually "switch sides" during the national defence campaign and transfer his allegiance to Paris on 19 March 1871, placing himself "at the disposition of government forces."[7] In due course he would acquire a reputation as "ambitieux" by exceeding his military brief with political interventions (his handling of the Fort Issy affair being the key example) as well as through his secret meeting of 27 April, held in the Rue des Dames of the Batignolles, with Dombrowski, Wroblewski and Vuillaume, in which plans for a military dictatorship were discussed. Rossel, it can easily be argued, was the symbol of the Commune's "failure"; its anti-Marxist, or anti-communist figure, a social authoritarian driven by a puritan petit-bourgeois morality.

There is little interest in trying to determine whether Rossel was a good or a bad guy—an "evil spirit"—revolutionary or reactionary, despite the fact that Thomas's biography offers ample evidence of the former, and that personal ambition was the last thing on his mind when he rallied to the side of "government forces" the day after the popular uprising of 18 March, which is to say seven days prior to the municipal elections and nine days prior to the Commune's first sitting. Rossel is a fascinating and essential character in the sense that he presents an alternative to the established Hegelian reading of tragedy, where the tragic hero is mired in false consciousness, thus leading him into irreconcilable conflict with a rival power, the negation of which precipitates his own downfall. Although undoubtedly it's possible, and indeed rather straightforward, to read Rossel as a tragic hero, the more intriguing question is what precisely might

6 Ibid., p. 298.

7 Rossel's resignation letter, technically an act of desertion, was written on 19 March 1871, and addressed to "Monsieur le General Ministre de la guerre à Versailles" Adolphe Le Flô. See Louis Rossel, "Le 19 Mars" in: *Papiers posthumes*, 2nd edition (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1871), p. 82.

become of the *drama* of the Commune in the absence of ambition—of the *hubris* or Dionysian excess—we associate with Attic tragedy.[8]

La comédie humaine

Pride comes before a fall in Louis-Napoleon's declaration of war against Prussia on 18 July 1870. And yet the nature of the drama is far from clear at first. Napoleon I paves the way for his nephew's *hubris* and the latter's destiny to repeat the unfinished business of the French Empire. Historical materialism dictates that "Men make their own history" albeit not "under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past." Nonetheless in the case of the Franco-Prussian War one has good reason to question this formula. "Time passes. That is all. Make sense who may. I switch off."[9] Beckett's listless and world-weary observation, thoroughly modern, shows scant faith in men's historic mission. To paraphrase Althusser, historical time is unhinged and uneven; an unconscious process without subject or goal.

Rossel will arrive at Metz on 4 August 1870 in the midst of the action. *In media res*. This is the first feature of the French farce: history has always already begun. It is *pre*-given. On arrival he immediately sets to work on building a line of fortifications.[10] At the start of August, Metz is still some way back from the front line, which is frustrating for a young patriotic captain who, while stationed at Bourges, threatens to resign in order to enlist as a regular soldier. Such enthusiasm, in the words of his superior, is "uncalled for."[11] The drip feed of bad news begins to filter through that same evening: Douay at Wissembourg, Mac-Mahon at Frœschwiller, Frossard at Forbach. Rossel senses disaster. In the absence of

8 While Aristotle emphasizes the suffering that elicits pity in the spectator, and through which he adapts to the substantive laws of the universe, Hegel sees suffering as the rational means through which the tragic hero transcends those laws and serves the march of history. Though I pay no attention to this important distinction in what follows, Aristotle's writing on tragedy goes to the heart of my thesis, as does Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's conviction that tragedy as drama is inseparable from the birth pangs of a new constitution. In place of the democratic city-state of 5th century Athens I shall consider the Paris Commune of 1871.

9 Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 376.

10 The fortified belt of Metz would remain unfinished and only reach completion in the late 19th century i.e. after the Franco-Prussian War, once Metz had been annexed by Germany.

11 Thomas, *Rossel: 1844—1871*, p. 192.

any joined-up strategy the Imperial Army begins to crumble, and with it the French Empire. In less than a month the Emperor will be a captive. Rossel will later recall the "absolute incompetence" of the gold-braided commanders ensconced in the local town hall, and a "blind incompetence confessed by the whole army; and, as I'm in the habit of pushing my deductions to the end, I was even thinking up ways to remove this whole clique prior to the battle of 14 August."[12] Briefly Rossel describes his involvement in the fighting:

> On 14 August we saw from the top of the Serpenoix ramparts the horizon from Saint-Julien to Queuleu illuminated by the fires of battle. On 16,[13] the army passed through the Moselle and found the enemy before it. As soon as I had finished my shift—the arrival of convoys of the wounded announcing a large battle—I raced on horseback by way of Moulins and Châtel to the plateau of Gravelotte, where I participated in the action with a magnificently-commanded battery of machine guns.[14]

On 18 August, Rossel returns to the fighting at Gravelotte where the Army of the Rhine, commanded by Marshal Bazaine,[15] is attempting to check the advance of the Prussian First and Second Armies. However, selfless courage is no match for absolute incompetence and, by 19 August, Gravelotte is lost and Bazaine is besieged at Metz.

The situation soon mutates into a microcosm of all the skulduggery and bad faith of the so-called National Defence Government, which will seize power and install itself at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris on 4 September, following Napoleon's surrender at Sedan two days before. An imperial satellite torn out of orbit. In truth there is no government of France, no constitutional body, and so no chain

12 Rossel, "Capitulation de Metz," in: *Papiers posthumes*, pp. 10—11. [Letter to his father of 18 February 1871].

13 Rossel is describing the Battle of Mars-la-Tour, also known as Vionville, which began on the morning of 16 August and was a prelude to Gravelotte on 18. The battle was inconclusive and came to symbolize the indecision and unwillingness of French generals to take the fight to the enemy.

14 Rossel, "Capitulation de Metz," pp. 11—12.

15 François Achille Bazaine (1811—1888) was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French Army by Napoleon III in early August 1870. In August 1873 he was tried and found guilty of treason for his conduct during the Metz siege, though his death sentence was commuted to twenty years imprisonment.

of command operating between Paris and Metz in the immediate aftermath of the Empire's fall. The reigning absolute incompetence will last indefinitely and provide ample scope for treachery and duplicity. Even the citizens of Metz threaten revolt against the occupation of their city by a French Commander-in-Chief who, surreptitiously on 15 September, enters into negotiation with the Prussian monarchy and, on 19, Bismarck.[16]

Despite the fake disgust that will later be heaped on him by the French bourgeoisie, and which will guarantee his condemnation in a military show trial two years later, Bazaine's "treachery" is in actual fact no different from that of the National Defence Government. Jules Favre will begin negotiations with Bismarck on 18 September, having previously vowed publicly not to yield "an inch of French territory or a stone of its fortresses" to the Prussian invaders. The Janus-faced Minister of Foreign Affairs will continue to play the enemy against his own people, actively undermining the principle of national defence, before eventually pulling the rug from underneath his own War Ministry by signing an armistice on 28 January 1871, without so much as a word to its chief minister Léon Gambetta.

Staring defeat in the face Rossel's motto prefigures Beckett: "It might be impossible, but it's absolutely necessary."[17] Fail better. On 6 October he swaps his military uniform for peasant garb and attempts to break through the Prussian lines. He is promptly caught and sent back to the city of intrigues, where the talk is of a move against Bazaine. Convinced of the necessity of a "radical change of command"—a mutiny—Rossel meets with two sympathetic generals but becomes wary of an Orléanist plot. The next day shifting loyalties expose the would-be conspirators and Rossel is summoned before Bazaine. Unlike Charles Delescluze, the veteran republican in whom he will discover a kindred spirit, Rossel is prone to black humour, and such is the tragicomedy of their meeting that it inspires the following dramatic reconstruction[18]:

16 Thomas, *Rossel: 1844—1871*, p. 201.

17 Rossel, "Capitulation de Metz," p. 14.

18 From the following excerpt I have omitted Rossel's detailed commentary. Occasionally the speech is reported, rather than appearing in quotation marks, in which case I have improvised the dialogue myself.

BAZAINE is pacing his vast cabinet; MORNAY-SOULT and a CUIRASSIER stand either side of the fireplace. Enter ROSSEL in yellow boots and a military pea jacket

BAZAINE
What's with this attire! What's with this attire!
ROSSEL
I wasn't counting on the honour of being admitted before Your Excellency.

BAZAINE quickly regains his composure

BAZAINE
What are you going to do in the camps?
ROSSEL
Could you be more precise?
BAZAINE
The question is perfectly clear.
ROSSEL
Sometimes I go for walks out of town, as I've always done in the past.
BAZAINE
And what do you talk about when you're going for walks?
ROSSEL
I talk about all sorts of things, about the current situation, about what's happening.
BAZAINE
Describe what you mean.
ROSSEL
One hears and says so many things that it would take until tomorrow to repeat it all.
BAZAINE
So we'll be here until tomorrow. Describe what you mean.
ROSSEL
Inasmuch as the current situation is current, I have no dealings with it; only with the situations that preceded it. My preoccupations with military science don't date from yesterday. On examining my notes it's easy to confirm that I've been consistently dealing with these studies for several years. I'm doing nothing secretive...
BAZAINE
Have you spoken to generals and superior officers about the current situation?

ROSSEL

I've spoken about it with different officers.

BAZAINE

But you don't know them!

ROSSEL

I've spoken about it with people I know and with others I don't know.

BAZAINE

But you went to them intentionally?

ROSSEL

Intentionally for what, Marshal, sir?

BAZAINE

Intentionally to inform yourself of the intentions of these generals and what they plan on doing should certain circumstances arise... In case of a surrender which, thank God, no one has yet envisioned.

ROSSEL respectfully nods his head. BAZAINE goes to lean against the fireplace

You went to them intentionally, did you not?

ROSSEL

I went with no intention other than to appraise myself of what was happening. I see no likelihood of a mere captain being able to dictate a course of action to generals. An officer's conduct should give some indication as to whether he's neglecting his duties and wasting his time on intrigues.

BAZAINE

What's your *mission?*

ROSSEL

I am not on any mission. What mission would I have? Such an accusation demands a separate inquiry.

BAZAINE

But there's no accusation!

ROSSEL

I have but one preoccupation, which above all is to do my duty.

BAZAINE

I don't doubt that... Anyway, I'm frank; I'm questioning you frankly, answer me with equal frankness.

> **ROSSEL**
> That is what I have been endeavouring to do since you accorded me the honour of questioning me. Ask me questions, and I am entirely at your command in answering them as clearly as possible.[19]

In his record of the meeting Rossel provides the scene with ample direction, little of which I have retained, although the exchange is perfectly intelligible without it. There is nothing to read between the lines. This is the model for all diplomatic exchanges, all euphemistic dialogue between heads of state: a never-ending preamble. A *différend*.

Bazaine's hands are tied. To admit that he has lost the confidence of his generals, who by now are openly conspiring against him—which both he and Rossel know to be the case—is precisely what a commander-in-chief can never publicly admit. Such admission would oblige him to act (against "the enemy"), which, in the circumstances, is precisely what he cannot do, even if he wanted to, which most certainly he does not. Absolute incompetence means absolute impotence. *Nothing to be done… And what of it?* The dialogue on the "current situation" is of a piece with Estragon and Vladimir's exchanges in *Waiting for Godot*. Inasmuch as it's current, it's not Rossel's responsibility: a veiled swipe at Bazaine's inaction. Rossel only concerns himself with "the situations that preceded it," which sounds like a second swipe at the Commander-in-Chief, inasmuch as it makes Rossel out to be always one step ahead.

In farce nothing is beyond a joke. At the end of the civil war in France its generals will place each other on trial in procedures resembling a game of musical chairs. The buck doesn't stop. Such is the second feature of farce: the state of exception and the power without accountability. Following the death sentence handed down by his military tribunal, Bazaine will petition Marshal MacMahon, another incompetent general of the Prussian campaign, aptly elected President of the Third Republic in May 1873, for clemency. However, in the "current situation" Bazaine prefers to do nothing. On 27 October the Commander-in-Chief of French Forces surrenders Metz with an army of 173,000 men, 1,570 canons, 137,000 breech-loading rifles and 123,000 miscellaneous weapons.[20] "Indeed,"

[19] Rossel, "Capitulation de Metz," pp. 23—32.
[20] Thomas, *Rossel: 1844—1871*, p. 223.

notes Edith Thomas, "it was not the Prussians against whom the marshal intended to lead the war, but the republicans."[21]

The Birth of Tragedy

Rossel is reconciled to the Apollonian myth to which Nietzsche, who spends the siege "beneath the walls of Metz"[22] serving the Fatherland as a medical orderly, will devote much of his life to overturning. There is no republic worthy of a constitution until the war is won. But how does one go about combatting farce? For Beckett the *human* comedy is nothing of the kind.[23] This is the third feature of farce: bestiality, Dionysian excess. The spectator, the good Christian soul, need not be perturbed. Rossel however is neither a passive spectator nor one of the "people transformed, whose civic past and social status are completely forgotten."[24] Owing to the monstrousness of the farce Rossel remains in limbo. On 1 November he arrives in Luxembourg and the next day leaves for Brussels. Fearing the pull of conflicting loyalties between army and country—this is the resistance after all—he writes to Gambetta, the War Minister at Tours, where military operations are headquartered, before departing for London to be with his family. Following a sojourn of three days he returns to France and catches the train to Tours, later lamenting "the disorder of our railways: the trains constantly stopped due to the disorganization of the service; two days to send the London mail from Dieppe to Tours; in the depots, at Mézidon, long lines of useless locomotives, cold and cast aside; the wagons piled up in the sidings, all the signs indicating that this mighty instrument of war was wasted on the government." Rossel describes with his usual scorn the scene in Tours where "the roads were full of strange uniforms; everyone had gold braid on their hat, cap, jacket. Disorderly irregular soldiers roamed the town: what were they doing here?"[25] The proliferation of gold-braided uniforms will become a growing

---

21 Ibid., p. 226.

22 Friedrich Nietzsche, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" in: *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 3.

23 Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, eds. E. O'Brien and E. Fournier (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), p. 120: "Why *human* comedy? Why anything? Why bother about it?".

24 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 43.

25 Rossel, "Le Gouvernement de Tours," in: *Papiers posthumes*, pp. 46—7. [Letter to his father of February 1871].

source of irritation to this professional soldier. A *reformed* Apollo, not Dionysus, is what's called for. The Commune's decadent military chiefs will in Rossel's eyes adopt the same status as these "useless locomotives": a mighty instrument of war wasted on the government.

On his arrival in Tours Gambetta drops everything to receive Rossel, whose reputation precedes him. Gambetta is the nearly man of the Third Republic. The son of an Italian grocer from the southern town of Cahors, the French Minister is a silver-tongued and flamboyant lawyer who two years before had been unexpectedly thrust into the spotlight as defence counsel for Charles Delescluze. Although the case itself was unwinnable (the so-called Affaire Baudin[26] was a political show trial), Gambetta hammed it up like Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, sweating like a sewer and laying into the Empire in a forty-five minute harangue that ended in a standing ovation.[27] In the *Reveil*, Delescluze would write of his counsel: "Logic, unparalleled joy of expression, dazzling inspiration, he lacked nothing; in a single breath he took on the appearance of orator and tribune. It's glorious news for France, it's an added strength for our glorious party."[28] And, in private correspondence: "Sir, we have no more need of Ledru: he is succeeded."[29] This is fine praise indeed from France's legendary Iron Man, who is typically as tight-lipped as Gambetta is effusive. But the republicans' dazzling apprentice will ultimately fail to live up to the weight of expectation.

In their meeting Gambetta asks Rossel where he wants to serve. Quite simply wherever his experience and qualifications might be best employed. Gambetta writes a letter of introduction to his colleague in the War Ministry, Charles de Freycinet, who, on receiving Rossel two days later, asks him exactly the same question. Rossel responds ironically that he would be happy to take up the post of Commander-in-Chief.[30] In the event de Freycinet sends him north on a "study mission," essentially a false errand to nothing. He spends a few days in Lille

[26] In 1868 Delescluze launched a subscription for a statue in honour of Alphonse Baudin who on 3 December 1851 had been shot and killed while resisting Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état. Delescluze was immediately prosecuted.

[27] See Marcel Dessal's summary of the trial in *Un révolutionnaire jacobin, Charles Delescluze, 1809—1871* (Paris: Marcel Rivière et cie. 1952), pp. 230—38.

[28] Ibid., p. 236.

[29] Ibid., p. 238n.

[30] Rossel, "Le Gouvernement de Tours," p. 49.

meeting lawyer-prefects and listless generals before running the gauntlet of "phantom Prussians," the enemy nowhere to be seen, on the road to Mézières. In Arras he encounters deserters from the Battle of Amiens.[31] "It was on my return," he recalls, "that I saw how facetious these missions were."

Arriving back in Tours at the beginning of December, Rossel learns of the loss of Orléans to the Prussians. Gambetta, meanwhile, is feeling the strain of third way politics. Caught between republicans and monarchists this *bon orateur* "was a flag rather than a chief [...] a sort of Louis XIII who didn't have Richelieu. He was appointing and sacking prefects while the fortunes of France were being played in a marked game of cards."[32] And yet the "madness" of the human comedy, as the Prussian medical orderly would have it, need not be the symptom of decadence.[33] It might also be the symptom of a people perfectly optimistic in the face of a national disaster.

At midnight on 6 December Rossel meets Gambetta for what will turn out to be the last time. The talk is energetic and bold, albeit somewhat fantastical. Gambetta offers Rossel the Army of the Loire and instructs him to draw up plans; then, reconsidering, the camp at Saint-Omer "for experience". Then the Loire again. They mull over the so-called *tiercement* strategy favoured by Napoleon where three separate units are amalgamated under a single regiment: "something similar to the creation of the half-brigades of 1794." However, lacking an up-to-date report on military operations, Rossel declines a commander's role. The discussion is put off until the next day, but when he returns "armed with a small sheet of tracing paper" the Minister is unavailable.[34] That evening Rossel meets General Vergne who offers him the post of Chief Engineer at Nevers, which he accepts "slightly through ill will." In Nevers he is stationed far from the action and all decision-making. Gambetta no doubt breathes a sigh of relief. The atmosphere in camp is languid, ill-disciplined, a "menagerie" in which officers' wives are free to lodge with their husbands.[35] His frustration mounts and letters to would-be allies confirm that in the current situation the sword is no mightier than the pen. Finally, in the second half of February, he concludes a

31 Ibid., p. 52.
32 Ibid., pp. 54—5.
33 Nietzsche, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism," p. 7.
34 Rossel, "Le Gouvernement de Tours," pp. 58—60.
35 Thomas, *Rossel: 1844—1871*, p. 242.

letter to his father by noting laconically that the armistice with Prussia is signed and he is no longer a soldier. "Before long," he predicts, "I will join you in Paris and either set out into politics in France, or enterprise in the United States, depending on how disgusted I am with our wretched country."[36]

All-out War

But Rossel is still thinking revolution. In a Homeric prophecy he writes: "As a general thesis, all-out defence cannot be harmful to a people. The error we are committing in making the peace is the same one which lost Carthage: a people well-off and a little sceptical is always seduced into committing this mistake; thus its victor has no more than to gently exploit it until ruin is complete."[37] Concluding his private reflections: "We lack patience; we are making peace as rashly as we made war."[38] Epic words indeed. In total, the Punic Wars between the Roman Republic and Carthage span 120 years. The siege of Carthage, during which the slaves were set free, marked the final episode of the third and final act, and during the course of which the entire city mutated into a giant military machine. The Greek historian Appian of Alexandria describes the scene:

> Quickly all minds were filled with courage from this transformation. All the sacred places, the temples, and every other unoccupied space, were turned into workshops, where men and women worked together day and night without pause, taking their food by turns on a fixed schedule. Each day they made 100 shields, 300 swords, 1000 missiles for catapults, 500 darts and javelins, and as many catapults as they could. For strings to bend them the women cut off their hair for want of other fibres.[39]

The Carthaginians endured the siege for over two years before the Romans scaled the city walls. Appian describes the final bloody week of street-fighting. The city defenders rained missiles down on Roman soldiers, who pursued their foe onto the rooftops before setting fire to their houses, which soon came crashing to the ground, taking old men, women and children down with them. Under

36 Rossel, "Le Gouvernement de Tours," p. 61.

37 Rossel, "La Lutte à Outrance," in: *Papiers posthumes*, p. 76.

38 Ibid., p. 78.

39 Appian of Alexandria, *The Punic Wars*, trans. Horace White, Livius.org. (2005), § 93. Online edition: <www.livius.org/sources/content/appian/appian-the-punic-wars/>.

orders to make the roads passable for the Roman army, the street cleaners used axes and forks to remove the rubbish, and "tossed with these instruments the dead and the living together into holes in the ground, dragging them along like sticks and stones and turning them over with their iron tools."

> Trenches were filled with men. Some who were thrown in head foremost, with their legs sticking out of the ground, writhed a long time. Others fell with their feet downward and their heads above ground. Horses ran over them, crushing their faces and skulls, not purposely on the part of the riders, but in their headlong haste.[40]

Once conquered 50,000 Carthaginians were sold into slavery and their city was razed to the ground. "Commencements are to be measured by the re-commencements they enable."[41]

Is optimism bestowed through the tragic act? Or is the act simply the final involuntary gasp of a people prior to the moment of destruction and ruin? Such is the question of the Prussian medical orderly. For Rossel revolution and war are identical. Or at least the one is the coordinated means of carrying the other through to the end. In February he writes to Gambetta, who is no longer in charge at the War Ministry, having tendered his resignation on 6 February following his failure to reverse the armistice, which he and the left republicans had vigorously opposed. Rossel's letter is laudatory and recriminatory by turns, betraying schoolboy petulance at the Minister's downfall. And yet: "The Revolution is perhaps to be repeated."[42] Perhaps, indeed. One rather suspects that, had he lived, repeating the Revolution would have become a lifelong obsession for Rossel, as it did for Delescluze during his Odyssey of revolt to the margins of Empire. And yet, assuming the farce is always pre-given, the question is—*how to begin?*

On 18 March the stalled revolution restarts in Montmartre and soon spreads all over Paris. Barricades are chaotically thrown up and "posters emerge like snails from a day of rain."[43] The chief executive of the French government, Adolphe

---

40 Ibid., § 129.

41 Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 375.

42 Rossel, "Lettre à M. Gambetta," in: *Papiers posthumes*, p. 79.

43 Pierre Dominique, *La Commune de Paris* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1962), p. 77.

Thiers, flees to Versailles with his ministers, ordering the evacuation of the forts and the army. The Central Committee of the National Guard fills the void by seizing control of the ministries. "The members of the Central Committee," reports the *Journal Officiel de la République française*, "are communists, Bonapartists and Prussians."[44]

On 19 March Rossel learns of the evacuation of the government and "40,000 troops in fine fettle. I would have had no inclination to throw myself into the insurrection," he will later admit, "but for this last detail."[45] The army had squandered its offensive advantage, "which is the only really favorable chance for an insurrectionary movement." However, where others may detect nuance in this insurrectionary chance, in this "strong singularity," Rossel sees uninterrupted continuity. Like Odysseus, Rossel is a recalcitrant adventurer who would rather fill his men's ears with wax and be lashed to the mast of his ship than risk being seduced by Sirens. In his letter of resignation—a "chef-d'oeuvre" in the words of Edith Thomas—he announces his decision "to fall unhesitatingly in line alongside the party which hasn't signed the peace and which isn't counted among the ranks of generals guilty of surrenders." On 20 March he arrives in Paris and in no time is appointed Senior Force Commander of the National Guard of the 17th Arrondissement at the Batignolles.[46] We are approaching the euphoric moment when on 26 March 1871 the Commune will be voted into power in municipal elections. But for Rossel, no less than for the Commune itself, the problems are only just beginning.

It has become fashionable to interpret the Commune as a Dionysian drama, a "political imaginary" that does away with the classical distinctions between audience, chorus and actors. By contrast Colonel Rossel is a thoroughly military man whose professionalism and insensitivity to the nuances of Parisian social life—to the art of seduction, so to speak— will lead him into bitter deadlock with the Commune, in whose democracy he sees nothing but incompetence and equivocation. Granted Rossel is a stranger to Paris, a wandering spirit whose sole motivating thought is to save the country from its squandering suitors. And yet it's not so much a matter of *choosing* between a social revolution and a mil-

44 Ibid., p. 76.
45 Rossel, "Mon Rôle Sous la Commune," in: *Papiers posthumes*, p. 87.
46 Ibid., p. 89.

itary one. The question for the Commune, and for us, is how to establish its revolutionary term and its constitution as such.

For example, consider the insurrection of 18 March in relation to the inaugural meeting of the Commune on 28 March. One assumes that the Federation of the National Guard, into whose hands the revolution falls like manna from heaven on 18, is the delegation which oversees the transition to an elected government on 28 March, at which point its provisional power is relinquished. And yet the question of executive power will prove to be a minefield from 28 March onwards. Where is the leadership? "I don't know," Rossel admits in retrospect, "if the Federation made the revolution of 18 March; but what's certain is it suppressed [*confisqué*] this revolution and excluded the leading republicans from participating in its affairs, the most active members of the International, unless they belonged to the Federation's hierarchy.

> This is how conflicts arose from the beginning, between, on one hand, the mayors, deputies [*adjoints*], republicans and revolutionaries in certain arrondissements, and, on the other, battalion delegates forming the Conseil de legion or Arrondissement Committee. The latter suppressed, in the name of the Federation, the municipal powers, which it unintelligently and sometimes dishonestly exhausted.[47]

Furthermore:

> Once the elections were concluded it seemed all power had to return to the Commune. But nothing of the sort happened, and the same struggle continued between the delegates of the Commune and the Arrondissement Committee (Conseil de legion).[48]

One might infer from this that the Commune was compromised by the Federation, which, in suppressing those republican and revolutionary voices that didn't belong to the Federation's hierarchy, downgraded the Commune's egalitarian credentials. But the *social* composition of the Commune and the socialist principles which underlie it are the last thing on Rossel's mind. It's a matter of

47 Ibid., pp. 90—91.
48 Ibid., p. 91.

establishing Apollo, not Dionysus. The point being made here is essentially that the 18 March revolution was rendered ineffective from the beginning by incompetent and interfering chiefs. Too many *chefs*. But then Rossel isn't telling us anything new. In fact, he repeats exactly the same story from 4 September and the fall of the Empire. And it will set the tone for the remainder of the war.

Call of the Sirens

War communism. Is there any other kind? All hitherto existing society is the history of war. All-out war? The Russian Revolution will arrive courtesy of the greatest chance, and yet is impossible—unthinkable—without the intervention of the Great War.

Once elected the Commune struggles to get down to business. Rossel describes with incomprehension the rolling election of battalion chiefs as "the veritable pitfall of the command." And yet permanent war calls for permanent elections, since, as Marx will reflect on 30 May at the Commune's end: "The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the State parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of, society."[49] Active citizens, freed from the state parasite, become electors. This is where Rossel and the socialists, and indeed the bulk of the Jacobins, part company. Rossel gives us a sense of the Commune's "free movement" in describing his attempt, around 1 April, to retake Courbevoie and Neuilly[50] from the Versailles army:

> I set out with seven battalions, which together made up around 2000 men, divided into three groups under the orders of Malon (member of the Commune), my second-in-command, and Gérardin (member of the Commune). At least two

[49] Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France, Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association" in: *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Vol. 22* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010. Digital edition), p. 333.

[50] The attack by the Versaillais on Courbevoie took place on 2 April. Pierre Dominique claims that it resulted in 2000 casualties on the side of the *fédérés*. See Dominique, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 91. A war council was held at the Place Vendôme on 1 April which Rossel attended. The march on Versailles of 3 April would end disastrously and mark the turning point in the civil war. Arguably all subsequent engagements with the enemy were purely defensive, with no prospect of the Commune emerging from it victoriously.

> battalions were completely drunk; others complained of not having eaten. The front of the column, which I was leading, followed me in an orderly manner, but the other battalions, whose officers lacked authority, were soon sitting down on the side of the road quarrelling and complaining; there were two or three panics before total disorder set in [...]; I did everything possible to achieve something until finally, seeing it was impossible to march these men toward the enemy, we resolved to take them back to town. But if it was impossible to march them forward it was even more impossible to turn them around.[51]

Rossel ends his recollection by noting that he was almost shot by his own troops on Asnières Bridge, though doesn't elaborate.

Should there be any room for disagreement between Rossel and Marx when it comes to the Communal Constitution? The immediate consequence of restoring freedom to the social body by eliminating its parasites is war. The state and the state-form represent a passing historical phase. The armistice between the French and "the Prussians" marks a short interval prior to the (re)commencement of the civil war on 18 March. Thereafter the state machinery is deactivated, if not smashed, and with it the discipline of a standing army. A fact Rossel takes personally. At least he will live long enough to tell the tale, unlike many less fortunate officers, victims of the ill-fated sorties at the start of April.[52]

With his talk of all-out war Rossel will fail to yield to the Commune's democratic imperatives. His ears will remain sealed to the call of the sirens. Following the disastrous march on Versailles of 3 April he is appointed Chief of Staff to General Cluseret, the American Civil War veteran and newly-appointed as the Commune's War Delegate. Cluseret sets up a Court Martial and Rossel presides. The evening sittings soon prove a burden. Delegation is not his forte and at the War Ministry he suspects an unnamed officer of deliberately undermining his work.[53] As for the Court Martial "whose role was only to hand down death sentences,"[54] Rossel attempts to shore up military discipline. "All of the accused," he ob-

51 Rossel, "Mon Rôle Sous la Commune," pp. 96—7.

52 One thinks of Emile-Victor Duval, the Commune general, who on 4 April was captured with his regiment at Plateau de Châtillon, then shot; and Gustave Flourens, the Internationalist arrested by gendarmes and decapitated on 3 April at Ile de Gennevilliers.

53 Rossel, "Mon Rôle Sous la Commune," p. 107.

54 Ibid., p. 109.

serves, "were *fédérés* brought before the court for military crimes or infractions. The Court judged neither political causes nor causes of common law."[55] However, his "greatest sacrifice" to the revolutionary cause hits a brick wall when the Commune's Executive Commission begins to reverse the Court's decisions. For example, the death sentence handed down on Girot, Commander of the 74th battalion, for having refused to march against the enemy, is commuted by the Commission to demotion and incarceration for the remainder of the war, based on the accused's previous democratic good standing.[56] Constantly overruled by the Commission, Rossel resigns his presidency on 27 April.

Democracy prevails. Despite his resignation Rossel claims being at "the centre of an incoherent, diverse movement, and whose unconscious slogan was: 'Save the Revolution by abolishing the Commune.'"[57] Heeding these "unconscious" voices he hastens to a secret meeting of generals on the Rue des Dames in the 17th arondissement at which Dombrowski proposes a "new government" comprising Rossel as War Delegate; Charles Gérardin, his close friend and confidant, at Foreign Affairs ("in other words charged with preparing revolt in the provinces"); Dombrowski as Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard; and Dupont as Interior Minister, who at the time is combining his membership of the Commune with his assignment to the Committee of General Security.[58] A military dictatorship, in other words, Blanquist by design. Dupont rejects the idea and reports the incident to his superior, Raoul Rigault, the twenty five-year-old Metropolitan Chief of Police, who despite secretly approving of the plan places the conspirators under surveillance.

Might this revolution against the Revolution have brought victory against Versailles? Even if it had, which is highly improbable, one wonders at the cost. On 29 April, Cluseret is arrested on a charge of treason—"vulgar" in Rossel's words, who will defend him—and Rossel is promptly appointed War Delegate in his place. On 1 May a Committee of Public Safety is set up on the initiative of Rossel and Gérardin. With military options fast running out, Rossel petitions Rigault in person. Although sympathetic to the idea of a dictatorship the Chief of Police

55 Ibid., p. 111.
56 Thomas, *Rossel: 1844–1871*, pp. 293–94.
57 Rossel, p. 120.
58 Thomas, *Rossel: 1844–1871*, pp. 312–13.

admits that without Blanqui, who has been in prison since 17 March, nothing can be done. The situation points toward an impasse with the National Guard's Central Committee, the Commune's Executive Commission and the Committee of Public Safety constantly at loggerheads and at each other's throats. For a supposedly centralized bureaucracy the Commune is by now a relatively monstrous and unruly assemblage operating at the height of farce, a fact perfectly illustrated by the Fort Issy affair, which will result in Rossel's resignation on 9 May.[59]

By 7 May Rossel's military directives threaten the imposition of martial law;[60] or perhaps in being addressed to a citizen army one is already in place. How to discipline such an army? The practical consequences of attempting to impose such "discipline" is staring everybody in the face: all-out civil war. With this in mind one might dismiss Rossel's vague initiative for a Blanquist dictatorship as being totally impracticable in the circumstances.

Between Myth and the Law

A Hegelian reading of the tragedy of the Commune, read from the point of view of the tragic hero, the one who refuses to yield, reveals the struggle to transcend the false particularity of the state. It is a clash of competing claims to right through which the one divides into two. The Commune can only endure as the ideal city on condition of the destruction of everything the actually existing republic stands for. The price of the revolution, the Commune's pound of flesh, is extracted during the final week of May when the Versailles army enters Paris and slaughters everyone in sight, combatant and non-combatant alike. Through this merciless and perverse ritual, "unity" is restored. The Commune's moral victory is the "lost cause" which future generations will re-stage on the barricades.

But one can also see things differently. "The only origin of tragedy," writes Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "is tragedy itself."[61] What does this mean? That tragedy must be thought through the institutions and meanings that are peculiar to it. The context is not a given set of historical circumstances that account for the composi-

---

59 Rossel will post the famous proclamation of 9 May—"The tricolor flies above Fort Issy abandoned yesterday by its garrison"— to accusations of "treason" from the Commune.

60 Thomas, *Rossel: 1844—1871*, pp. 350—51.

61 Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 305.

tion of tragedies in 5th century Athens. Instead, the context is revealed through one's understanding of a society whose civic constitution is itself inferred from its dramatic form. What tragedy represents is precisely a mixed constitution whereby old-fangled beliefs and superstitions run headlong into the revolutionary legal discourse that will set about defining Athens anew. Tragedy needs to be thought through the structures of this dramatic setting, where at the annual Dionysia the spectacle confronts the citizens in the theatre of democracy.

"Tragedy is born," observes Jean-Pierre Vernant quoting Wilhelm Nestle, "when myth starts to be considered from the point of view of a citizen." But we must also assume that this "citizen" can only be constituted as such by his participation in the spectacle which awaits Athenians at the theatre. It is one thing to build a new society (Greek "democracy") on the ruins of the old ("aristocracy"). But what might it mean practically speaking to build a society from a drama whose "citizenship" is contained within this novel form of expression called tragedy? In this respect it might be foolish to consider Attic tragedy as providing its citizens with a moral education. In the words of Vidal-Naquet:

> tragedy cannot be dissociated from the tragic *representation*. This involved a twofold confrontation: first, between the hero and the chorus and, second, between the chorus and the actors on the one hand and the city present on the tiered steps of the theater on the other.[62]

Tragedy is not the *mode* through which the dramatist conveys his message to the audience. Nor crucially does it represent the unstoppable march of history and the seeds of a more rational order disseminated in the flawed actions of its hero. The farcical nature of the civil war in France, from 1870–71 (and to the present day!), is enough to dissuade us from reading the Commune as the rational kernel of this dialectic, the transcendence of the false particularity of the state. Instead, reading Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, tragedy and democracy *share the same mode*: they are the "city present," the assembly of its spectators in direct communication with the drama. Where the constitution depends on this civic gathering at the City of Dionysia the spectator might even be deemed a legislator.

[62] Ibid., p. 308.

In a partial sense the figure of Rossel represents the complications of tragedy's birth: its phantom pregnancy, the conundrum and the paradox of its term. The Commune of 1871 assumes the appearance of a singular tragedy. In taking Rossel as a model for this drama I have tried to problematize it in three overlapping points: 1) farce is pre-given, rendering its beginning and ending obscure (in passing, Aristotle shrouds the history of comedy and its media of imitation in mystery); 2) absolute incompetence and impotence in the face of arbitrary power, where men are represented as worse ("better worse" says Beckett) than in actual life; and 3) its divine comedy, an epic and false promise of redemption lacking temporal boundaries in which no one quits the stage as a friend.

And yet as tempting as it is to reject the Commune as tragedy in favour of its Dionysian performance, its unprecedented social revolution, such temptation may be misguided. What Rossel's involvement in the Commune brings into focus is instead the drama which is part and parcel of its communal constitution, the one whose full implementation is, perhaps ironically, all-out war. As Marx reminds us: "The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the State parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of, society." How the full restoration of communal power would have squared with the kind of Jacobin/Blanquist dictatorship envisaged by Rossel and Raoul Rigault in their meeting of 1 May is of course purely hypothetical in the circumstances. Certainly "the free movement of society" entails risks which threaten to destroy it. And yet given that "All of Greece is a stage, and every Greek's an actor,"[63] the people stands as the arbiter of its own pathos.

Like Eteocles in the *Seven against Thebes*, Rossel is the paradigm of virtue, facing down the hysteria of the chorus while calmly appraising the city's defences. But unlike Eteocles no miasma of *atē* will descend on him, and he will exit the stage at the time of his own choosing. On 10 May, following his resignation the previous day, and his famous request for "the honour of a cell at Mazas," Rossel is summoned before the Executive Commission. While the Commune deliberates on whether to try him for treason, he absconds from an antechamber of the Hôtel de Ville in the company of Gérardin, and the pair cross the Seine together by ministerial carriage. Rossel takes up residence at a hotel on the Boulevard

63 Dorothy Wender, *Roman Poetry: From the Republic to the Silver Age* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1980), p. 138.

Saint-Germain. Far from having "slunk away like a weasel," as Lissagaray snidely remarks, Rossel will host clandestine meetings with Delescluze, his successor at the War Ministry,[64] advising him on military strategy, while the rest of the Commune wastes no time in scapegoating him for the coming defeat. In spite of the desperation of Delesluze's final stand, when on 25 May the latter is killed mounting the barricade of Boulevard Voltaire, neither he nor Rossel succumbs to the daemonic spirit. Finally captured on 7 June, and following a long and drawn out process in which the indignity of being judged by his military opponents is enough to make one wonder who is on trial—and who indeed is in power—Rossel is sentenced to death and executed by firing squad, alongside Ferré and the sergeant Bourgeois, on 28 November 1871.

[64] Marcel Dessal establishes Delescluze's "frequent visits" to Rossel on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. See Dessal, p. 373.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 81–99

Gilles Grelet*

Prolégomènes à la Bretagne
Anti-politique du navigateur solitaire

« Le lieu précédant la formule. »
— Yves Elléouët[a]

[I]

[1] Dans *Le Crabe-tambour*, le grand livre d'honneur et de mer de Pierre Schoendoerffer, un aviso de la Marine nationale française croise, au large, après un ouragan, un petit voilier blessé qui parvient à étaler le très gros temps en tenant la cape. « Un navigateur solitaire », observe l'officier des pêches ; et d'ajouter : « Bientôt ce seront les derniers vrais marins, ces gens-là… » Réaction sévère et dédaigneuse de son supérieur, qui conclut : « les marins, les vrais marins, sont ceux qui gagnent leur vie, leur pain quotidien, sur la mer.[b] »

[2] Il y a ceux qui vont sur la mer pour quitter le monde, s'en purger, et ceux qui annexent la mer au monde, la mondanisent autant qu'ils le peuvent.

[3] Entre les marins selon l'homme de mer qu'est l'officier des pêches et les marins selon son supérieur, militaire avant tout, division *radicale*. Faisant exploser la notion de marin, cette division est telle qu'elle dégage un point depuis lequel trancher avec le monde même ; elle établit le navigateur solitaire comme gnostique, point zéro d'une anti-philosophie.

[4] *Théorisme* du navigateur solitaire[c] : s'il tire quelque chose de la mer, ce n'est jamais que le vide des mondanités, leur vidange, et la vie d'ange que, défaisant un à un les nœuds qui attachent les hommes au monde, il s'invente point par point.

* Chercheur indépendant

[II]

[5] *Radical*, ce qui refuse le monde, la société humaine ; *mondain*, ce qui refuse l'homme, la solitude humaine.

[6] La *radicalisation*, arrachement des hommes au monde, est humanisation ; la *mondanisation*, ajustement des hommes au monde, réalisation.

[7] Les hommes tiennent au réel dont ils choient en venant au monde ; le monde tient à la réalité forclose au réel.

[8] Le réel n'est pas tant l'homme que la mélancolie qui voue l'homme à la radicalité ; la réalité n'est pas tant le monde que la suffisance spéculaire qui en machine la sécularité.

[9] La mélancolie est aux hommes, et la *s(p)écularité suffisante* est au monde, ce que la divinité est à Dieu.

[10] Le propre de la mondanité est de vampiriser l'homme, de prostituer les solitudes humaines ; celui de la radicalité est d'attenter au monde, d'en défaire la suffisance.

[11] Entre les figures pures de la mondanité et de la radicalité s'inscrit une série de mélanges diversement dosés, dont les deux principales figures sont la *radicalisation mondaine*, arrachement des hommes au monde par un ajustement au rien du monde, au monde ramené à la vérité de sa nullité, et la *mondanisation radicale*, ajustement des hommes au monde par un arrachement à ce monde au nom d'un autre monde.

[12] Sur le plan idéologique, la mondanisation donne lieu au *conservatisme*, la mondanisation radicale au *progressisme*, la radicalisation mondaine au *nihilisme*, la radicalisation à l'*angélisme*. Quadriparti que commande celui de la philosophie, de l'hypo-philosophie, de la contre-philosophie et de l'anti-philosophie.

[13] L'anti-philosophie prend appui sur le réel pour soulever la réalité, lui donner des ailes : c'est un angélisme. Faisant levier de façon à arracher

au monde – à sauver du monde – des lambeaux de réalité et ainsi suspendre point par point l'entreprise s(p)éculaire, son angélisme est un matérialisme.

[14] « Le Solitaire, écrit Saint-Pol-Roux : un être qui étant un homme encore n'est pas encore un dieu : c'est une affaire de temps, il ne s'agit que de tenir.[d] » Un dieu, ou plutôt un ange en devenir : non pas un homme du monde mais un homme rien qu'homme, radicalisé, dont l'attente dans la solitude attente au monde.

[III]

[15] La rupture du navigateur solitaire avec le monde, qui lui vient de sa seule existence (qui en tant qu'existence seule est solitude redoublée – *appropriée*), est aussi simple et immédiate que ce qui suit de cette rupture est complexe et laborieux – sauf à ce que cette suite, laissée à son illusoire simplicité, ne conditionne rétroactivement la rupture dont elle procède, machinant de la sorte sa récupération par le monde. Pas de *spécularité* entre la simplicité de la rupture avec le monde et ce qui suit de cette rupture, ou bien c'est la *sécularité* qui gagne, le monde qui absorbe ce qui rompt avec lui. L'absorbe : non seulement l'annule, mais encore s'en nourrit, trouve à s'en éterniser.

[IV]

[16] Il s'agit d'abord de rompre le silence. Non que la parole vaille mieux[e], mais parce qu'elle seule a chance, sous certaines conditions, assez strictes, de sauver l'essentiel : le silence, justement. Et la solitude. Qui s'entre-expriment, tout comme de leur côté s'entre-expriment parole et monde.

[17] Silence et solitude, pour les bavards qui machinent le monde d'y grenouiller, sont inadmissibles de « conférer aux choses ordinaires une beauté au-delà du supportable[f] ». Silence et solitude sont ce pour quoi, à la recherche d'une *régularité* de quoi, j'ai, l'année de mes quarante ans[g], rejoint bateau et Bretagne, leur double finitude ouverte sur un infini réel, quittant Paris et l'infinitude imaginaire des possibles mondains.

[18] Quittant l'intense foyer de mondanité qu'est Paris[h], c'est du monde que je me suis retiré. (Tourner le dos au monde à la force de l'âge, le geste en impose. Mais en l'espèce il ne recouvre pas grand renoncement, nulle carrière sacrifiée par exemple ; le monde, il faut bien le dire, ne m'avait jamais fait très bon accueil.)

[19] Posté à distance du monde, ayant fait le ménage dans mes attachements, ne possédant que mon bateau et des rayonnages de livres recueillis au loin[i], j'ai eu ce que je voulais : des jours et des jours, sans nombre mais qui font des années, en tête-à-tête avec la mer.

[V]

[20] Le bruit du monde s'est tu ; la mondanité a trouvé son antidote. Dans le tête-à-tête avec la mer, tout entier ramené à la rigoureuse finitude de mon bord redoublée de celle de Bretagne, où la lumière vibre et fait vibrer, où l'on respire mieux que partout ailleurs, cette terre qui inspire d'expirer dans la mer, face au couchant et aux grands vents d'Ouest, pays extrême-occidental où se révèle la grandeur de l'Occident, la seule, mais immense, qui tient en l'infini de sa mélancolie, je me suis mis à vivre, économe de mes mots, au ras des choses.

[21] De « pratiquant de l'activité voile mention support habitable », pour parler la langue altière de la Fédération française de voile[j], marin de plaisance expérimenté mais de vacances seulement, soucieux de saisir toute occasion d'enrichir mon *curriculum vitae* nautique et de voir tourner – et sans doute de pouvoir exhiber – mon compteur de jours de mer, je suis devenu marin tout court, marin subjectivé.

[22] « J'ai fait le vide autour de moi, lâche le commandant de supertanker Marco Silvestri (Vincent Lindon) dans le film de Claire Denis *Les Salauds* ; ça sert à ça, la marine[k]. » Marin, celui dont le tête-à-tête avec la mer fait le vide du monde. Autour de lui, et en lui.

[23] Peu de marins au sens radical parmi les « usagers » de la mer. Professionnels ou amateurs, la plupart vont sur l'eau pour en tirer ou y gagner quelque chose, qu'il s'agisse d'y commercer, d'en exploiter les res-

sources, d'y glaner des trophées sportifs ou bien encore de s'y éprouver pour mieux revenir au monde. Ce sont des mondains de la mer.

[24] La ligne de partage, magistrale, passe entre ceux qui se servent de la mer et ceux qui se servent de la marine. Les uns rapportent la mer au monde auquel ils se rapportent eux-mêmes ; les autres se rapportent au radical d'humanité dont la mer est miroir.

[25] À demeure sur l'eau, ne quittant guère mon bord plus de quelques heures (et en fin de compte seulement cinq nuits les cinq premières années), ne croisant pas grand-monde, j'ai pris mes quartiers de mer, comme l'on dit quartiers de noblesse. Dès lors ai-je navigué non pour ce que cela apportait à ma vie, mais parce que c'était ma vie : sinon mieux, du moins bien.

[26] Sait-on ces jours de transparence, où rien enfin n'est de trop, où l'on est si exactement ramené à sa finitude que c'est l'infini même dont on se sent traversé ? Ces jours où une belle manœuvre, qui n'est telle qu'autant qu'elle se fond si bien dans le paysage que personne ne la remarque, comble l'âme sans l'alourdir de rien ? Où tracer un grand sillage scintillant, dans une brise tiède, peut faire hurler, seul, dans la nuit ?

[VI]

[27] Cela n'a pas duré. Deux ans de ce régime de mutisme tout juste tempéré (par les achats courants, des obligations administratives et, de temps à autre, un contact avec des proches plutôt compréhensifs), et la solitude bénie se retournait en malédiction banale, se peuplait de fantasmes et de fantômes, rameutait rancœurs et convoitises. À mesure que j'en approfondissais le vide, ma circonscription virait au glauque ; le silence, intensifié, perdait éclat et vibration : loin de s'y épurer, il moisissait, s'effritait, partait en charpie.

[28] Dans la cellule de lumière qu'à distance du monde je m'étais ménagée, tout s'est mis à résonner, creux ; à raisonner, mou. Le tête-à-tête avec la mer virait au décervelage, l'âme rincée, avalée.

[29] « Sans m'en rendre compte, constate au seuil de son miraculeux *Armen* le tout jeune gardien de phare Jean-Pierre Abraham, je suis entré dans l'hébétude de ces vieux marins. Naguère encore, quand je descendais, quand je retrouvais l'île après vingt jours, je les admirais, tous alignés sur le quai Nord, immobiles, l'œil fixé sur un point de l'horizon. Je les imaginais pleins de sagesse et de souvenir. Je sais maintenant qu'ils sont sans pensée. La mer est entrée par leurs yeux, leur a vidé lentement l'intérieur de la tête[l]. »

[30] « Le bateau, ça rend con, remarque Brel de son côté. T'as le cerveau qui s'atrophie à force de te demander d'où vient le vent.[m] » Pas sûr que le souci constant du sens du vent y soit pour grand-chose, mais l'atrophie intérieure, l'apathie de l'âme, le dessèchement subjectif du marin sont, eux, avérés.

[31] Nourri de lui-même, de son vide propre bien davantage que du refus d'occuper une place parmi les bavards dans les rangs du monde, le mutisme de ceux qui vivent sur la mer, à même la dévorante, s'avère inséparable de l'hébétude, de l'abrutissement, de la ronde des pensées molles, médiocrement folles, informulables à force d'inconsistance, dont à la fin des fins le brouhaha sourd n'est pas moins désastreux que le bavardage qui mondanise tout ce qu'il touche.

[VII]

[32] Reprendre alors la parole. Mais pas n'importe laquelle. Une parole *de* silence : qui en vienne, et y conduise.

[33] Non pas rendre les armes, revenir au monde ; mais ne pas, ne plus croire à trop bon compte m'en être défait de l'avoir fait taire. Car c'est encore et toujours le monde qui, en creux, par l'évidement plutôt que par la bouffissure, insiste en ce silence nu qu'importe la mer en même temps qu'elle l'emporte.

[34] On sait l'observation du sage Maître Folace (Francis Blanche), le notaire des *Tontons flingueurs* de Georges Lautner : « C'est curieux, chez les marins, ce besoin de faire des phrases.[n] » Curieux, sans doute, aux yeux du

monde ; beaucoup moins, en revanche, à tenir ces phrases pour paroles de silence.

[VIII]

[35] Rompre donc le silence, pour le sauver. Parler le silence pour que le silence ne parle pas, ne fasse pas monde.

[36] Ce qui ne revient pas exactement à dire, avec Maurice Blanchot : « *Garder* le silence, c'est ce que à notre insu nous voulons tous, écrivant.[o] » Il y a le silence idéaliste, qu'on *vise*, et qui recule à mesure qu'on s'en approche, donnant ses aises à la parole chemin faisant : c'est ce dont Blanchot dégage la dialectique. Et puis il y a le silence matérialiste, élémentaire, qu'on *habite*, moyennant la parole qui en rompt la suffisance : c'est ce dont j'engage l'anti-dialectique.

[37] La dialectique du silence est là pour procurer un alibi au trafic-monde de la parole, dispositif de justification aussi sophistiqué que redoutablement efficace en vertu duquel les agents spéciaux de la mondanité peuvent, la conscience tranquille, faire œuvre, créer, réaliser et se réaliser, quand ses agents de base, avec meilleure conscience encore – la meilleure du monde, forcément –, procréent, engendrent, fabriquent de la chair à parole.

[38] Création et procréation l'une à l'autre s'adossent pour machiner ensemble, dans la fabrication et la consommation d'illusions qui donnent envie de vivre, l'infamie de la perpétuation du monde[p]. Au premier rang de ces illusions, l'idéal du silence, le silence comme idéal.

[39] Silence facile, silence difficile. Le vide du premier, au revers immédiat du bavardage mondain, est voué à la moisissure boursouflée des marges, qui remplissent une fonction essentielle pour le monde : la marge, dans un cahier, est ce qui fait tenir ensemble les pages. Quant au vide du second, il se parle. Profération du vide, harmonique du rien, la parole de silence conjure la parole et son revers de silence.

[40] Si la parole est l'orthodoxie même, le silence facile en est l'hétérodoxie et le silence difficile l'hérésie.

[41] Rompre le silence hétérodoxe pour en établir un autre, hérétique, moyennant la parole. Une certaine parole, ayant sa fin hors d'elle-même. Parole qui soit moyen (humain, d'humanisation) plutôt que fin (mondaine, de mondanisation). Parole fonctionnelle, anti-idolâtrique. Parole d'une fonctionnalité d'ordre iconique.

[42] Iconique, ce qui, dans le domaine pictural, *représente* moins (la représentation valant pour soi, ayant sa fin en elle-même) qu'elle ne sert de chemin d'approche, de pont, de moyen d'accès à autre chose qu'elle-même, et peut bien s'effacer sa tâche accomplie. Iconique, ce qui met en rapport ce qui est séparé, tels le croyant et son Dieu, l'icône valant non pour la beauté qui s'y donne à voir mais pour l'état – de recueillement, de prière – auquel elle conduit ; ce qui ne meuble pas le monde, ne fait pas œuvre, ou alors *de surcroît*, malgré soi, mais supporte un arrachement au monde, lui est tremplin.

[43] Mise en rapport du silence avec lui-même, la parole de silence, comme parole fonctionnelle d'ordre iconique, est parole minimale – plus petite forme possible : formule, parole ou écriture formulaire[q].

[IX]

[44] Le solitaire ne rompt le silence que pour l'établir, et s'y établir ; qu'il demeure, et y demeurer. Non pas *garder* le silence, écrivant, mais écrire à même le silence.

[45] Formulaires, ses paroles sont du silence tenu, retenu de faire monde : *theoria*, plutôt que *logos* et vide du *logos*. Anti-dialectique dont, souvent, l'écriture de la lumière est mieux capable que celle des mots.

[X]

[46] La mer fait le vide du monde sans jamais faire monde elle-même. Elle n'est pas plus du monde que d'un autre monde, alternatif à ce monde : c'est la dévorante[r].

[47] Si la mer n'est pas du monde, ou (d')un monde, c'est qu'elle n'est pas une réalité mais le réel de la réalité. Comme la mélancolie dont elle constitue le *miroir anti-s(p)éculaire*, la mer baigne toute réalité. Élémentaire, elle détermine en dernière instance *la* réalité.

[48] La mer est la chance et le risque des hommes. Faisant le vide du monde sans rien lui substituer qu'un abîme, elle laisse place à un retour du monde, sous les espèces de miasmes, pour tenter de combler ce vide. En une manière d'appel d'air en circuit fermé, le monde, mis à la porte du corps, revient par la fenêtre de l'âme. À moins d'y parer. Ce qui requiert, entre mer et monde, *au lieu du vide*, un dispositif spécial : une *institution*.

[49] Ne pas croire la mer contre le monde, tout contre : elle vient avant ; c'est l'anté-monde. Entre la mer, réel de la réalité, et le monde, réalité, au lieu du vide, l'institution : réalité du réel.

[XI]

[50] L'institution dans sa version usuelle, domestiquée, est instrument de mondanité maximale : ce par et en quoi l'organisation sociale des hommes excède sa stricte horizontalité pour se doter d'une profondeur (historique, généalogique, juridique), de « racines » qui stabilisent l'émulsion sociale en sorte que le monde tienne.

[51] Prise en elle-même, libérée de sa camisole, l'institution n'est pas ce dont la verticalité tempère, contrebalance et à son corps défendant pérennise ainsi l'exercice horizontal de la socialité ; c'est ce qui attente à cet exercice. L'institution est anti-sociale.

[52] « Tout ça n'a aucune importance, docteur ; le second prendra ma place, tranche, dans l'adaptation cinématographique du *Crabe-tambour*[s], le

vieux commandant malade (Jean Rochefort) face à Pierre (Claude Rich), le médecin de bord. Ce qui compte c'est le bateau. – Le bateau ? – Le bateau. Les hommes, vous savez… Sans un bateau, nous ne valons pas cher. » Le bateau c'est l'institution, dont le commandant énonce la formule. Ce que Pierre refuse d'entendre. Pour lui qui a quitté la Marine il y a longtemps avant d'y revenir, sur le tard, avec le sentiment de « rentrer dans le rang » (« je me suis fait peur », l'entend-on murmurer comme pour s'excuser), l'institution est un pis-aller, la voie tracée d'avance de ceux qui n'ont pas la force de suivre leur propre chemin – ou, comme lui, y ont manqué. Pour le vieux commandant au contraire, seule l'institution permet de tenir tête au monde.

[53] L'institution donne aux hommes de tenir debout là où le monde en fait des flaques d'eau. Elle les subjective là où le monde les socialise. L'erreur du personnage de Pierre, le médecin du *Crabe-tambour*, est de rabattre l'institution sur la socialisation, et la socialisation sur le registre du collectif. Car l'individualisation n'est pas moins une socialisation que la collectivisation. Ce qui s'oppose à la socialisation, individuelle ou collective, individualiste ou collectiviste, c'est la subjectivation ; c'est l'institution humaine.

[XII]

[54] Qu'un homme livré à lui-même, à ses propres forces, ne vaille pas grand-chose, ne signifie pas que le monde vaille mieux que la solitude, moins encore qu'il faille en passer par lui qu'on le veuille ou non (la question devenant celle, aussi répugnante que dérisoire, de « la dose de compromis acceptable »). C'est dire qu'il faut aux hommes des institutions.

[55] Ce qui fait le départ entre la radicalisation rigoureuse et sa version mondaine, c'est leur rapport à l'institution. Toutes deux articulent un parti pris du vide ; mais le nihilisme de la radicalisation mondaine, faisant du vide la vérité dont l'extinction est la méthode, voit en l'institution le redoublement du mensonge de la vie par sa sclérose, alors que l'angélisme de la radicalisation rigoureuse, dont la vérité n'a d'être que du parti pris du vide dont elle procède, est tout institutionnel.

[56] La vérité du nihilisme, épistémologique, accomplit les Lumières[t] ; la vérité de l'angélisme, gnostique, n'instaure pas tant la lumière (hénologique) que le combat (anti-ontologique) contre la ténèbre.

[57] La méthode est, selon Novalis, la régularisation du génie[u] ; je dis *institution* la régularisation de la grâce. L'ange, partenaire de l'homme dans son combat contre la ténèbre mondaine, c'est l'institution.

[58] L'institution, réalité du réel, met en rapport le réel et la réalité moyennant le sujet, réel de la réalité, auquel elle donne, non des mains, mais des ailes. C'est ainsi ce grâce à quoi l'homme trouve quelque prise sur les réalités sans succomber à la réalité : juste de quoi vivre sans pour autant se mondaniser.

[59] *Prothétique* et non institutionnelle, la dimension de ce qui donne des mains à l'humanité, c'est-à-dire de quoi combler son vide, son essentiel défaut ontologique, le manque d'être foncier qui en fait une espèce si peu apte à la survie. Dimension de la prothèse ou de la machine à laquelle fait droit Laurent de Sutter, pour qui « de tout temps, l'être humain n'a pu se présenter comme tel que par le biais des accessoires, des suppléments, des prothèses qui en disent le tout, c'est-à-dire qui en disent l'absence d'être.[v] »

[60] Ses mains sont ce par quoi l'humanité prétend échanger son vide (son manque d'être) contre du faire : du réel contre de la réalisation, de la mélancolie contre de la mondanité. Les prothèses, « innombrables accessoires qui, comme dit encore Laurent de Sutter, du langage au feu, du livre aux ordinateurs, des tracteurs aux cosmétiques, font que nous sommes ce que nous sommes[w] », ne mettent pas en rapport le réel et la réalité mais rabattent celui-là sur celle-ci : bouchant le trou du réel avec la bourre de la réalité, elles sont ce par quoi l'humanité s'accomplit : se débarrasse d'elle-même.

[61] Les prises sur certaines réalités que donne à l'homme l'institution sont comme les ascendances qu'accrochent les oiseaux pour prendre de l'altitude et rester en vol. L'homme a des mains faute d'avoir des ailes ; l'ontologie humaine est prothétique faute d'être institutionnelle. Mettant en

rapport réel et réalité en faisant écran entre eux, l'institution refuse – ou conjure – l'échange : anti-prothèse du sujet[x], elle permet l'humanisation. Instituer, c'est donner lieu à l'humanité.

[62] Faute d'instituer le vide du monde que délivre la mer, c'est sinon le monde qui revient, du moins ses remugles qui viennent hanter l'espace vacant. Instituer le vide, c'est, lui donnant lieu, en forger le *canon* – d'un même geste *norme et explosion* : ce qui régularise silence et solitude, en les rompant. Au lieu du vide, la formule, le lieu précédant la formule.

[XIII]

[63] Politique, le refus de la priorité du lieu (*topos*), et sa mise en coupe réglée par la parole (*logos*). La politique est ce qui fait que rien n'ait (de) lieu qu'à s'inscrire, moyennant la parole, dans l'ordre du monde (*cosmos*). En quoi la politique est toujours une cosmopolitique, c'est-à-dire une philosophie.

[64] Le monde n'est pas un lieu mais un processus : procès d'ouverture tous azimuts, le monde est mondanisation. À quoi s'oppose l'exigence humaine de clôture. L'opposition du clos et de l'ouvert, secret le plus profond de l'humanité ? Comme Frédéric Worms[y], je le crois, mais, contrairement à lui, en tiens pour le clos.

[65] La circonscription est ce sans quoi l'humanité se transmue en ressource mondaine. On n'accède pas à l'infini par l'indéfini mais par le fini. On ne lutte pas contre le repli en s'ouvrant au large, puisque le repli est la *condition* même du large. Encore faut-il ne pas sciemment méconnaître le repli, et le large[z].

[XIV]

[66] Anti-politique, la précession canonique du lieu sur la formule.

[67] Un lieu n'est pas une localisation au sein du monde, mais ce qui sépare et protège l'homme du monde ; c'est un entre-deux. Comme l'indique Michel Le Bris, « à croire décidément qu'un "ici" n'est un lieu que s'il est

une porte…[aa] ». Allons au terme : habiter un lieu, c'est y être mis à la porte de chez soi.

[68] De la désactivation politique du lieu procède la maxime cosmopolitique « je suis partout chez moi ». À quoi j'oppose non le « chez moi c'est chez moi » identitaire (repoussoir dont le cosmopolitisme a besoin comme l'État a besoin du terrorisme, quitte à les sécréter), mais le « je ne suis nulle part chez moi » anti-politique.

[69] Le chez soi est la s(p)écularisation du lieu ; la politique en est la manufacture à toutes les échelles, du microcosme au macrocosme. Le lieu est l'institution du vide ; l'anti-politique en dresse le canon, comme pied de nez d'une solitude douée de régularité.

[70] Le monde s'éternise de ce qu'on bavarde chez soi, fût-ce de se taire ; l'homme se sauve de s'établir au lieu du vide, et d'en dire le mot. Sans lieu, pas de formule mais du bavardage, idéalement délibératif, qui s(p)écularise les lieux. Pour l'anti-politique, rien n'a lieu que le lieu.

[XV]

[71] La rébellion au monde par les voies du silence et de la solitude requiert le lieu et la formule. La radicalisation anti-philosophique, théoriste bien plutôt que terroriste, requiert un enracinement anti-politique.

[72] Le lieu, comme entre-deux ou coprésence de l'ici et de l'ailleurs, est gnostique. Dire « je ne suis nulle part chez moi », c'est ramasser l'exil, la quête du royaume et l'échec de cette quête. C'est dire : je suis ici, mais n'en suis pas. La mélancolie, science du lieu. L'homme, en venant au monde, s'est perdu dans les ténèbres ; il s'y débat pour retrouver des bribes de la lumière à laquelle il est apparenté. Telle est la logique de la gnose celte, que recèle la *Matière de Bretagne*[bb]. Et pour cause : les lieux celtiques sont lieux purs.

[XVI]

[73] J'ai découvert que je suis breton ; que la Bretagne, gnostique, n'est pas faite pour le monde, qui l'a pourtant annexée.

[74] Que la Bretagne ait pu, il y a bientôt cinq cents ans, être rattachée à la France, et depuis progressivement s'y dissoudre, tient d'abord à ce qu'elle se voyait elle-même comme rattachable au monde, et soluble en lui. Pas de discontinuité entre la Bretagne et cette figure immédiate du monde que lui est la France : toutes deux étaient de plain-pied sur le plan politique. Avant même que la Bretagne n'ait perdu politiquement face à la France, elle s'était déjà perdue d'être politique.

[75] Ni politique, ni mystique, la Bretagne, gnostique, est anti-politique. « Si, comme l'écrit Alain Le Cloarec, au XIX^e^ siècle, la Bretagne apparaît principalement comme un moyen d'affirmation d'idées politiques conservatrices, au XX^e^ siècle, ce sont également les idées politiques progressistes et révolutionnaires qui vont être des moyens d'affirmation de la Bretagne.[cc] » Peut-être, au XXI^e^ siècle, la Bretagne cessera-t-elle de se rapporter au monde, que ce soit comme moyen d'une politique ou comme fin d'une autre ; peut-être se constituera-t-elle une bonne fois comme *lieu*, s'établissant en elle-même, en sa finitude qui piège l'infini, de sorte que, ne s'attachant plus à rien, elle ne s'appuie que sur elle-même.

[76] Il y a bien des raisons pour lesquelles la Bretagne, prise comme nation aux neuf pays (Cornouaille, Vannetais, pays Nantais, Léon, Trégor, pays de Saint-Brieuc, pays de Saint-Malo, pays de Dol, pays Rennais), doit et peut travailler à son indépendance. Des raisons, historiques, géographiques, linguistiques ou encore économiques, souvent excellentes dans leur ordre mais dont l'appareil empirique, ne touchant pas au radical de Bretagne, peut tout aussi bien lui donner corps anti-politique qu'en tisser le linceul politique.

[77] Déterminant l'appareil empirique des raisons qui militent pour l'indépendance sans en être déterminé en retour, le radical de Bretagne donne à l'indépendance de quoi échapper aux impasses de la revendication : sa rigueur de dernière instance.

[78] De la même manière et pour les mêmes raisons que l'anti-philosophie doit être capable de mener et remporter sa guerre d'indépendance vis-à-vis de la pensée-monde qu'est la philosophie, la Bretagne doit être capable de mener et remporter sa guerre d'indépendance vis-à-vis de la figure du monde que lui est la France.

[XVII]

[79] Entre-deux de la mer et du monde, du réel et de la réalité, la Bretagne, dépourvue d'identité à défendre ou à dissoudre, est ce qui demeure. « Un pays où rien ne meurt, un peuple qui se targue de n'avoir rien abdiqué, tel est le singulier anachronisme que présente la Bretagne », écrit Le Braz[dd].

[80] Dans la formule générale des choses humaines, qui est celle de la rébellion au monde, la Bretagne occupe la place de la constante[ee].

[NOTES]

[a] Yves Elléouët, *Falc'hun*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 66.

[b] Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Le Crabe-tambour*, Grasset, Paris, 1976, pp. 295-297.

[c] J'ai avancé la notion de « théorisme » dans les *Prolégomènes à la rébellion comme théorisme* (mémoire de recherche pour le DEA « La Philosophie et la Cité », Université Paris Nanterre, 1996). Son seul défaut étant de ne pas passer en anglais, cette notion quasiment vierge avant que je ne la mobilise (le *Trésor de la langue française* en cite deux occurrences, au demeurant lâches, chez Chateaubriand et Vigny), constitue le fil rouge d'un parcours de plus de vingt ans. Fil hétérogène, cependant. Sans doute faut-il en effet distinguer deux âges du théorisme, entre lesquels l'année académique 2006-2007 fait charnière.

[d] Saint-Pol-Roux, *La Besace du solitaire*, éd. Jacques Goorma et Alistair Whyte, Rougerie, Mortemart, 2000, p. 51.

[e] « Il n'est rien de plus indigne, ai-je expérimenté avec l'âge, que la très respectée dignité du mutisme », indiquait Jean-Claude Milner en tête d'un ouvrage pour en justifier l'existence (*L'Universel en éclats. Court traité politique 3*, Verdier, Lagrasse, 2014, p. 9). Sur ce point comme sur bien d'autres désormais, je me découvre en opposition complète avec un auteur qui, longtemps, m'aura été un guide infaillible vers la radicalité. Une radicalité où il ne s'aventurait guère lui-même, mais dont il dégageait les voies comme nul autre.

[f] “It was killing him with its silence and loneliness, making everything ordinary too beautiful to bear”, écrit Ken Cosgrove, sous son nom de plume de Dave Algonquin, à la fin de l’épisode 5.5 de la série *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner, 7 saisons, 76 épisodes, AMC, États-Unis, 2007-2015).

[g] Je me suis avisé que Xavier Grall avait lui aussi quarante ans en quittant Paris pour s’établir en Bretagne. La coïncidence me semble significative. Non que cet âge, parce qu’il serait celui de la moitié de vie, inciterait aux bilans et changements éventuels d’existence afin de profiter du temps qui reste : cette vision gestionnaire et touristique des choses humaines, misérable en plus d’être *fausse*, n’était pas celle de Xavier Grall, et n’est pas davantage la mienne. Je constate, plus simplement, plus radicalement, avoir mis quarante ans à commencer à vivre. Jeune, sauf à être abruti, l’on veut surtout mourir. Vieux, je ne sais encore. À quarante-six ans, l’âge que j’ai au moment où j’écris ceci, je suis *vivant*. Nulle gestion de vie, chez Grall et moi ; mais un rapport *de* vie. Et sans doute y a-t-il là, dans le champ contemporain, une structure subjective partagée.

[h] À l’appui d’une assertion qui se soutient très bien d’elle-même, l’actualité me souffle les mots que prononça Victor Hugo à son retour d’exil, le 5 septembre 1870 : « Sauver Paris, c’est plus que sauver la France, c’est sauver le monde. Paris est le centre même de l’humanité, Paris est la ville sacrée. Qui attaque Paris attaque en masse tout le genre humain. Paris est la capitale de la civilisation, qui n’est ni un royaume ni un empire, et qui est le genre humain tout entier dans son passé et dans son avenir. Et savez-vous pourquoi Paris est la ville de la civilisation ? C’est parce que Paris est la ville de la Révolution. » (Discours repris le 10 janvier 2016 lors d’un hommage officiel aux victimes des meurtres parisiens de janvier et novembre 2015.)

[i] Ma bibliothèque est sans doute la seule chose que je regrette de ma vie à terre. Certains jours, elle me manque sans cesse, qu’il s’agisse d’épauler dans l’instant un travail en cours ou de permettre une de ces libres errances dont la fécondité n’est plus à prouver. Mais je ne suis quand même pas totalement dépourvu. Ma bibliothèque de bord, pour contrainte et peu aisée d’accès qu’elle soit (puisque les livres, protégés de l’humidité dans des sacs plastique, sont rangés au chausse-pied dans des caisses ou des sacoches elles-mêmes calées dans des casiers situés derrière des dossiers ou sous des assises), comporte en effet plusieurs centaines de volumes. Et j’en adapte la composition par des échanges annuels avec ma bibliothèque principale.

[j] Effroyable langue, à l’avenant d’une pensée nulle, toute tissée de pédagogisme aux sources psycho-sociologiques résolument désubjectivées et désubjectivantes, que ce jargon de la FFV, où l’âme des Glénans (l’âme, oui, l’âme !) s’est noyée au tournant des années 1990. Ayant alors passé la qualification fédérale de formateur de moniteurs de croisière, j’ai vécu cette noyade de près, croyant pouvoir y parer avec les moyens du bord – ceux que je commençais de me forger et ceux, surtout, que recélait la pensée-Glénans ou ce qui me semblait de cet ordre.

[k] Claire Denis, *Les Salauds*, prod. Wild Bunch et Alcatraz Films, France, 2013.

[l] Jean-Pierre Abraham, *Armen* [Le Seuil, Paris, 1967], rééd. Le Tout sur le Tout, Gouvernes, 1988, p. 13. Faut-il dire que je ne lisais plus grand-chose, que tout me tombait des mains ? Mais le chef-d'œuvre d'Abraham, lui, tenait, et me tenait. Il ne fut pas pour rien dans mon sursaut, dans le travail de subjectivation qui s'inscrit ici-même. Comme si je relisais moins *Armen* que ce n'était lui qui me relisait, et me ramenait à moi-même.

[m] Quand Brel a ce mot (cité par Philippe Joubin, « La cathédrale de Jacques Brel », *Voiles et Voiliers*, n° 554, avril 2017, p. 113), il est aux Marquises, au terme d'un demi-tour du monde en équipage réduit à bord de l'*Askøy II*, yawl en acier de 18 mètres pour 42 tonnes, si peu équilibré qu'il ne pouvait être laissé aux soins d'un pilote automatique ou d'un régulateur d'allure… On aurait cependant tort de minimiser la portée d'un tel mot.

[n] Georges Lautner, *Les Tontons flingueurs*, dial. Michel Audiard, prod. Gaumont, France-Allemagne-Italie, 1963.

[o] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre*, Gallimard, Paris, 1980, p. 187.

[p] « Tu es infâme. – Non, je suis une femme », est-il dit dans *Une femme est une femme*, de Godard (prod. Georges de Beauregard et Carlo Ponti, France, 1961). Non pas les femmes, instance de l'infamie, mais *la* femme, qui n'existe que des mères. La femme, qui court les rues, porte le monde ; les femmes, qui sont des raretés, le suspendent. De là que je haïsse la femme, c'est-à-dire les mères, lors même que j'aime une femme, et ma mère.

[q] Ainsi de ces lignes, évidemment, mais encore des conditions qui président à leur écriture. Je pense par exemple à la musique. Si je l'écoute assez peu pour elle-même, elle m'est en revanche un moyen privilégié de mise en condition de travail. Grâce à elle se constitue une sorte de bulle autour de moi, en laquelle l'écriture parfois peut avoir lieu.

[r] « La mer attend son heure, raconte l'illustre sauveteur en mer breton François Mic ; elle guette, comme un crocodile ; et elle avale. Elle ne pardonne rien à l'homme. Elle n'aime pas. Elle est mauvaise… Dieu qu'elle est mauvaise ! » (*Le Monde*, 19 juillet 1996, cité in Björn Larsson, *La Sagesse de la mer*, trad. Philippe Bouquet [2002], rééd. Le Livre de Poche, n° 30438, Paris, 2005, p. 44). Et Jean-Pierre Abraham, à la fin de sa vie, de confesser : « J'ai vu de vieux noyés, depuis je hais la mer. J'ai tout le temps peur maintenant » (*Fort-Cigogne*, Le Temps qu'il fait, Cognac, 1995, p. 87). Joseph Conrad : « *Odi et amo* pourrait bien être l'aveu de ceux qui, consciemment ou aveuglément, ont abandonné leur existence à la fascination de la mer » (*Le Miroir de la mer* [1906], trad. Pierre et Yane Lefranc, Gallimard [1985], coll. « Folio », n° 4760, Paris, 2008, p. 212).

[s] Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Le Crabe-tambour*, prod. Georges de Beauregard, France, 1977.

[t] Je renvoie ici à Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound. Enlightenment and Extinction,* Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007.

[u] « La véritable conquête, chez Fichte et Kant, se trouve dans la méthode, dans la régularisation du génie. » (Novalis, *Fragments*, précédé de *Les Disciples à Saïs*, trad. Maurice Maeterlinck [Bruxelles, 1895, 1914], rééd. José Corti, Paris, 1992, p. 126.)

[v] Laurent de Sutter, « L'âge de l'anesthésie dont je parle est en réalité l'âge de la dépression », entretien avec Jonathan Daudey et Mickaël Perre, in *Un Philosophe*, <unphilosophe.com/2017/10/30/entretien-avec-laurent-de-sutter-lage-de-lanesthesie-dont-je-parle-est-en-realite-lage-de-la-depression/> [dernière consultation le 17 février 2018].

[w] L'ensemble du propos mérite d'être cité ici : « La seule chose qu'il y a d'humain en l'humanité est ce qui supplémente son humanité – les innombrables accessoires qui, du langage au feu, du livre aux ordinateurs, des tracteurs aux cosmétiques, font que nous sommes ce que nous sommes. L'ontologie humaine est une ontologie prothétique. Sans prothèse, nous ne sommes que des vers nus – des larves néoténiques. La machine est notre condition. » (Laurent de Sutter, post Facebook, 20 septembre 2017.)

[x] L'écran (symbolique) refuse l'échange (imaginaire) non en lui résistant, mais en venant avant : la dimension institutionnelle précède la dimension prothétique ; elle est rigoureusement anti-prothétique d'être *anté*-prothétique.

[y] Frédéric Worms, « L'ouverture, oui mais laquelle ? », *Libération*, 7 avril 2017.

[z] En visite en Bretagne à la toute fin de son mandat, le président François Hollande déclarait ainsi : « On a besoin d'air pur, parce qu'il y a quand même aussi des mauvais vents (…), les vents du nationalisme, du repli, de la peur. Il faut (…) aller vers le grand large, ne jamais se replier » (propos rapportés par Solenn de Royer, *Le Monde*, 29 avril 2017).

[aa] Michel Le Bris, *Un hiver en Bretagne* [NiL, Paris, 1996], rééd. Le Seuil, coll. « Points », n° P369, Paris, 1997, p. 189.

[bb] On sait que la Bretagne de la *Matière de Bretagne* – cet ensemble de légendes et de chansons qui au Moyen Âge donna lieu à une immense littérature – ne se limite pas à la Bretagne actuelle, mais englobe également et même se centre plutôt sur l'île de Bretagne. N'importe.

[cc] Alain Le Cloarec, *Aux origines des mouvements bretons*, Coop Breizh, Spézet, 2016, p. 46.

[dd] Anatole Le Braz, *La Bretagne à travers l'Histoire* [1923], Les Équateurs, coll. « Parallèles », Paris, 2009, p. 57.

[ee] J'ai longtemps tenu le lieu pour accessoire ou contingent au regard de la formule, seule chargée de dignité ou de nécessité. On pouvait bien être ici ou ailleurs, cela n'importait guère, ou alors de manière négative, comme ce dont la généralité doit s'abstraire pour advenir. Breton exilé à quatorze ans, j'éprouvais un allègre fourmillement de l'âme à chaque retour en Bretagne, mais n'en tirais pas de conclusion pour mon travail, ne voyant pas comment un lieu pourrait ne pas être homogène au corps, lui-même prison de l'âme.

Et puis, j'ai fait droit à ce qui, dans la formule, *a lieu*. À ceci qu'il faut que l'âme se fasse corps pour que le corps se fasse âme. Le corps, prison de l'âme, mais la chair prison du corps bien davantage. À distinguer corps et chair, s'ouvrait la possibilité d'un lieu qui ne soit pas une localisation, c'est-à-dire d'une circonscription qui libère de la prison du monde, la rigueur de sa finitude étant ce qui donne accès à l'infini. Ce fut – et c'est toujours – mon bateau, pour cela nommé *Théorème* : le lieu de la formule et la formule du lieu.

Belle trouvaille sans doute, s'agissant de faire le vide du monde. Moins s'il s'agit d'y vivre. Car vider la formule de toute détermination hors son lieu flottant, c'est lui interdire d'être autre chose qu'elle-même *flottante*, et partant d'avoir prise sur la moindre réalité. En instituant la finitude du lieu comme moyen de la formule et la formule comme détermination du lieu à même l'infini, j'ai moins trouvé le lieu et la formule que court-circuité l'un par l'autre les termes de la recherche. Manque au lieu l'enracinement qui, précédant la formule, lui donnerait sa constante. Ce qu'est la Bretagne.

Merci à Laurène Strzempa

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 101–117

Dariush M. Doust*

Tragic Errors and Politics of Guilt

The name Antigone, echoed many a time in the contemporary literature, is also the name of a theoretical error marking the same vast interpretative literature: to perpetuate the phantasy of collective guilt in the guise of an emancipatory pathos. In this essay I will put this claim to the test by tracing three—arguably representative—variations of the same error. I will not overburden my argument with long quotations from Sophocles's *Antigone*, or with a discussion about its specific place in Greek tragedy. The play has been endlessly discussed in academic and literary works, and any new endeavour in a similar vein would thus seem superfluous. In any case a close reading of the minutiae will be beyond the scope and objective of this text, which focuses instead on the impact of the figure of Antigone on contemporary intellectual debate. In this respect my argument has been kept largely free of quotations from the play, and references to textual interpretations are confined to footnotes.

I. Meinhof: Sacrifice

Germany in Autumn (1978) was the result of a collectivist collaboration between filmmakers belonging to the so-called German New Wave. In one sequence of the film, written by Heinrich Böll and directed by Volker Schlöndorff, we are shown a national TV broadcast of the play *Antigone* that would be eventually cancelled for fear of the harm it might cause to the so-called "public interest". The sequence shows the boardroom meeting of the state broadcaster during which concerns are expressed about whether Antigone could invite unwelcome associations with the fate of the founders of the RAF. The RAF, or *Rote Armee Fraktion*, was the outcome of a decade-long radicalism in Germany. The onset of the process that led to armed struggle can be traced back to 1967, when a young student, Benno Ohnesorg, was shot and killed by the police at a demonstration against the Shah of Iran during his visit to West Berlin. No policeman was held responsible for the killing. As a young revolutionary of the time, Gudrun Ensslin, one of the future founders of the RAF, wrote these words: "They'll kill us

* Department of History of Ideas, University of Gothenburg, Sweden & Research Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Xansi University, China

all. You know what kind of pigs we're up against. This is the Auschwitz generation we've got against us. You can't argue with the people who made Auschwitz. They have weapons and we haven't. We must arm ourselves."[1]

The "we" here is a subject opposed to society as a whole, an avant-garde that will bring down the regime of the One Dimensional Man. In 1970, the RAF's statement following the operation to liberate Andreas Baader from prison demonstrated the objective position of their armed struggle:

> Did they believe that we would talk about the development of the class struggle and the re-organization of the proletariat without arming ourselves at the same time? [...] Those who don't defend themselves die. Those who don't die are buried alive in prisons, in reform schools, in the slums of worker's districts, in the stone coffins of the new housing developments, in the crowded kindergartens and schools, in the brand new kitchens and bedrooms filled with fancy furniture bought on credit.[2]

A certain shift is discernible here: the political organisation of social forces is replaced by a pathos which inadvertently underlined a historical rupture between those social forces and political organization.

The armed struggle carried out by the RAF also highlighted the instrumental role of the mass media as the imaginary of the new capitalist society. The Springer Verlag publishing group and its tabloid newspaper *Bild-Zeitung* actively exploited the actions carried out by militant groups, either for the sake of instilling fear or encouraging more security measures. Members of the RAF such as Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader, though portrayed as monsters and villains, became front page icons in an orgy of pitifulness, horror and excitement. The life and destiny of Ulrike Meinhof, one of the leading members of the RAF, stands out as a tragic figure of this avant-garde. When in 1970 she agreed to help Andreas Baader's friends attack the prison guards and liberate Baader she was already a well-known journalist and an activist who had written extensively on the social situation of underprivileged groups in general and of woman workers in particular. Meinhof soon became a recognizable and fascinating face in the

1 Quoted in Seán M. Sheehan, *Anarchism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 108.

2 Ibid.

RAF's armed struggle. In the words of the Austrian-born author Erich Fried, she was "the most important woman in German politics since Rosa Luxemburg."[3] *Germany in Autumn* was one among a series of intellectual attempts to re-enact the sequence of events that came to a close with the mysterious deaths of all founding members of the RAF at Stammheim prison in October 1977.[4]

Film theoretician Thomas Elsaesser took up the analogy between Antigone and the RAF's actions, pointing out that it omits significant conflicts and contradictions that the RAF was an attempt to solve. However, Elsaesser also recognizes the fact that the whole style of an underground life comprising fast cars, communication and technical skills, and the staging of violent scenes on the streets, had an ambiguous aesthetic and political dimension.[5] Thus, he identifies a shared element that connects the RAF episode to the figure of Antigone, namely the act of self-positioning outside the law:

> Just as Antigone, by speaking from a position not above the law but outside the law, could become to Western political thought the 'ethical' subject par excellence, because the place outside the law is for any mortal a non-place, so the RAF's so-called self-obsession can be regarded as the consequence of their knowledge about the non-place from which they were speaking, doubled by the urban 'non-space' they were inhabiting.[6]

---

3 David Kramer, "Ulrike Meinhof, An Emancipated Terrorist?" in: Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern eds., *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 150; quoted in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

4 Here it is noteworthy to contrast *Germany in Autumn* and Reinhard Hauff's film *Stammheim* from 1986. *Germany in Autumn* is a funeral where you barely hear Chopin's March, a *Trauerspiel* that at any moment plunges into a bitter farce refusing to acknowledge that history as a matter of fact repeats itself twice; the figure of a pain-ridden self-deprecated and perplexed Fassbinder adds a tone of despair to the tragedy that is however the central generic theme. In 1986, the ambiguity of a shaken society seems evaporated. A cold damp angst pervades *Stammheim* in all its details including the photography. In hindsight, one may recognize this angst and the pending brutality permeating the photographic space of *Stammheim* as the forgotten precursor to the coming decades of cynicism after defeat; now the tragedy is played out on the side of the public.

5 Thomas Elsaesser, "Antigone Agonists: Urban Guerrilla or Guerrilla Urbanism?" in: Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin eds. *Giving Ground: The Politics of Propinquity* (New York: Verso, 1999).

6 Ibid., p. 297; translation modified.

By the end of the essay and contrasting the televisual global/local "we" to a real "we", Elsaesser concludes: "the very possibility of a non-ground would appear foreclosed by the sheer proliferations of (dis-)embodiments of a 'we' that alone can and should found a politics, by constantly confounding it." Desiring subjectivity, an ethical We and a non-ground outside the law, are components in a structure that Elsaesser identifies as being essentially at work in the tragedy and provides the bridge to the RAF's action. Desire here is understood in terms of the recognition of a lack which materializes itself in the impossibility of a non-place, an *atopos*, in relation to the law of the dominant order. For Elsaesser, this non-ground is objectively impossible but ethically justifiable. It is impossible because the "We" that the RAF strove for can only be the outcome of what Elsaesser calls a "cofounding", whereas it is justifiable because the tragic heroine, Ulrike or Antigone, exposes the mechanisms of domination from without.

However, one might wonder why the space outside the law is so intuitively and unquestionably identified with the non-ground, occupied by a heroine in a tragedy, and how the impossible can offer any exposition of the really existing order. In other words, is the space outside the law a non-ground inevitably sealed by tragic fate? Or can this external relation to the law be conceived differently?

It is true that both Antigone and the members of the RAF share this minimal feature: they moralize the inconsistency of a certain mode of political representation. However, this moralization and its affective implications impede the possibility of a conjunction of the social and the political. At the encounter with the inconsistency of a symbolic order, a pre-Athenian *polis* or the post-war Germany, the affective release that the tragedy occasions is nourished by the belief in the fateful hand of history. In one case, the figure of the tragic heroine, the young Antigone, functions as the screen that conceals and reveals the fate of the city state model run by a *tyrannos*. In the other, the figure of Ulrike Meinhof masks and exposes the collision course between the history of class struggle in Germany and the rise of West Germany as part of a new global configuration. A "sense of morality" is believed to precede the possibility of political struggle. Affect and morality become welded together.

Affects are distributed as collective emotions of pity and pathos for the spectator before the melancholic heroine paying her debt; Antigone pays for a wrongdoing, her father's, and others pay for their fathers' crimes in Berlin. Félix Guattari,

an author whose name has come to be associated with what nowadays is called an "affective turn", resumes this argument in his article "Like the Echo of a Collective Melancholia", written after the death of the founding members of the RAF. Far from an investigation into the meandering of a tragic pathos, he contends:

> While the secret war conducted by the industrial powers along the north-south axis to keep the Third World in tow is indeed the main issue, it should not make us forget that there is another north-south axis, which encircles the globe and along which conflicts of an equally essential nature are played out, involving the powers of the State and oppressed nationalities, immigrant workers, the unemployed, the "marginal," the "non-guaranteed" and the "standardized" wage-earners [...] Like it or not, in today's world, violence and the media work hand in glove. And when a revolutionary group plays the game of the most reactionary media, the game of collective guilt, then it has been mistaken: mistaken in its target, mistaken in its method, mistaken in its strategy, mistaken in its theory, mistaken in its dreams...[7]

The non-ground outside the law and a tragic pathos are welded by guilt for a crime transmitted from one generation to another. In this respect, guilt is the unhistoricized ground of all history. The play shows this in a clear way in the opening lines of the tragedy: "In spite of the orders, I shall give my brother burial, whether thou, Ismene, wilt join with me or not." Antigone, Oedipus' daughter, living in King Creon's household, tells Ismene, her sister, what she is resolved to do. But this defiant resoluteness is immediately neutralised, as it would otherwise surpass the generic boundaries of tragedy. The decision is explained as not originating in a desire for life but in a debt to the dead, expressed in the following words, which Sophocles puts into her mouth:

> Loving, I shall lie with him, yes, with my loved one,
> when I have dared the crime of piety.
> Longer the time in which to please the dead
> than the time with those up here.[8]

---

7 Félix Guattari, "Like the Echo of a Collective Melancholia" in: *Semiotext(e)*, IV, no. 2, 1982, p 105.

8 "Antigone", verses 73–75; translated by Elizabeth Wyckoff in: David Grene et al. eds. *Greek Tragedies* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

The full closure of possibilities is condensed in these opening lines where a decision is announced in order to be annulled. With defiance neutralised as duty towards the dead, the heroine is bound to the law. The *topos* occupied by the tragic heroine is the ground where the law has already advanced its claim; there is no grounding possibility outside of it, only the war of all against all that awaits in that unthinkable outside. This fusion of subject and guilt closes off a possible presence of desires outside the dominant plane of representation. If it be true that a regime of representation collects and totalizes all meaning production upon its represented surface according to a set of imperatives, then a singularity, insofar as it is able to produce a historical divide running across the plane of representation, will be a political moment, only if its external position, its "outside-ness" is a function of imaginable collective acts located in that divide within. This possibility of an outside, the space beyond the walls of the city, is exposed, albeit only as a barren, murky space, populated by dead bodies and blinding sand storms in the Greek tragedy. That is why, in the tragedy, Antigone oscillates between different discourses and finally ends up in guilt as the ground for reaction against the nonsensical decree issued by Creon. The error (*hamartia*, singled out by Aristotle as the central element in tragedy) in the contemporary encounter with the tragedy is the identification of the tragic figure as an ethically justifiable position, whereas this figure is made of that undifferentiated coalescence of a decision and an alliance with the dead that serves the tragedy as a genre. Antigone, taken out of its generic context, perpetuates a theoretical mistake which plays into the hands of the fantasy of a collective guilt, blurs what Guattari called two axes of a secret war, and evades history on behalf of an eternal debt.

II. Butler: Total Being

It is this eternal debt that brings us closer to an investigation of a second major theme in interpretations of the play; Antigone as the expression of a subversive possibility in regard to kinship structures and the order of patriarchal power. A classic locus of such a reading is *Antigone's Claim* by Juidth Butler.[9] The ambition of the book is clearly set out by the author: to expound upon the relation between kinship and "the reigning episteme of cultural intelligibility" and how

[9] All references are to Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

these in turn relate to what she calls "the possibility of social transformation".[10] Antigone is said to represent "a possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed."[11] This possibility is then identified as questioning and problematizing the kinship structure. According to Butler, Antigone "does not conform to the symbolic law and she does not prefigure a final restitution of the law. Though entangled in the terms of kinship, she is at the same time outside those norms."[12] In other words, Antigone figures "the nonhuman on the border of human."[13] She does not represent a sovereign anti-position in the political life of the Greek city, but "a chiasm within the vocabulary of political norms. If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political *catachresis*, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws."[14] Butler's reading establishes a continuity between two heterogeneous standpoints. It is claimed that the figure of Antigone "implicitly raises the question for us of what those preconditions [of kinship relations] must be", a questioning that takes place at an extreme limit, at the cost of suspension of all representations. In a second line of thought, Butler also suggests that Antgione's claim, being rooted in an impossible position, opens up "a new field of the human".

Nothing is less evident than this assumption of a transition from a negative, non-representable exposure of a patriarchal social order, to "a new field of the human", which after all means a historical and political project aligned with the possibility of social transformation—unless one identifies or rather limits the scope of a constitutive political act to an unrepresentable representation of an aesthetic figure. More precisely, what is presented as a "possibility" is the politics of tragedy in a nutshell, the proof that the impossible is eternally excluded. The implicit presupposition is that a pure negativity, a non-representable—the uncanniness of the radiating beauty of a heroine before whom the kinship structure reveals its outer limits and the regime of intelligibility founders—somehow widens the field of new possibilities for social transformation. How can this wish, this fast track from negativity, law and guilt to social transformation, be

10 Ibid., p. 24.
11 Ibid., p. 2.
12 Ibid., p. 72.
13 Ibid., p. 79.
14 Ibid., p. 82.

conceived as intelligible? Why couldn't the opposite be the case, that the play brings forth the closure of the field of possibility, as was probably the case for an Athenian spectator, who would deem the mode of governance in Thebes as too primitive and thus doomed to founder? Antigone was there merely a "vanishing mediator", an affective remainder, a narrative device that arouses pity and fear; thus further consolidating the tragic but inevitable end.

To answer these questions, it is perhaps more accurate to revisit a more recent—and seemingly more remote—figure than the Attic Greek one, namely the proletariat and the demise of the political subjective position conveyed by this figure. The jump from a purely negative force outside social antagonisms to the half open field of new human experience is the effect of a political strategy. This strategy finds a firm ground for a politics of representation in the non-articulated presence of a pure being, covered by a thin layer of dust; the dead body of Polynices lying beneath the walls of the polis. Contrary to this politics, the social body of the proletariat was the non-representable in the dominant representation of bourgeois society; yet, this working class from the slums of the nineteenth century cities, in its productive actuality, through its irruptions onto the public stage, remained a social force. It certainly instilled horror and fascination, while at the same time retaining a productive collective force that negated the social order by dividing it along the lines of an adversarial social agenda. This negation aimed to invalidate the law's unconditional power. In this sense, the proletariat functioned as a dialectical limit between the given social order and an imaginable future at the heart of the same order. The decisive difference between such a limit and what Butler calls the "less-than-human" is the one between existence and the absolute sameness of Being, this unalterable Other; the difference between what a political act is—which is always impure, prone to failure—and the dead body of the fallen absolute. What is asked for—not only in Butler's work but also in a number of contemporary readings of *Antigone*—is the transition to "a new field of the human" without any binding commitment to a positive and organized historical project. Therefore, we are left with an endless quest for something that has both the consistency of an Other and the fluidity of a force, the transgressive quality of an unspeakable sensation and the uncompromising solidity of a will. This spectacular entity, in its radical impossibility and its inevitable tragic destiny, fascinates; it is both a proletariat without party and a party without proletariat, the misfortunes of pure being viewed from the interval opened up by gender difference.

III. Hegel: Dance Lessons

Most commentators of *Antigone*, sooner or later, stumble over the German reception of the play, from Goethe to Hölderlin, and also to Kierkegaard. But Hegel's comments in *Philosophy of Right* and in *Phenomenology of Spirit* have set the framework for contemporary readings of *Antigone*. If existence is determined from the point of view of pure being as its less than pure appearance, as being indebted to being and guilty for carrying the defects of empirical life, then there is always a moral schema surrounding the settlement of the debt involved. In Hegel, morality is defined within a range that starts from the immediacy of ethics represented by family, and its mediated form called the state, the instance that in its highest form, the constitution, is the realization of substantiality in and for itself.[15] Crime and guilt are for Hegel rooted in the antithetical relationship between what is "The divine right of essential Being"[16] at one extreme, and the public, secular right on the other. Hegel's reading of *Antigone* establishes, first, a reciprocal relation in guilt; both Creon and Antigone violate the other party's rights. The first violates the divine and mythical natural right and the second violates the laws of the city. This reciprocity is however a pure external relation between the two parties and as such the cause of the ulterior disintegration of the relation. Creon's decree is viewed by Hegel as an intermediary manifestation of "the restored unitary self of the community"[17], but this is different from the realization of this unitary spirit of community.

The corpse in the play lying outside the walls of Thebes is the left-over of a historical process through which the foundering of the external relation and the realisation of the unitary spirit of community will be later achieved in a universal constitutional state. Hence, even though Creon only represents the actual but limited expression of the spirit, still Antigone's defiance against the unitary power of the state is qualified as a crime.[18] The defiance itself is traced back by Hegel to family right, the necessary but necessarily supervened ground for the public right. The family right, the inner space of the family, will eventually

[15] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), § 165 and the addendum to § 166.

[16] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller and J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), § 467, p. 280.

[17] Ibid., § 473, p. 286.

[18] Ibid., §470, p. 284.

fail, as it is by definition a right pertaining to pure particularity as opposed to the universal organisation of rights first realised in the state form.[19] Hegel views tragedy as the stage where state confronts its own mythical and surpassed substance. The error committed by the higher unitary power is to overlook its dependence on the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) that at this early level only appears as its external counterpart and not its inner limit: "But the outwardly actual which has taken away from the inner world its honour and power has in so doing consumed its own essence."[20] Creon's error is the cannibalism of the state to consume its own ground. Hegel's definition of the Aristotelian term *hamartia,* error, is the forgetting of those waters of forgetfulness from which the state form once emerged: "The publicly manifest Spirit has the root of its power in the nether world. The self-certainty and self-assurance of a nation possesses the truth of its oath, which binds all into one, solely in the mute unconscious substance of all, in the waters of forgetfulness. Thus it is that the fulfilment of the Spirit of the upper world is transformed into its opposite, and it learns that its supreme right is a supreme wrong, that its victory is rather its own downfall."[21]

Antigone's figure is for Hegel a piece of mute substance that intrudes into the public self-sufficiency of the sovereign power. The interesting detail is that Hegel, like Kant before him, views rebellion against power to be impermissible, and Antigone's defiance, precisely as the tragedy intends it, is reduced to a metonymy for the corpse of Polynices, thus exiled from the city. Hegel adopts this narrative strategy when he writes: "The dead, whose right is denied, knows therefore how to find instruments of vengeance, which are equally effective and powerful as the power which injured it."[22] The dead is injured, finds instruments of vengeance and acts, and defiance is deprived of any social significance. Starting from the substantiality of a moment called ethics, Hegel's dialectic of rights overlooks the fact that Antigone's defiance was in the first place a decision, clearly marked at the beginning of the tragedy, but only as an ephemeral moment to be surpassed by the tragic fate dictated by the genre. She may be siding with the dead, but if so, this would not inevitably entail a complete identification with the corpse of her fallen brother. It would not have been the case, if only the

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., § 474, p. 287.

21 Ibid. Hegel's comments are related to verses 520–525 in *Antigone*.

22 Ibid.

decision had been connected back to the social life in the *polis*.[23] But such a connection, a decision to disobey, is beyond the scope both of tragedy and Hegel's argument. Tragedy conflates these two otherwise distinct moments, kinship and decision, divine laws and resoluteness of the deed, the ancestral duty and the right to rebellion; the adolescent girl who heedlessly defies the ruler and the ruler who does not see what even the blind Tiresias can obviously see. This dramatic moment confuses even the moral register into which Hegel tries to place her. How could Antigone, the representation of family duties, that undifferentiated inner substance, act in such a resolute and self-conscious manner, while Creon proceeds blindly to the extent that his actions bring forth the tragic end of his state? That is why for Hegel the dead becomes an active agent and Antigone its prolongation among the living. What is overlooked is what renders the play coherent: the decisiveness of her decision remains indistinguishable from the unconditionality of Creon's edict. This in-distinction is narratively supported by the guilt stemming from the filial axis of kinship structure. This is why Hegel's otherwise powerful analysis of a moment of surpassing and sublation of the tyrannical sovereign power sees no further than Creon. Hegel adopts a viewpoint that Creon, by issuing his edict, had believed to be meaningful: that the dead can be injured, humiliated or is else capable of avenging his lot. If Creon's act is part of a Greek tragedy, Hegel's reading yields to the dead in a dance macabre.

Returning to Creon's edict, it would seem to state the following: "All enemies of state are exempted from being honoured by ceremonial burial." In other words, the universality of the law asserts that any person who has insulted the state power is simultaneously exempt from being honoured. He is neither questioning nor ignoring the power of the gods or family right. In fact, he is maintaining the dividing line, the river of forgetfulness, between those forces and the secular order of the city.

The introduction of the universal articulation of law as the unconditional principle of sovereignty introduces a split in society. This is also consistent with Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's reading of the birth of the tragic hero as a transitory figure and an outcome of the encounter between the heroic (epic)

---

[23] On Hegel's theory of family and sisterly love, see Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, "Hegel's Antigone" in: Patricia Jagentowicz Mills ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 64–67.

order and the introduction of formal laws in the Greek *polis*, namely the Solonian reforms.[24] The deployment of a universal legislation projects its claim of unconditionality on a subjective scale and renders this latter tragic. Both Hegel and Vernant and Vidal Naquet identify a central conflict between a particular instance (family, the pastoral order) and the public articulation of the universal (public right or *Staatsrecht*). However, the main schema—Hegel's or in a more historical variant of Hegel's reading—assumes the inconsistency generated from inside the articulation of the universal, but dislocates the split. Rather than an expression of two different temporalities, the pastoral or family right on the one side and the posterior public expression on the other, the split that the tragedy deals with is a synchronic differentiation; a confrontation between a singular decision and the unconditional obedience demanded by the edict. The dead enemy was mistreated in the Greek city by being left unburied, a common Greek convention which stigmatizes their Persian archenemies and their customs. By issuing a decree and proclaiming something that could have been considered as a convention, Creon is doing something more than repeating the convention. He is declaring a punishment meted out to a dead body and demanding the unconditional obedience of the city. Antigone replicates that excessive moment implied by the decree and rushes into an exchange about *nomos* and unwritten laws (verses 450-470). She becomes the perfect Hegelian heroine, representing family piety and the ethical duties in the family domain (*Sittlichkeit*), thus assuming the guilt for an inevitable crime. The inconsistent particular instance, a particular case of the universal, is the decreed punishment upon a dead body. The singularity of the act carried out by Antigone is already effaced by tragedy as genre with its generic conventions of a preordained misfortune; and, finally, the universality of the split running through the political order is recovered, transformed into individual debt in an affiliative kinship relation.

The crucial theme in Hegel's interpretation is neither the sister-brother relation, nor the conflict between the particular and the universal. Hegel's reading in *Philosophy of Right* upholds the thesis inherited from Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* that an act of disobedience in regard to any power is a crime. The legalism in Hegel's case is not the law of Thebes, but the future public right of a constitution.

---

[24] Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce Ancienne* (Paris: Editions Découverte, 1986), p. 154.

Again here, the constant and unalterable element is the guilt that existence pays to the essence of being.

IV. Desire and Debt

When the law legislates, not upon bare life, but rather upon the corpse, and subordinates it to its universal sanctions, its unconditionality encounters its own inconsistency. A critique along these lines was delivered in 1953 by Lacan.[25] In his *Seminar VII* Lacan's analysis of the play—in contrast to Hegel—does not evolve around the mediations in a dialectical movement from family ethics to the constitution of state. Instead, the point of departure is the beauty of a fantastic screen presented by Antigone. In Lacan's dialectic "the beauty effect is a blindness effect."[26] The coincidence of the blinding point and the fascinated gaze, a theme that Lacan would develop in more detail in *Seminar XI*, is determined by the way phantasy is constituted; the inevitably imagined something that resides beyond the law. For Lacan, Antigone reaches for this point, this thing that is supposed to be beyond, which is, in a dialectical turn, nothing else than the void.[27] Hence, Lacan's reading of the drama concerns ultimately the gap that is marked out by the tragedy between the order of existence and Being. Polynices' corpse, the dead body, is the manifestation of the unique value of Being. For Lacan, the tragedy, by being true, excludes eventuality. It is a structure locked in a blind point through which Being is *supposed* to intrude into existence, and yet this point is not a site wherein a possible subjectivity could be situated.

How can Lacan's account enable us to perceive the place of tragedy in the conjunction of the social and the political? Lacan's theory of the tragic subject starts from the conditions of articulation of the universal principle. Evoking Goethe, Lacan underscores that Creon is acting in the name of the law and in the best interests of everyone. The issue is not that public law interferes in the private

[25] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 1959-1960, trans. with notes by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992).

[26] Ibid., p. 281.

[27] Ibid., p. 279. Lacan's comment on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is to be viewed as a phantasy of self-generation, in other words a denial of being born.

sphere but that the law demands unconditionally the obedience of all.[28] It is this absolute unconditionality, inherent to the law in its formal structure, that at every turn contains a potential tyrannical decree. The cruelty of the edict aims not at Polynices, an individual in the network of historical relations, but his corpse, pure Being. Creon is not simply the representation of the social organization as Hegel has it; instead he becomes the instrument of a law that crosses the border and aims at the realm of pure Being at the very moment when it claims its unconditional universality. Hence, Antigone is neither an incarnation of the laws of the underworld nor a counter-discourse that belongs to another incompatible realm of existence. Only from the point of view of the law could she be conceived thus, because this is the only possible way for the social order to grasp "her senseless and bewildered nature". While her action exposes the conditioned nature of law, Antigone, as a figure, perpetuates a guilt that seals the conditionality of the law.

Antigone's arguments as to why she is prepared to sacrifice her life for a brother but not for a child or a husband is crucial not only because it takes up the kinship structures pertaining to *Oedipus Rex*.[29] Her argument, the uniqueness of the brother born from the same womb, implies a desire for absolute sameness. This sameness in pure being is the reverse side of the phantasy that upholds the *tyrannos* who in the final analysis is a primordial, unborn figure. Such is the *aporia* in *Oedipus Rex*, the impossible position of the *tyrannos* as father of himself and son of no mother, the spirit of unity, which turns out to have other origins. The law in its formal and tautological structure refers to the autochthonic phantasy—to use Lévi-Strauss's term in his analysis of myth.[30] It is a disavowal of the fact that the one-ness of the law, its unambiguous imperative force, is preceded by the social struggle of both women and men.

---

28 Ibid., pp. 254–55 & 258–60. Lacan develops this idea further in an essay "Kant with Sade" in: Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

29 The passage 904-15 in *Antigone* has been discussed extensively since Goethe. Antigone's argument in the passage contains a historical reference to a story in Herodotus (3.119). An early explanation is given by T. J. Buckton, "Goethe on the Antigone of Sophocles" in: *Notes & Queries*, Oxford 33/1856, pp. 123–24.

30 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in: *Structural Anthropology* (London: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 202–212.

Antigone's tragedy is precisely this innocent complacency towards the law, which excludes future alliances, invalidates imaginable futures. The only conceivable option for her, as the chain of actions unfolds leading to the inevitable collapse of the sovereign, is to succumb to the weight of guilt, assuming its validity and hence descending to the underground. Underground here is tantamount to the absence of those social forces that would have separated the tyrannical exercise of political power from the affairs of the city. Antigone, delivering explanations of blood ties with the parents and the underground forces, becomes *the effect of the law in its unmediated exercise*: the debt to be settled for the committed error.

What does this tell us about the tragic dimension? More so than the misfortunes of fate, which is evoked in the play by its mythical name *Até*, tragedy is the mode of subjective existence, not per se, but *from the perspective of the law*. The argument I am advancing is not that the tragic dimension of human action is nullified by political decision, that a revolution as event does not bring forward a tragic or comic dimension of the so-called post-revolutionary era. The point is to separate the unconsciously hoped for state of being subject to tragedy from the tragic dimension of human existence. The desire that inhabits the action, beyond whatever the agent imagines, is distinct from the fate it realizes in the tragedy itself. Or in other words, the figure of Antigone, in her irreconcilable heroic act, is the figure of dissociation between act and desire. This logic is a well-known story; a price is set for a desiring act, culpability is monetarized and sacrifices harvested, by a church or any other instrument that extracts the surplus. The burden of this debt eclipses desire insofar as this latter aims at something behind a historically given situation. From this point on, three paths are thinkable and historically practiced.

The first evolves around a reasonable position; harmony and balance at the horizon of a closed universe, the purification of passions through catharsis is the preferred method. The new liberal subject, celebrating the pure monetary universe of debt and guilt, walks backwards along the same path. As the innocence of living among deities in a perfectly closed world is long gone—even for the Athenian audience of *Antigone*—and despite knowing or imagining that we know more than ever before yet still doing as we did, this historical "we" necessarily traces the same path backwards, eyes open and affects adjusted to yesterday's fluctuations of the stock market.

Not far from this lies the second possible movement, its opposite but at the same time simple reverse: the cult of impossible pure being beyond all existence in the name of desire, veneration for the big Events of the past, vacillating between voluntarism and nostalgic defeatism; ultimately—to paraphrase Lacan—a case of necrophilia.[31]

It is through the separation of debt and the act of desire that a third path can be conceived. It is neither the closed universe of the first path, nor the cult of the real, settling the debt by sacrifice, but a re-definition of the possible as that which is produced, created by human desires. This involves questioning the possible as an exclusive modality of being and detaching it from the old tautological definition, i.e. the possibility of being and impossibility of non-being (Parmenides). It also involves defining desire as the act of production of a possibility independent of the indebtedness that is implied by the phenomenology of gift and apparition. This latter is ultimately about the indebtedness of the spectator before whom the world appears. Above all, this means to take part in and take sides in the process of desiring production.[32]

The crucial point is that there is no desire without the act of production and no act of production without an object of desire. Desire as detached from empirical objects and in a pure state is a will that sustains the Kantian imperative,[33] an abstract freedom that leads into unconditional submission. On the contrary, the object as such, that which requires its subject, is an inconsistent entity that at each encounter is either less or more than the perfect self-sameness of the thing

[31] "The object, as I have shown in Freudian experience—the object of desire, where we see it in its nakedness—is but the slag of a fantasy in which the subject does not come to after blacking out [syncope]. It is a case of necrophilia." J. Lacan, "Kant with Sade", p. 658.

[32] Undeniably this thesis follows what Lacan proposes in the last lessons of *Seminar VII*. The term desiring production is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking Press, 1977) which may surprise defenders of a certain academic rationale, but these references follow this simple principle: our interest in *Anti-Oedipus* is motivated by the series of answers that this work provides in regard to questions formulated by Lacan in *Seminar VII*. Desiring production is a term that here should be understood in a non-vitalist sense, and production as an act-sequence through which desire comes into effect and this effectiveness is desire as actuality. Thereby, we do not intend to equalize the Lacanian conception of desire and Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the same term.

[33] See Bernard Baas, *Le Désir Pur: Parcours philosophiques dans les parages de J. Lacan* (Louvain: Peeters, 1992).

aimed at; desiring production invalidates at each turn the principle of non-contradiction as the foundation of objective consistency.[34] These encounters are the history of desiring production, the history of aleatory encounters, of love as *tyche* and of facing the lack of continuity in a causal chain.[35] Lacan singled out the phantasy involved by dredging up a word from Freud, *das Ding*. That which is supposed to be beyond the empirical, given objects, a pure being qua being and nothing else. This pure being is the corpse we cover up and put in a box beneath the earth. There is no desire without the act of production and an act is effectuated when its subject assumes the inevitable inconsistency of the object that is yet to become—as a side product of the desiring process.

Emancipatory projects of the past two centuries may have failed in many respects. The lesson to draw is neither the staging of a non-ground, nor the quest for a pure being allegedly outside the law, and least of all the circumvention of tragicomic dimensions of desire. Each of those options ultimately perpetuates the guilt that is the sworn ally of capital. Fleeing this guilt, either by withdrawal deeper into the heart of institutions sustained by the circulation of capital, or by turning the guilt into affective reaction to the atrocities of Thebes, only creates clever story-tellers and well-behaved spectators awaiting the final catharsis. On the contrary, there is no ultimate conclusion to draw in theory alone, except for the articulation of new questions concerning the changing conditions for possible emancipatory projects, all the while bearing in mind that any such project only can be thought and conceptualized within a social and political conjuncture whose lines are drawn by desiring production; thus as a historical possibility.

---

34 Jan Lukasiewicz, a Polish philosopher close to Alexius Meinong and Bolzano, provided a critique of the Aristotelian logic of the principle of non-contradiction as early as 1910. See Jan Lukasiewicz, "Sur le principe de contradiction chez Aristote" in: Barbara Cassin and Michel Narcy eds., *Rue Descartes*, (Paris: Collège internationale de philosophie, 1991), pp. 9–32. I discuss this question with a reference to Freud and Brentano in a chapter in Dariush M. Doust, *Randanmarkningar till psykoanalysens etik* (Daidalos: Bokförlaget, 2003), pp 35–70.

35 See Mladen Dolar, "Tyché, Clinamen, Den" in: *Continental Philosophical Review*, 46/2013, pp. 223–239.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 119–126

Ana Stankovic*

Computer Chess and the Reverse Odyssey of *Marx Returns*

> 'It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—
> all over the world—if this *is* the world at all, you know.
> Oh, what fun it is! How I *wish* I was one of them!
> I wouldn't mind being a Pawn, if only I might join—
> though of course I should *like* to be a Queen, best.'
> — Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

The chess metaphor in historical fiction has an illustrious history. Any philosophy of history can scarcely avoid the metaphor of the game, both in terms of the pieces (most mere "pawns") or else the players themselves. Susan Brantly reflects on how in the Middle Ages, "The forces that guided human history were beyond the control of men." God played chess against the Devil. With the coming of modernity the players are the "men" themselves, equipped with military, political or diplomatic strategies. Torbjörn Säfve's *Molza, The Lover* imagines Vatican politics as a series of "moves," while in Sven Delblanc's *The Cassock* General Waldstein "has arranged his garden like a chessboard, with statues of his ancestors arranged as chess pieces."[1]

Glen Robert Downey considers the plight of women in Victorian chess games. In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Hargrave coerces Helen into a match. What follows is a series of vulgar advances: chess as the symbolism of a social contract in which women's sexuality is made to yield. Once the game is won the threat of rape is the corollary of Hargrave's "playful" sense of entitlement.[2] In Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes,* the chess matches are expanded into a long game of social power plays.[3] Elfride, in her quest to find a "mate," is playing a war of

1 Susan Brantly, *The Historical Novel, Transnationalism, and the Postmodern Era: Presenting the Past* (London: Routledge, 1999).

2 Glen Robert Downey, *The Truth about Pawn Promotion. The Development of the Chess Motif in Victorian Fiction* (PhD Thesis, 1998), University of Victoria, pp. 38—48.

3 Ibid. p. 60.

* Kyung Hee University, Department of British & American Language and Culture, Republic of Korea

position rather than a war of manoeuvre. Somehow however she must make up for being the daughter of a bad player. Swancourt, Elfride's father, in selfishly attempting to revive the family's fortunes, makes a habit of scuppering the spontaneity his daughter might otherwise achieve through her own decisions. For Swancourt mad queens must be pawned. Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* offers an alternative instance of mad becoming where the lowliest of individuals manages to attain the rank of royalty. Nonetheless in this case, as Downey observes, "the discovery that being promoted from a pawn (a state of innocence) to a queen (one of experience) does not bring with it a liberation from the game, but only a greater recognition of how trapped within the game she really is."[4] However twisted the rules may have appeared they still account for Alice's every move.

Naturally when it comes to Marx one expects great things from the pawns; although in his own writings the metaphor is absent. As Brantly observes, Marx "had little use for the chess metaphor and tended to choose technological metaphors instead, as in his famous discussions of basis [*sic*] and superstructure and in his comparison of history with a locomotive that is fuelled by production and demand."[5] The chess metaphor instead appears in Benjamin's "On the Concept of History," where we find a synthesis, courtesy of "technology," of game and machine. Benjamin's amusing anecdote of the chess computer (an elaborate con-trick involving a dwarf who is a master chess player concealed beneath a puppet) recalls the type of logical montage that Marx grasped at in his final years, in the faint hope that it might miraculously deliver up "the principal laws of crises".[6] If chess is an absent metaphor in Marx's works then the logico-mathematical precision of the "chess computer" is nonetheless still emblematic of his late thinking. To speak like a formalist, Marx may have had no time for chess *metaphors*, but that didn't mean that he wasn't *thinking* like a grandmaster. Indeed, the absence of the metaphor may even provide proof of the presence of the concept.

4 Ibid. p. 53.

5 Brantly, *The Historical Novel*, p. 20.

6 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke. Band 33* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976), p. 82.

Such may have been Barker's starting point in *Marx Returns*, which in all events suits the story the author wants to tell.[7] But let's underline the counterfactual nature of the story: all else being equal, what if Marx's aim to tear the veil from the obfuscatory *symbols* of differential calculus— insofar as they obfuscate the *real* material nature of so-called infinitesimals—had been pursued from the beginning of his research into political economy, rather than at the "end" (or at least after the publication of the first volume of *Capital*)? This question assumes that Marx wasn't all along "practising" mathematics anyway; just as Badiou asserts that the mathematician practises ontology without knowing it. Everyone is a philosopher. The point for the Marxist in training is to achieve the practical ends that the philosophical mode of address makes possible. Changing the world? Is that really Marx's practical end? Framed in this manner, where philosophy—which Marx reneges on (we assume) in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach—is conditioned by mathematical practice, we might conclude that nothing could be further from his mind. The Book is the real object Marx struggles to produce; both as the "objective" thing of description or interpretation, in addition to the "subjective" reality which he works under the illusion of changing. Marx is both *terra firma* and *terra incognita*, *poiesis* and *praxis*, *in* and *of* The Book. This is the frantic and frenzied character that Barker's novel confronts us with: if time is always catching up with Marx then it's not a simple question of speeding up, for in that case he would risk completing the Book too soon, forcing the situation, before the revolutionary conditions had ripened: completing the Book before *there is* any Book to complete.

Barker's novel is rather good at depicting virtual communism, the one that dare not enact itself—"restrained action"—and the examples he uses, although familiar, are sharp-witted and amusing. Wouldn't it be exploitative, Wilhelm Liebknecht queries at an emergency meeting of the Communist League, for Engels to extract a surplus from his labourers' work in order to pay Marx a salary? (MR, 202) Surely not if the money were paid from Engels's salary; though let's not forget that Engels, as a capitalist, by definition exploits the workers' surplus labour. Marx manages to square this uncomfortable economic arrangement by reminding himself that he, as *paterfamilias*, is using the income "to pay the fixed and variable costs of his much smaller yet no less productive factory,"

7 See Jason Barker, *Marx Returns* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2018). Page references to *Marx Returns* are written in brackets in the text.

namely: "The communist factory for the purpose of abolishing the factory" (206).

Does exploitation go all the way down? Does it "descend"—imaginary Althusserian descents run throughout Barker's novel—into the most intimate places that Marx, in his sexual modesty, deems out of bounds? By his own frank admission, as far as Helene's wages are concerned, he doesn't know where to start (48). The Book, whose tasks are those in and of the Book—"since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation"[8]—turns on a point of extimacy. Readers of the Marx melodrama will be aware of the dutiful wife syndrome, where Jenny suffers for her other half's "revolution," taking on secretarial duties (deciphering Marx's indecipherable hand) and having to put up with his messy affair with her best friend Helene Demuth. Barker's approach provides a welcome alternative, and seeing as so much of the historical record must have been destroyed one is free to speculate that if Marx is making the revolution "in theory" then why not have Jenny making it "in practice"?

Portrayed as being naturally indifferent to Marx—in spite of their blissful adolescent romance—Jenny's communist awakening arises during a hilarious scene in which she tends her sick husband at his bedside. Distracted, she reads out random passages from the *Communist Manifesto*, scandalized yet titillated by the paragraph that deals with "bourgeois marriage," or the "system of wives in common," and how its abolition under communism was to bring about the end of "prostitution both public and private." We might doubt, however, whether the wife really manages to enact the revolution she desires in her private life, thus erasing the distinction between the public and the private, any more than Marx manages to complete The Book. Might she have had more success had her impending affair been announced? Made public? Broadcast at a meeting of the Communist League? Marx's own infidelity with Helene might conceivably have provided common cause, balanced things out. Free association means egalitarian, the free development of each on condition of the free development of all. But at the decisive moment Jenny holds her tongue, ultimately in thrall to the demon that possesses her, and those "*extraordinary saints she has to put up*

8 Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" in: *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume* 29 (London: Lawrence and Wishart Electric Book, 2010), p. 263.

with" (271). The possession—and the romantic indifference that accompanies it—will be clarified in the final act.

The multi-layered connections in the novel between communism and chess invite an interesting analysis. However, in admitting the *metaphorical* equivalence of communism as the "real movement" to chess as a "game" we would be subscribing to a philosophy of history which surely goes against the author's intentions. There is no outside of The Book, as Marx himself will come to realize. As such the dimensions of the board and its rules, even the identities of opposing players, overwhelm the question of who in the end stands to triumph:

> Marx wondered whether by "bigger" Helene meant a board of infinite dimensions. On such a scale checkmate might be achievable in a finite number of moves. It seemed plausible on condition that the parameters of the game provided for the possibility of checkmate in n-moves which, despite being a very, very large number was still *not* infinite (36).

The question of how to account for the infinite in finite terms is the dominant and ingenious theme in Barker's novel. It finds expression in the narrative voice which suggests to Marx that an evil genius must be behind this lawless game, that there must be a Higher Law at work capable of barring the lawlessness. The falling of mathematicians into religion has provided down the centuries the suture for unsolvable problems, the personal awakening that wards off the mathematicians' descent into madness. Marx's "religion" is far from personal, instead being the monstrous outgrowth of a whole society whose cell-form is the commodity, meaning that there is no refuge for the intellect. Marx's descent into hell has no bottom.

The games in which Helene plays Jenny are always encountered mid-flow. Marx enters or exits their game as a spectator and remains as ignorant as we are about how long it's been going on or is likely to last ("as long as it takes," responds Helene to Marx at one point (34)). This discontinuity raises the question of whether or not it's the same game the women are always playing, a never-ending game where "checkmate might be achievable in a finite number of moves." When eventually Marx finds the time to sit down and take on Helene his victory at the board seems hollow, as if she weren't the real or a worthy opponent. Ever more so the case with Jenny, who afterwards Marx forces, much to

her unwillingness and bemusement, to play Helene. This mismatch inclines us to doubt the veracity of all that went on before, of this unique game that struggles to reach conclusion.

Marx's "return" is a dramatic question opposed to the notion of the sad passions which he in his own self-pitying reflections on the state of his constitution always affirms. Tragedy is the boomerang effect, the law of unintended consequences; the law of heroic *action*. Marx struggles to avoid all responsibility, too invested in his own "philosophy" of science that men make history in circumstances not of their own choosing. But he discounts the possibility that not to choose is still a choice and that his personal misfortunes are always self-inflicted. "Circumstances" will eventually lead him back to Trier on "a reverse Odyssey where, instead of a nostalgic trip home, one is carted back to a house in turmoil and upheaval" (262). This purposeful and unconscious return-as-reversal is what separates the Marx story as drama from the melodrama of a Dickensian novel, as well as from the epic of the nostalgic return.

We are living in a culture that sees tragedy everywhere; that fetishizes it. In mid-nineteenth-century England, around 60,000 children would die each year of tuberculosis. When Charles Darwin's daughter Annie died of the disease in 1851 he wrote in his diary: "We have lost the joy of the household, and the solace of our old age. She must have known how we loved her. Oh, that she could now know how deeply, how tenderly, we do still and shall ever love her dear joyous face! Blessings on her!"[9] Another child, Mary, died in early infancy.

And yet we don't think of Darwin's life as tragic. High birth rates were normal for Victorian families irrespective of social class. Jenny Marx gave birth to seven children, only three of whom survived to adulthood; the Darwins had ten. There is nothing tragic about this high mortality rate. Indeed, Darwin accounts for it himself in *On the Origin of Species*, noting that the number of individuals of a given species is governed by natural selection, which determines how each individual's inherited characteristics aid and abet it in the "struggle for existence." Only a culture profoundly anesthetised to the real causes of human

---

9 Charles Darwin, "Chapter 1. III. – Reminiscences of My Father's Everyday Life" in: *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Volume I (of II) Edited by His Son*, Project Gutenberg Ebook. 1999, n. pg. Available at: <www.gutenberg.org/files/2087/2087-h/2087-h.htm>.

suffering would mention tragedy in relation to infant mortality. The word is derived from the Greek for "goat" (*tragos*), whose blood sacrifice would have been lamented in song at the Theatre of Dionysus in fifth century Athens.

On the available evidence there is nothing to suggest that the deaths of the Marx children were tragic, at least according to the historical definition of tragedy handed down to us from Aristotle. The deaths were sad, and of course their lives were defined through *struggle*. But they were not tragic, since the mere fact of being born, becoming ill, then dying, sooner or later, is a biological fact. In order to be a tragic figure the deaths in question would need to be attributable to an act of *hubris* on the hero's part. There is no evidence to suggest Marx committed any such act in the case of any of his four deceased children. It was arguably Charles Dickens—like Darwin, Marx's contemporary—who was responsible for this perversion of the idea of the tragic death, which he memorialized through his depictions of children's undeserved suffering, their poor unfortunate souls, to such an extent that the plight of almost any Victorian child is today thought "tragic." But this Dickensian propensity for melodrama is more worthy of a satyr play. As Oscar Wilde reportedly put it: "One must have a *heart of stone* to read the death of little Nell without laughing."[10]

Marx is widely portrayed as a Dickensian hero in order to *humanize* him. By depicting Marx as a "nineteenth-century life," to borrow the title of Jonathan Sperber's wholly unconvincing biography, one relativizes the man and his ideas. Marxism is thus envisaged as one "school of thought" among others; one man's intellectual contribution to an age. In highlighting the role reversal, the *peripeteia*, and indeed the fear which *real* history inspires, at the expense of the pity, Barker's novel confronts us with the genuinely tragic form of the Marx story.

The narrative in *Marx Returns* is framed by historical events—the bloody repressions of June 1848 and May 1871—that Marx cannot possibly predict and whose ramifications he fails grasp, even if it is he who in the tragic sense sets things in motion. Barker's novel is an Oedipal drama in which love and politics collide. Only a chess computer in the sense of a universal Diophantine equation solver would be truly equipped to describe the random unfolding of the tragic act; of what, on Aristotle's definition of tragedy, is possible according to

[10] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1987), p. 441.

the law of probability or necessity. However, there is no "law" of randomness,[11] despite Marx's frantic search for the existence of "laws [of capitalist production] themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results."[12] In *Marx Returns* the epic form of the poem and the nostalgic return home of a man finally at peace with his own history, having laid to rest his demons, is rejected by the author. "The only writer of history," writes Walter Benjamin, "with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this: that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious."[13]

Barker conjures the true stakes of Marx's tragedy which instead of ending in reconciliation, forces it to assume terrifying forms in its prospect of life after death, or of what somewhat ridiculously has come to be known as permanent revolution.

11 Gregory Chaitin's research into algorithmic information theory proves that despite being definable, randomness is incomputable. See Gregory Chaitin, *Meta Math! The Quest for Omega* (New York: Vintage, 2006).

12 Karl Marx, "1867 Preface to the First German Edition" in: *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling, ed. F. Engels (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1999. Online version), n. pg. Available at: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm [accessed 24 September 2015].

13 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," VI. trans. D. Redmond, Marxists.org., 2005. Available at: <www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>.

II. Democracy and Modernity in Korea

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 129–148

Ho Duk Hwang*

Asiatic Mode of Production as Method: The Discourse of Democracy and Modernity in Korea[1]

1. Between Stagnation of Critique and Inflation of Alterity

Is there an alternative path to modern democracy? What insights may we gain into redefining the process of social transformation or modernization based on the Meiji Restoration's Social Darwinist backdrop, Chinese capitalism initiated at the impasse between continuous or permanent revolution, or Korea's widespread integration of colonial modernist heritage and the American modernization agenda into a passion for democracy, despite the country's anti-communist division? Is the Asian "experience" a legitimization of modernity and democracy? Or is it an "exception" that demands a new theory of transformation and change?

In a sense, these questions address whether transformations in Asia have appropriated or overcome the classic historical development model of Euro-American theory through a certain "vernacular" political practice and historical rewriting. For long periods during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the classical historical development theory held that Asia was incapable of change by its own volition, and that European intervention and imperialism alone was the singular path to modernization. As the representative example of the divergence between European theoretical perspectives and the Asian historical experience, Marx's theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production (hereafter AMP) garnered a global debate the scale of which is incomparable. Marx's theory of historical materialism reported an enormous transformation. Yet simultaneously, Asia was reflecting on why it, too, could not change in the manner of the West. How did Asia's rev-

[1] This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2013S1A2A1A01066891). This article represents a supplemented and entirely revised version of the following article in Korean: Hodŏk Hwang, "Tisŭ/k'aunt'ŭ, Asia esŏ ironhagi" in: *Munhak kwa sahoe* 119, 2017.
I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Daniel Pieper, a Korea Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis, for translating the Korean draft into English.

* Sungkyunkwan University, Republic of Korea

olutionaries, politicians, and intellectuals (re)adapt the Euro-American universalist metaphor to their own vernacular historical context?

Around 1850 Marx noticed that his historical development theory displayed coherence, but only in certain societies within Europe. Therefore, he created a term to designate the discrepancies and differences that arose from within his theory, which came to be called AMP. In order to explain outliers in his theory Marx formulated the AMP and disarticulated the Asian from the European experience, the former path characterized by East Asian absolutism, civil works such as central government-directed irrigation and state control of land, a small number of large urban centers and the concentration of populations in scattered rural areas marked by strong county and prefectural organization, and a feudal system of underdevelopment and paltry commercial activity, all of which combined to create centuries of "long stagnation" throughout Asia[2]. In nearly all non-European societies, including the Islamic world, Russia, China and East Asia, South Asia and Latin America, Marx's theory of historical progression does not apply based on relations of ownership, political institutions, and forms of industry. The theory of this difference is none other than the AMP. Regions that do not fit into Marx's five stages of history are referred to as "the Asias." Though the highly impoverished theoretical framework encompassing nearly every nation outside of Europe was constantly challenged when confronted with matters of developmental region and developmental history, Marx's theory of "development" and "change" survived until the late twentieth century, despite the fact that Marx himself had little faith in the possibility of independent change in Asia.

For example, the decades-long debate between Korea's internal development theorists advocating an historical development model parallel to Europe, and colonial modernization theorists arguing that imperial intervention was an indispensable factor in modernization, may be seen as a contemporary example of a debate over the existence of the AMP and historical attribution. Euro-American philosophy has cited the adjective "Asian" and its various applied concepts from the dual perspectives of tyranny and alternative, while post-colonialism and cultural studies have resurrected AMP as a metaphor for the Third-World

[2] Joshua Fogel, "The Debates over the Asiatic Mode of Production in Soviet Russia, China, and Japan" in: *The American Historical Review* 93, 1988, pp. 56–79.

subaltern geo-body in a critique of global inequality and injustice. Ironically, an AMP that attempts to theorize exception has become one of the most active agendas for the past century in both Asia and Europe. At times it has been used as an instrument of domination to prove the legitimacy of colonial subjugation, at other times adapted to invoke the historical urgency of a transition to communism, while simultaneously serving as the source of capitalist territorialization and the mantle on the backs of the global subaltern. Unexpected lessons may be gleaned from this battlefield of discourse.

The twentieth-century Asian experience, despite being theorized as an "alternative" to the European experience aiming at the same vision of modernization and communism, is now associated with an Asian revivalism since the 1980s and an alternative historical trajectory toward modernity. Sensitive to the question posed by Dirlik[3] of how to salvage the demands for social equality and political justice which emerges from the attempt to advocate alternative and multiple modernities, I now turn my attention to a reexamination of the "global" theory of AMP and its attempt to theorize exception.

2. First as Governor-General, Then As Revolutionist

In 1853, Marx began to focus his research on Asia, particularly India. It can be inferred that social theory relating to Asia began to be formulated through the correspondence of Marx and Engels. These were a series of writings emerging from an atmosphere of present urgency, and the article that is regarded as Marx's clearest articulation of his Asian social theory appears in the June 25, 1853 edition of the *New York Daily Tribune* under the title "The British Rule in India".[4] In this article, Marx's description of Indian "little republics" emphasized stagnation in Asian society. In this way, Marx again confirms that destroying the village community is an inevitable condition in the Europeanization of India.[5] It is therefore apparent that underlying such statements was the so-called capital-centered "restrictive stage theory"[6] postulating that, following Asian

3 Arif Dirlik, "Thinking Modernity Historically: Is 'Alternative Modernity' the Answer?" in: *Asian Review of World Histories* 1, 2013, pp. 5–44.

4 Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India" in: *New York Daily Tribune* 3804, June 25, 1853, p. 5.

5 Yi Seyŏng, *Han'guksa yŏn'gu wa kwahaksŏng* (Sŏul: Ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 1997), pp. 147–56.

6 Ho Duk Hwang, "Stairs of Metaphor: The Vernacular Substitution–Supplements of South Korean Communism," *The Idea of Communism 3*, Slavoj Žižek and Alex Taek-Gwang Lee

society's subsumption into the capitalist world order, socialism could only be achieved by passing through the capitalist stage of production.

The focus here is not on a critique of Orientalism, which is in continuity with Marxism. More importantly, the root of such thinking is that there exists a unilinear and progressive historical stage theory related to so-called productivity and modes of production, and that this stage is premised on properties that cannot be bypassed or compressed. Revolution does not occur suddenly, but must ripen over time. In order to proceed to a capitalist society, Asian society lacking feudalism must endure colonialism.

The idea that intervening in Asia was necessary for the purpose of historical development and transformation was being propagated among Japanese economic leaders in the span of mere decades. That is, it was justified as "scientific and theoretical," as demonstrated in the following thoughts expressed by the early Japanese Marxist Fukuda Tokugawa:

> In today's Korea [...] on this issue of land there is only a vague concept of public ownership. [T]he concept of land ownership is completely absent. Landlords, too, are non-existent. If one were pressed to find an owner, there is only the crown; though, in truth, this is an empty appellation.[7]

Fukuda's argument is straightforward. The nominal national ownership of land and hence the lack of private estate ownership—in other words the absence of the feudal system—was the ultimate cause of underdevelopment in agricultural production, and as a result the "merchant could not exist in Chosŏn". In like fashion Fukuda concludes, "commerce as well is moribund, and there is no social division of labor that is worthy of the label 'industry'. The only thing that exists is temporary wage labor [賃仕業, *Lohnwerk*], while domestic work [domestic industry] does not exist". As evidence, Fukuda points out that such merchants were regarded as "handicraftsmen," a kind of occupational identity much more despised than general villagers. Fukuda held that the rural village in Chosŏn Korea was a place where primitive community, one in which com-

(eds.), (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 191–211.

7 Fukuda Tokugawa, "Kankoku no keizai soshiki to keizai tani," (1904), quoted in Moritani Katsumi, *Ajiateki seisan yōshikiron*, Ikuseisha, Tōkyō 1937, p. 267.

munal village autonomy based on hereditary social control, was stubbornly protected. Despite Fukuda's scientific approach, his desire to explore Chosŏn society from its earliest history through its disintegration and to examine evidence of its "stagnation" permeates his entire research project. Fukuda, who studied at the University of Munich from 1898–1900 under Lujo Brentano, one of the premier scholars of German socialism, published "Die gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Japan" in 1900, which was also edited by Brentano.[8] Here Fukuda asserted Western/Japanese isomorphism, in the process invoking Chosŏn as an example of deviation from general laws. "Korea," as a "special case among special cases," was judged to be a prime example of Asia's heretical image.[9]

Fukuda wrote a work titled "The Status of Korea in Indices of Economic Development," the result of a two-week sojourn through old Korea in 1902, in which his central thesis was that the feudal system, an essential precondition for the formation of a national economy, had never emerged in Korea. In other words, the modernization of Korean society would be impossible through its own initiative alone. Fukuda's influence was tremendous. His representation of Korean history and society had a decisive impact on several of the architects of late Chosŏn's modern economy such as Kawai Hirotami (河合弘民), Shiogawa Ichirō (鹽川一郎), and Wada Ichirō (和田一郎), and became an important foundation for the land survey project conducted in Korea and northeast China.

A Government General's office well read in Marxist theory? According to the colonial historian Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn, until the late 1920s the official position of the Government General of Korea was that, "in terms of Chosŏn agriculture, vast tracts are left stagnant in the 'manner of Asia', there is 'an endless division of means of production and the isolation of producers, extraordinary waste in human capacity, progressiveness in conditions of production and appreciation in the means of production', according to 'unavoidable laws'. Under these conditions, 'the development of labor's social production, capital's social accumulation, commercial livestock farming and the application of scientific progress

8 The Japanese edition was published in 1907 and translated by Sakanishi yoshizō. Moritani Katsumi, *Ajiateki seisan yōshikiron*, Ikuseisha, Tōkyō 1937, pp. 268–71.

9 Sanjun Kan, "Fukuda Tokuzō no *Chōsen teitai shikan*: Teitairon no genzō" in: *Kikan sanzenri* 49, 1987, p. 84.

are eliminated'"[10]. When considering the intrusion of distorted Marxist theory into the office of the Governor General, the issue could only depend on what transition or theory of transformation would this understanding of "Asian" come to redefine?

The clue to this transition came from the Soviet Union. The AMP debate was held in Leningrad in February 1931, jointly hosted by the Leningrad Oriental Association and the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences. The prevailing theory there was put forth by M. Godes, which was reignited by discussions on Japan and China, and from around 1935 gained even more momentum with the combination of Tōyōron (東洋論), the discovery of oracle bone inscriptions, and the Korean Studies movement (*Chosŏnhak undong*). Korean scholars of the 1930s meanwhile considered AMP theory to be an "Asian perversion of feudalism," and advanced a strong critique of the synthesis of colonialism and Marxist political economy. Cross-referencing occurred among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese intellectuals, and the debate intensified. From examples such as the Chinese writer Guo Moruo (郭沫若 1892–1978) reading theories on history advanced by the Korean writers Yi Pungman and Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn, and the Korean writer Kim T'aejun reading Guo Moruo, we can perceive that the debate over AMP was setting the regional tone throughout (East) Asia, and spreading beyond these boundaries as well. For example Paek Namun and Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn considered the connections being drawn between AMP, Asian stagnation, the theory of Chosŏn particularities, and racial discrimination to be a form of cunning guile:

> There are those who insist that feudalism did not exist in Chosŏn society. In particular, Mr. Fukuda Tokugawa contends that the maladministration of Chosŏn government was due to the absence of feudalism (*kangjehak yŏngu*). However, he is not aware of the many differences between Western feudalism and the Asian/Chosŏn system, and the myriad differences within the same base economy. This is because he only considers a system identical to that of the West to qualify as feudalism. The so-called Asiatic Mode of Production is not itself an autonomous economic tool, but has come about merely because the same

[10] Myŏnggyu Pak, "Nalgŭn nolli ŭi saeroun hyŏngt'ae: Miyajima Hiroshi ŭi *Chōsen tochi chōsa jigyōshi no kenkyū* pip'an" in: *Han'guksa yŏngu* 75, 1994, pp. 157–84. Ch'ŏngwŏn Yi, "Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi" in: *Yuibutsuron kenkyū* 30, 1935, p. 276.

> economic foundation has been transformed and shaded by racial, geographical, and historical conditions.[11]

That the AMP was not an autonomous mode was an official tenet of socialism that had been expressed in various forms, but up until the Kapo reforms (1894) Chosŏn society was based on a system of slavery, and the contention that feudalism had never existed was maintained in the academic discourse of Moritani Katsumi (森谷克己) and other government scholars through the 1930s. Paek Namun in his universal theory is well known for avoiding as much as possible usage of the adjective "Asian":

> No matter how 'Asian' the developmental history of the Chosŏn people, the internal development tenets of the society itself belong completely to world history. Whether it be the slave society of the Three Kingdoms period, the Asian feudal society from the late unified Silla, or the transplanted capitalism of today's Korea, our history's recorded overall development stages are universal in nature, but with each possessing unique aspects.[12]

Paek Namun and Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn shared a common consciousness of the issue in that they each rejected the connection drawn between AMP, Asian stagnation, and the theory of Chosŏn particularities. This is because for Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn "the Asiatic" meant a "unique economic social structure separate from the realm of world history," while Hirono Yoshitaro (平野義太郎), Aikawa Haruki (相川春喜), Moritani Katsumi, and other scholars of the metropole argued that viewing this as a "unique economic social structure" was to deny Asia's inclusion into global history.[13] However, Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn had a more radical view of history than Paek Namun, who focused on the solidarity among bourgeois forces which formed during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn contended that feudalism was established only in the last half of the fourteenth century in Chosŏn, and that this historic delay created a highly stratified society of contradictions, a system marked with temporal compression preceding violent release. In summary, an Asia with an autonomous mode of production did not exist, but only unique Asian elements within the framework of world history;

11 Yi, "Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi".
12 Namun Paek, *Chōsen shakai keizaishi* (Tōkyō: Kaizōsha, 1933), p. 9.
13 Yi, "Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi".

what remained was the "Asian" contradiction, and through the accumulation of this contradiction the pressure building to revolution became even greater.

There is no need to restate the various criticisms here.[14] The important point is that this debate included a decisive agenda, that revolution could be carried out any time, in any way, by anyone. In stipulating the character of modern society, the remnants of the Asian production mode had to be considered, namely the matter of a lack of feudalism and transformation, and how these related to the question of who constituted the subject forces in determining revolutionary strategies in various parts of Asia. In the case of the Soviet Union it proclaimed the priority of the bourgeois democratic revolution, and officially declared its alliance with the nationalist front through the Comintern. On the other hand, in China and other non-European societies this issue implied the urgency or revolution and the charting of a new course. In other words, if the particularities of AMP are more generally acknowledged, then the Asian bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out the bourgeois democratic revolution, requiring the socialist revolution to be led directly by laborers and farmers. If Asia was different from Europe, it should not take, nor could it take, the same historical path as Europe. Was it not possible to simultaneously replace "non-capitalist development" and "revolution" with "mode of production"?

Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn, who, through AMP theory, insisted on the multi-layeredness of Korean history (through an accumulation of contradictions), was criticized by Moritani in the following way:

> In his book *The Asiatic Mode of Production and Chosŏn Feudal Society*, although merely an imprudent, strange outlier, Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn's representation of the 'AMP' is distinct from that of Marx, who was referring to a primitive community. This being the case, we are obliged to test this theory. Where on earth did this problem arise? According to Mr. Yi, AMP is understood to be a standard part of primitive communities, and therefore this is akin to drawing a line to distinguish the earliest historical epoch. However, at the same time Mr. Yi writes that the 'feudal system of Chosŏn' and the irregular feudal system of East Asia 'is the

[14] For a monumental work on Korean internal development within AMP, refer to Hong Sunkwŏn, "1930nyŏndae Han'guk e Malksŭ chuŭi yŏksahak kwa Asiajŏk saengsan Yangsingnon nonjaeng" in: *Tonga nonch'ong* 31, 1/1994, pp. 35–64.

> AMP described by Marx and Engels,' and so according to this logic it seems that the AMP is not a social economic structure that needs to be drawn as an historical epoch. Thus, Yi's argument unfortunately makes no sense whatever to the reader. Moreover, Mr. Yi refers to me in the text as a literalist and claims that he is not adhering to the letter of Marx but rather to the spirit of him. My question to Mr. Yi would be, rather, where is your spirit?[15]

Where was the "spirit" of Yi's theory when he was moving from disenfranchised activist to theorist of the Materialism Research Society? The AMP had to be a system of slavery imposed on the land, a feudalism performed in a state of "remaining," in other words a perverted form of Chosŏn (Asian) feudalism. Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn, who was neither a staunch universalist nor an Asian particularist drawn to literal interpretations, was forced to employ both a universalist historical narrative alongside Paek Namun along with Moritani's theory of "agricultural community" remnants, and thus ran the attendant risk of seeming to vacillate between the two poles. For example, Yi evaluates the land survey project by the GGK in much the same way that Marx had assessed British domination of India. "While being 'liberated' from land ownership itself and 'becoming free,' at the same time they were converted to the nationalist system and the vast avenues of proletarian and quasi-proletarian identities opened up before them"[16]. In other words, the destruction of the agrarian community by "transplanted capitalism" and the emergence of the proletariat class on a large scale compressed the time frame for socialist revolution. The last portion of *A Chosŏn Social History Reader* (Chosŏn sahoesa tokpon) reads thusly:

> Although one major question is the origin of Chosŏn's semi-feudal land ownership *Aufheben*, another question concerns the difficulties with global capitalism in this present century, which groans under the prevailing wave of global economic depression. Moreover, as part of the 'Asian mode as stagnation' theory Chosŏn's rural areas are also affected, and finding a solution is now a vexing problem.[17]

[15] Moritani Katsumi, *Ajiateki seisan yōshikiron* (Tōkyō: Ikuseisha, 1937), p. 77.

[16] Ch'ŏngwŏn Yi, "Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi" in: *Yuibutsuron kenkyū* 30, 1935, pp. 126–149.

[17] Ibid., p. 308.

The problem was the stratified nature of history and the fixity of its contradictions, while the method was to escape from economic decision-making. For Yi, the central issue was that the stages of Asian history—ancient, feudal, and transplanted capitalist Asia—were simultaneously fixed to contemporary colonialism.

The only form of resolution was to represent deformed, transplanted, and multi-layered capitalism as semi-feudal Japanese capitalism within the Asian stagnation model.[18] Yi's call for popular scholarly analysis to determine the existence of feudalism as the presence of an "Asian or non-Asian" mode of production was deeply significant. Yi wrote: "Following this logic, the political conclusion would be that because there existed no feudal system in Asia, its current political process is not civil but rather proletarian".[19] By the mid-1930s, an alternative path of historical development was already being envisioned: if feudalism had indeed not existed, Asia should behave as though it had, and consider an historical task a task at hand.

The fractured and heterogenous leadership Marx had written about that prevented ultimate resolution of the mode of production question was discovered to be colonialist and imperialist forces. Emphasizing the tendency of history itself and the historical tendencies of social constructs, economism and technicism were critiqued, while economic evolutionism (historical stage theory) was extricated from progressive ideologies. Following Louis Althusser, this may be called the discovery of "overdetermination," or of "contradiction" according to Mao Zedong.[20] It goes without saying that the Asian/Chinese revolution, realized at the level of the peasant and proletariat rather than at the economic level, has risen beyond the civilian level to provide decisive inspiration to socialism in other regions. What did "Asia" and the AMP mean to modern Korean theorists? We may only say this: Asia was not a geographical category, but rather a coordinating instrument for realizing historical tasks and grasping social compositions, and also a contradictory concept and ideological framework for combating colonialism through a program of historical development.

18 Ibid., p. 254.
19 Ibid., pp. 52–57.
20 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1996).

3. Anti-Oriental Alterity and Asiatic Globalization – The Globe as the Asiatic

Today, there are few who explain Asia's history or stage of economics through the framework of the AMP. Perry Anderson wrote in 1974 that the socialist revolution and experimentation within the non-European world had reached its climax. Anderson writes that such comparisons between Islamic and Chinese civilizations "preclude any attempt to assimilate them as simple examples of a common 'Asiatic' mode of production. Let this last notion be given the decent burial that it deserves"[21]. Even when observing ancient wooden tablets (*mokkan*), family registers from the Silla Dynasty, or Chosŏn-era *yangban* agricultural management, there are few who harbor any illusions about salvaging the concept of AMP. On the contrary, there are international scholarly trends toward village communities in pastoral societies and the Chinese bureaucratic system based on the civil service examinations, and scholars arguing that "alternative modernities were lost" through abundant social welfare and revolutionary concepts, such as the California school advocating for "new world history"[22].

But if we are to lay to rest such theory, according to whose standards shall we do it? It was the Indian post-colonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak who resurrected this buried theory and reexamined it in the new millennium. It is Spivak's contention that rather than as a spirit, as a heritage or value, the AMP may still become the subject of theoretical or practical contemplation. If we observe Marx's thinking on so-called "species life" and "species being" this will become clear. Spivak reminds us that from a young age Marx distinguished between the natural world, or "species life," and the human world, or "species being".[23] If species life is life *an sich* or, to use Benjamin-Agamben terminology, a *bloßes Leben* (bare life) confined to nature, then species being is linked to

21 Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolute State* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 548.

22 Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Hiroshi Miyajima and Hangsŏp Pae (eds.), *Tong Asia nŭn myŏt siinga?* (Sŏul: Nŏmŏ puksŭ, 2015); Hiroshi Miyajima and Hangsŏp Pae (eds.), *Tong Asia esŏ sigye rŭl pomyŏn* (Sŏul: Nŏmŏ puksŭ, 2017); Miyajima Hiroshi and Pae Hangsŏp (eds.), *19segi Tong Asia rŭl ingnŭn nun* (Sŏul: Nŏmŏ puksŭ, 2017).

23 Gayatri Spivak, *P'ost'ŭ singmin isŏng pip'an*. trans., T'ae Hyesuk, Pak Misŏn (Sŏul: Kalmuri, 2005), p. 128; *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* p. 78. Okhŭi Im, *T'aja rosŏŭi Sŏgu: Kayat'ŭri Sŭp'ibak ŭi* P'osŭt'ŭsingmin isŏng pip'an *ilkki wa ssŭgi* (Sŏul: Hyŏnamsa, 2012).

the domain of political economy through the process of historical development. However, for Marx, who aspired to a free, and ideal plane of species being, the social inequality of species life prevented the natural progression of species being and represented its greatest obstacle. The prime example of species life as the historical present was none other than the Asian populace under the AMP. What were the conditions that prevented humans from making the leap to species being in Asia? Marx's line of questioning has been of lasting import to Spivak. In Spivak's view, the AMP was a rather desperate attempt to identify the discrepancies exposed within Marxist theory and explain them through a culling and categorization of such questions.

Spivak seems to contend that AMP theory, while no longer in vogue, may still provide the tools to grasp the division of species life and species being, as well as the mechanism of that division, for several reasons. First, within AMP theory is inscribed the Marxist Asian phylogeny, containing a profound legacy. Thus, it is still necessary to reinvent AMP theory in order to explain historical narrative and theoretical differences and introduce "values" of inequality and injustice. Second, in a globe unified by financial capital, AMP theory offers a framework through which to interpret not only the global financial system through development and economic restructuring but the issues of economic migration centered on Europe. In short, the AMP provides clues as to the reinterpretation and deconstruction of what Samir Amin has called the global tributary system, whereby subalterns pay tribute to an imperialistic system through debt-bondage entities within a global system of unequal international trade. Externalities that convert capitalism to imperialism and quash revolutionary momentum, such as the relationship of debt-bondage maintained on the backs of subjugated women of the Third World, may be reinterpreted through AMP, and thus reach the realm of artificially-enforced life. For Spivak, the AMP is akin to a mode of thought that constantly circulates "externalities" that allow capitalism to be converted to imperialism.

Although Marx formulated the concept of AMP as a kind of necessary discrepancy or residual theory of the "Other" to explain the discrepancies laid bare in his own theory, it is suggestive that this theory of difference and residuum is being reevaluated as a mode of critique in the context of "Asianization of the globe", where migration and global management have created a condition of ubiquitous subalterity. However, what is more important is that these "remain-

ders" have functioned as sites for redefining the histories of individual Asian societies and attempting to outline present challenges. For example, in South Korea the theoretical lessons and perceptive ability learned through such a theory, and the enduring concept of the future led us to interpret colonial Japanese theories deconstructively. Had AMP theory not been suggested, East Asian histories grounded in scientific periodizations and revolutionary discourses based on modes of production and fluctuations in social structure would not have emerged. As suggested by Spivak, rereading AMP theory from a Marxist axiological dimension, post-colonial thought is merely a political economy and cultural research project combining capitalism and imperialism that supplements the "spatio-temporal" gap between the historical development stages.

Conversely, the theoretical residuum created by Marx's AMP entered Western European theory from the reverse direction. In their work on capitalism and schizophrenia from *Anti-Oedipus*, for example, Deleuze and Guattari reawaken the example of strong territorialization of great Asian nations in order to formulate a mechanism of state reterritorialization and, more concretely, to explain the Oedipal relationship between agriculture and the state that depends on a relationship of debt and repayment. Critiquing the original and abstract nature of the state by means of a reterritorialization that cannot or will not perform any action other than to guarantee the private ownership of the ruling class, what they had in mind was the perception of the continuing and original experience of pre-existing Asian countries, the AMP, feudalism and capitalism.[24] In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari reaffirm the original nature of absolute monarchy and the concept of the state as an "apparatus of capture," again alluding to "Asian structure" and mode of production. Not as a king in the role of priest or judge under contract or agreement, but as a ghastly emperor, existing in royal captivity and regal bondage—the Asian nation-state. In order to elicit an imperial/tyrannical extreme, again the old code of the agricultural community is invoked to recode the Asian absolutist state.[25]

[24] Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 108.

[25] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Angtti Oidip'usŭ: Chabonjuŭi wa chŏngsin punyŏljŭng*, trans. Ch'oi Myŏnggwan (Sŏul: Minŭmsa,1994), p. 298.

Interestingly, in *A Thousand Plateaus* the opposite concept of a "society against the state" is envisioned, and as a theoretical foundation, draws on Pierre Clastres' work of the same name on the subject of Latin America.[26] For example, Indian or nomad societies that resemble societies composed of primitive communities are not state relocations but rather societies composed of refugees of the state. Unlike in an absolutist state, the village chief in India does not possess any special authority, and in that sense this does not constitute a relationship of dominance and subordination rooted in economics and capital. Whether nomadism or its opposite, historically speaking it is the theoretical source of the residual shape or difference that is "Asia". (It is unclear whether the AMP, which was originally conceived based on conditions in the Bengal region of India, may be applied to Latin America. However, the geopolitical differences between India, the Islamic world and China are not important in this theory, which is envisioned as a way to incorporate differences that arise when assigning regions outside of feudal Europe to the framework of historical development). Stagnant Asia, Asia deviating from universal history, and overterritorialized or coded Asia became the material of alternative life or theoretical adventure of escape or nomadism within Deleuze and Guattari's taxonomic analysis.

East and West AMP discourse was a complete theory that included the residuum. "Asianness" in both the East and the West functioned as a serious metaphor for stagnation and regression, as well as transformation and development. By extricating the particular spatio-temporality of Asia from the fantasy and depicting it in the form of "mode," "system" and even "contradiction," the "remainder" within this theory was able to clarify not only difference but the tasks of individual regions. Asia has understood the urgency placed on regional limits of time in AMP theory to mean a demand for time's "revolutionary" compression, while Europe has established Asia as a source of imagination about the "task" of its own society. At issue is discovering the fate of species being, and reinventing a path forward. This is the reason that Spivak and Delueze-Guattari were able to read AMP so "arbitrarily," so autonomously.

[26] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Ch'ŏn'gae ŭi kowŏn: Chabonjuŭi wa punyŏljŭng 2*, trans. Kim Chaein (Sŏul: Sae mulgyŏl, 2001), chapter 13; Pierre Clastres, *Kukka e taehanghanŭn sahoe: chŏngch'i inyuhak nongo*, trans., Hong Sŏnghŭp (Sŏul: Ihaksa, 2005).

In our age, the delineation of inequality and injustice is not a matter of geography but rather topos. Not an alternative in wealthy parts of Asia, it rather dwells in the inequality, corruption, and bureaucratism that constituted "Asianness" in the past century. These exist as well in Europe. The political-economic inequalities inscribed within the world's infinite topoi are not a relationship between states, nor are they the task of "globalizing Asia" of the last century, but rather they indicate that "global Asianization" is the true issue of our times. Are inequality, fascism, corruption, and inequality marks of Asianness? This may be the case, and it may not be. If the former, then so be it, for it means that there is work to be done.

4. Theory by Asia?—Against Korean Woodside(s)

In 1989 when it became clear that socialism was collapsing, Arif Dilik argued that AMP applied to China and Asia, and that the theoretical debate surrounding AMP eventually opened up two new paths. First, that the pluralism of historical development implied in AMP burst wide open in East Asia. Second, the development of this theory has made possible both an assurance of a unified and universal historical development and a systematic understanding of regional difference and distinct characteristics of each society that exist within history. That is, "difference" here refers not to uniqueness, but is closer to "distinct traits". In short, the "pluralism" implied in AMP theory was the most important characteristic within the context of Marxist historical theory.[27]

For the next decade or so Asian history seemed to sing the eternal victory praises of the capitalist mode of production, perched at the pinnacle of a four-stage development hierarchy bereft of socialism. However, with the rise of China and East Asia in the last twenty years the main trend seems to be theories of decisive difference and assurances of the universality of particular histories, for example plural theories, multiple modernities, and confirmations that the centrality of such plurality is possible. No longer socialism with Chinese characteristics, the thesis that "China is different" has become a truism. It seems that economic development without democracy is possible, and perhaps this way of thinking has proceeded to the point that the current belief or fear that traditional sources

[27] Arif Dirlik, *Hyŏngmyŏng kwa yŏksa: Chungguk Marŭk'ŭsŭjuŭi yŏksahak ŭi kiwŏn 1919-1937*, trans., Yi Hyŏnbok (Pusan: Sanjini, 2016), p. 229.

of power or differing modernities are still functioning is not comparable with the atmosphere that spawned the Asian axiological debates of the past between the Asian particularist Lee Kwan Yew (李光耀) and the universal global history advocate Kim Dae Jung.[28] These are alternative global histories, supported by the effect of post-colonialism and the multiplicity of economies, or a global history inspired by "elements" within Asia.

Woodside, who reappraises the bureaucratic system in East Asia as a system of rationality that ensured the civil service examination based on meritocracy, writes that "there must be an acceptance that many of those forms [of creativity]—Athenian democracy, Roman law, the east Asian mandarinates provide examples—could develop independently of the timetables of capitalism and industrialization," while Sebastian Conrad queries "What time is Japan?"[29] Not surprisingly, in AMP debates of the past, the examination system and the administration apparatus it supported were the root of stagnation that hampered the development of feudalism and stifled capitalist maturation. Despite concerns that the paradox of Chinese capitalistic development without democracy may result in the selective reappraisal of current Chinese and past Third World oppression, there is bound to be some perplexity over how to interpret the concepts of "multiple" or "lost modernities". To take this further, how are we to understand the substitution-supplementation of systematized democracy with multiple modernities, or the explicit combination of economic reductionism and the assertion of traditional legitimacy that makes the pig of the present the Socrates of the past?

Is it possible to make an "abridged progress" on the superstructure without the support of the substructure? Among inter-layered elements of modernity such as political equality, capitalism, individualism, and industrialization, is

[28] Dae Jung Kim, "Is culture destiny? The Myth of Asia's Anti-Democratic Values" in: *Foreign Affairs* 73, 1994.

[29] Woodside, *Lost Modernities*, p. 36. This is in fact a strange question in that, if multiple modernities exist, then multiple "times" must too exist. Asking "What time is Japan?" is, in a distorted way, subverting the passion for transnational and universal history embodied in opposing the theory of Japanese exceptionalism and Emperor-based chronology in favor of "lost alternative modernities" or "plural modernities." See Sebastian Conrad, "What Time Is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography" in: *History and Theory* 38, 1/1999, pp. 67-83.

it acceptable to single out meritocracy (bureaucratism, accountability, the civil service examination) and conceive of this as a mark of modernity? In arguing for particularities in history, Woodside cites Walter Benjamin's historical philosophy, that the exception (of Asian history) may become the rule (of global history), resembling the recent query "What time is East Asia?" This is a seemingly conscientious and reciprocal discussion in the context of the significations and critiques of Western society, but in Korea and the rest of Asia the reactive response such a theory evinces evokes a deep sense of worry. If the "exceptional" development of colonialism, division, and protracted dictatorship in twentieth-century Korea's tortured history can become a "rule," is this a "value" that can justify itself?

A series published recently in South Korea on the so-called long nineteenth century titled *What Time is Asia?* is an example of this.[30] The critical approach that governs the methodology of this project, which begins with "The Debate over Privileging Modernity" and opens with the epigraph "Do not write that everything was invented in the modern age," is the critique of Euro-centrism and modernism, a strategic equivalency and symmetrical comparison between pre-modernity and modernity, change and continuity, and the West and Asia. Rather than drawing theoretical drive or utility from the discrepancy or difference between the two, it draws on the subject, historical reality, and even historical pride, which in itself is not worthy of criticism. Korea, a post-colonial state having just thrown off the mantle of Japanese imperialism and in becoming a developed country through US-mediated modernization, then entered the ranks of prominent capitalist societies in which theories of "internal development" and "colonial modernity" entered into competition with one another. In the G20 era this would seem to be a reevaluation of Korean history as an example of alternative modernity in its own right. But how is this carried out? What if the reason is some positive aspect of the past, a distinguished, independent, and even (different) modern element? In this case, national history and world history would be dismissed, replaced by East Asian (comparative) history and pluro-centric global history. Thus, Confucian modernity or alternative modernity relativizes Western modernity, and a new mission or task comes into relief.

30 Hiroshi Miyajima and Hangsŏp Pae (eds.), *Tong Asia nŭn myŏt siinga?* (Sŏul: Nŏmŏ puksŭ, 2015).

Simultaneously, as a special site within the topos of East Asia and Korea, the "discovery of difference,"[31] the overcoming of "teleological and developmental awareness formulated by Western Europe," and the conquering of "the economistic perspective that disdains culture and institutions" become part of the agenda, and the exciting proposition that "combining the pre-modern and the modern is possible" comes into view. If the examination system itself may be evidence of precocious modernity, this demands not a universal historical approach, but an internal approach. As may be seen from discussions on "medieval modernity" or "medievalness in modern times," within the argument that "modernity" and "medievalness" coexist to some extent, we may read the ubiquity of historical elements, but I cannot help but interpret the anachronistic nature of the elements themselves. Indeed, how might the critique of civil rights indices do harm to the current issues of global modernity or internal inequality?

The list of Asian values set for revision by scholars of the so-called "long nineteenth century in Asia" continues to grow. Much like the examination system, genealogies (*chokpo*) were not a matter of noble lineage, but something that made it possible for anyone to be a progenitor in a society based on individual ability. It was precisely the spread of Confucianism rooted in an interest in politics and national history that made the Meiji Restoration possible, hence the existence of Confucian modernity. The growth of East Asian society through an entanglement of meritocracy and caste, as well as small-scale agricultural self-sufficiency and tribute trade, the cosmopolitanism of *Hanmun* (same-script consciousness) and its modernity, these have been selectively reevaluated within the project of overcoming Euro- and modern-centric historicity. Particularly within the "long nineteenth century in Asia" project, Confucianism and gentry society, Confucian judicial tradition, and small-scale farming that refrained from large-scale commercial agriculture have been reevaluated as evidence of Confucian modernity or advanced organic societies. Depending on the case, the West and modernity are often considered as strategic equivalent measurements, as dogmas of the past century that must be resolutely overcome. But for what purpose?

The peripheral country of Korea is being considered a singular topos mediating between East Asia and the West. Naturally, the critique of Euro-centrism pos-

[31] Ibid.

sesses political, economic and ethical potential. Here, it cannot be said that the legacy of anti-colonial and post-colonial movements of the past half-century is not reflected. That is, as long as multiple modernities theory can become a stronghold for criticizing the developmentalism and productionism which implies a singular and homogenous concept of time. However, is it not still an urgent task for Korean and East Asian theory to dismantle the spatio-temporal combination of modernity and Western Europe? There is a need to contemplate to what extent Euro-centrism and multiple modernities have been critiqued in today's East Asia and especially Korea, which has become one of the major agencies behind neo-liberalism perverted into imperialism.

For what purpose are we to relativize the West and modernity? Within the framework of "anti-theory by Asia," Western-centrism and modernity-centrism are regarded as public enemies. What is needed is not theorizing *in* Asia, but rather envisioning Asia *as* theory. However, theory is on the one hand explanatory, and on the other revolutionary. What sort of *change* is desirable?

There still remains something that must be defended, and that is the legitimacy of modernity. Claiming to critique Western-centrism, we question the modern from pre-modern positions; criticizing the unrest of capitalist society, we evaluate highly the good, simple peasants of agrarian societies founded on slave labor; acknowledging the examination/bureaucratic systems, we cannot refashion modern timetables to fit the Chosŏn Dynasty lineage. Rather than a life in which the exception is the rule—the Asian, male, patriarchal, literati, administrative, conscientious/alternative modern life—what must be salvaged is the subaltern of today's Third World who exists in a new tributary system of inequality. What is it that we can rescue? If not change itself, then what?

The epoch of modernity and Euro-centrism may be necessary as a fervent value for some (Asian/male/patriarch/Mandarin intellectual). Yet, what actually seems more important to me is the question of whom, what, and what sort of future these epochs represent. This may be the reason that Gayatri Spivak formulated her initial research on the subaltern based on female Korean factory workers of the 1980s and the Indian practice of sati, and thus restored the con-

temporaneity of AMP.[32] On the opposite side of Asia, the nomadic life conceived by Deleuze and Guattari is today hyper-actualized in the form of migrant labor and refugees, while the illocutionary act that begs our attention in subaltern research continues to demand the reinvention of an alternative and revolutionary "Asian theory".

The temptation of Asian exceptionality has always existed on the theoretical horizon of Asia. The unequal development of the economy has also been reproduced as an unequal site of theoretical production and application. The attraction of adjectives or methodologies such as "equivalent," "plural," "different" and "equal" is understandable. However, what must be confirmed through these adjectives cannot be an equitable pluralism of a single country, region, or civilizational unit because the equivalence between civilizations actually conceals some inequality between nations and regions and blocks the theory of transformation driven by the theory of difference. The enormous inequality created by global modernity can never be counterbalanced by calling for a high degree of equivalence between civilization, regions, or countries.

[32] Gayatri Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory" in: *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 1, 1978, pp. 241–46.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 149–162

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee*

North Korea and the Enigma of Survival[1]

Counterfactual History

Despite the soft focus of the orientalist media, North Korea is not an enigma. The fact of its mere "brute existence" shouldn't seduce or astonish us any more than the "diversity" of the capitalist system that seemingly hems it in on all sides. And yet its stubborn long-term survival, much like capitalism's, quite arguably does represent something of an enigma. The question of North Korea today is that of the political endurance and continuity of a regime whose "social experiment" should long ago have been jettisoned into the dustbin of history. Its blanket demonization and ostracism by the "international community" is proof of a profoundly abnormal country, a zombie state which certainly resists the norms of the modern liberal state. As Jon Halliday once put it, "no state in the world lives with such a wide gap between its own self-image and self-presentation as a socialist 'paradise on earth' and the view of most of the rest of the world that it is a bleak, backward workhouse ruled by a megalomaniac tyrant, Kim Il Sung."[2] And yet, all appearances aside, what I want to suggest is that there is a rational kernel at work here, not so much "beneath" the thin veneer of paranoid propaganda that comprises its overtly repressive state apparatus, but in terms of North Korea's position within the uneven and combined development of global capitalism. Modernization too is a process which, all appearances aside, North Korea has been strongly committed to since its foundation, even if in this respect the ideology is prone to part company with the reality, as the much-trumpeted "successes" of its social plan become ever more symptomatic of massive and grotesque system failure. North Korea didn't suddenly fall from the sky. The evil features of this "hermit kingdom" have grown out of the very traits of the modern state in general. Journalistic platitudes and general bias aside, North Korea is not a feudal state or an anachronistic theocracy, but rather

[1] This work was supported by the Kyung Hee University Research Grant (KHU-20150648).

[2] Jon Halliday, "The North Korean Enigma" in: *New Left Review*, London, 127, 1980, p. 18.

* Kyung Hee University, School of Global Communication, Republic of Korea

a nation-state with an obsessive attitude towards modernization as well as the strong ambition to be one of the most advanced countries in the world.

Superman didn't land in North Korea. In *Superman: Red Son*[3] Mark Miller presents us with a counterfactual history which explores what might have happened had the rocket ship carrying the young alien from Krypton landed on Earth slightly ahead of time. In this case the "advanced" landing deposits the future superhero in Ukraine, where instead of growing up in the free state of Kansas and becoming a journalist on the *Daily Planet*, he grows up on a collective farm and becomes a journalist on *Pravda*. One needs to set aside one's prejudices in order to begin to bring North Korea into proper focus—although granted such formal reversals of good versus evil are limited in their critical scope. My contention here will be that the "monstrosity" of North Korea is nothing more than the unmasked identity of the modern state, the naked face of state violence. What one should question here is not what kind of country North Korea is, but instead what North Korea contributes to questions of modernity and modernization. In short, the supposedly "enigmatic" aspect of North Korea lies at the extremity of modernization, which has been pursued by both the socialist bloc and the capitalist bloc in the postwar world. As such the North Korean question should be revised in order to ask why the dual process of modernization and democratization ends up in the strange accomplishment of its secular theocratic regime.

The Democratic Paradox

The political ambition of North Korea as a modern state seems to lurk in its official name: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Like South Korea, North Korea insists on being the only legitimate government of the entire peninsula. North Korea calls itself a "democratic" people's republic—unlike South Korea, which is simply "republic" (ROK)—whose people (*dêmos*) are nominally deprived of power (*krâtos*). Historically the appellation of a Democratic People's Republic is certainly not unique to North Korea (one thinks of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1987—91) under Mengistu Haile Mariam). The idea of popular fronts as adherents of "democracy" can be traced back to Stalin's (failed) attempt to create a multi-class form of government in the Soviet Union. In the case of North Korea the obsession with modernization

3 Mark Miller, et. al., *Superman: Red Son* (New York: DC Comics, 2004).

and nation-building under the direction of the country's communist party, the Worker's Party of Korea, goes some way towards explaining the endurance of the idea of "democracy" in a supposedly socialist state.

Kim Il Sung, its visionary leader, not to mention the country's deity, was the Superman sent down from Soviet heaven to construct a new country. In North Korean propaganda, Kim promised his people daily rations of "rice and meat soup" for participating in guerrilla warfare against the Japanese imperialists. After liberation, the guerilla figure took power during the Soviet occupation and started to implement a strongly partisan agenda. First of all, as much as in other post-colonial countries, Kim Il Sung and his followers set about reinventing the past. The situation whereby the North Korean leader created the racial self-image of his nation is described in the following terms:

> Though most Koreans in 1945 had no memory of life before Japanese rule, neither the Soviets nor the Americans saw a need to de-colonize hearts and minds. That the Koreans now hated Japan was taken as proof that they had always done so. Nor did either power punish former propagandists. In Seoul, the cultural scene's spontaneous efforts to come to terms with its past were soon undermined by the settling of personal scores and a general refusal to acknowledge a collective guilt. Obscure ex-collaborators condemned the famous ones, those who had propagandized in Korean asserted moral superiority over those who had done so in Japanese, and erstwhile 'proletarians' acted as if their brief prison stays in the 1930s made up for everything they had written afterward.[4]

When Korea was liberated from colonialism, a ground zero emerged on which anybody obtaining power could fabricate anything about history. The situation provided the perfect condition for modernization. Even though Kim Il Sung was one day a commander in Mao Zedong's army and spent a year at an infantry officer school in the USSR during the Pacific War, his ideological background was unlikely to have familiarized him a great deal with Marxism-Leninism. As North Korean propaganda frequently emphasizes today, he was in those days more inclined to the alliance between socialism and nationalism. He even insisted that Korea was on the stage of democratic reform and construction, not

4 Bryan Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters* (New York: Melville House, 2010), p. 30.

socialism as such.[5] Needless to say, this does not mean that North Korea came to "communism" via nationalism. The communist regime was implanted in Korea by the USSR and backed up by the Red Army from the time of its foundation.[6] Challenging the nationalist intellectuals such as Cho Man Sik, Kim attempted to consolidate his support base and mobilized more people to participate in constructing his regime.

The official name of North Korea indicates the historical background of Kim's nation-building project. The "democratic people" are those who join in the democratic reform and construction against the United States-led world order. The emphasis of *the people* who advocate *democracy*, i.e. common people's rule, reveals the "democratic paradox" as such: if everybody rules, who would be ruled? As Carl Schmitt points out, those who command and those who obey are identical in democracy.[7] If democracy means that the sovereign of an assembly composed of all people can change the laws and constitution at will, the question remains who belongs to the people and who does not? The people able to decide the law at will must be determined. Accordingly "Democratic People's Republic" is inclusive and at the same time exclusive in its constitutional arrangements. It seeks to include those who agree on democratic reform and construction and excludes those who disagree, as the very basis of its constitution.

Chantal Mouffe regards Schmitt's definition of democracy as the means by which a people comes to exist through the determination of who to include and who to exclude. She says that "without any criterion to determine who are the bearers of democratic rights, the will of the people could never take shape."[8] Of course, this definition of "democracy" is ill-suited to liberal accounts of democracy. However, Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy is in some sense amenable to the constitutional dynamics of North Korea. Clearly North Korea does not endorse liberal democracy, but rather the dictatorship of the proletariat. Interestingly, there is a crucial clue to Kim Il Sung's *political* concept of democracy in his speech on the dictatorship of the proletariat from 1967. In these remarks,

5 Chong-Sik Lee and Robert A. Scalapino, *North Korea: Building of the Monolithic State* (Berwyn: The KHU Press, 2017), p. 43.

6 Ibid., p. 83.

7 Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Allen Kennedy (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1988), pp. 14–15.

8 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 43.

Kim criticized both "the Right opportunist view" and "the Left opportunist view" on the dictatorship of the proletariat in relation to the transition period of the communist revolution, before setting out his own theory of the third way, the so-called *Juche*:

> We must take into account such specific realities of ours in order to give correct solutions to the questions of the transition period and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Bearing this point in mind, I consider it excessive to regard the transition period in our country as the period up to the higher phase of communism. I deem it right to regard it as the period up to socialism. But it is wrong to believe that the transition period will come to a close as soon as the socialist revolution is victorious and the socialist system is established. Considering the issue on the basis of what the founders of Marxism-Leninism said, or considering it in the light of the experiences we have gained in our actual struggle, we cannot say that a complete socialist society is already built just because the capitalist class has been overthrown and the socialist revolution carried through after the seizure of power by the working class. We, therefore, have never said that the establishment of the socialist system means the complete victory of socialism. Then, when will the complete socialist society come into being? Complete victory of socialism will come only when the class distinction between the workers and the peasantry has disappeared and the middle classes (particularly the peasant masses) actively support us.[9]

According to Kim's argument, the problem is not so much the transition of the capitalist mode of production to a socialist one as that of the "*working-classization*" of the middle classes. Kim points out that "as long as the peasants are not *working-classized*, the support they may give us cannot be firm and is bound to be rather unstable".[10] How then is social transformation to be achieved? Kim places the emphasis on rapid economic development as the means for the consolidation of socialism. He argues that "to this end, the technological revolution should be carried out to such an extent as the advanced capitalist countries have turned their countryside capitalistic, so that farming may be mechanized, chemicalization and irrigation be introduced, and the eight-hour day be adopted".[11]

9 Kim Il Sung, *Juche! Speeches and Writings of Kim Il Sung*, ed. Li Yuk-Sa (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1972), p. 117.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 118.

This utterance reveals the meaning of *working-classizing* the peasants. Despite railing against the orthodox doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, forever emphasizing how North Korean realities differ from those of Europe and Russia, Kim's theory of socialism is a somewhat circular argument which sets out how the stable material basis of socialism is to be achieved: socialism is its own theory's goal. This is nothing new for anyone already familiar with Stalin's theory of socialism in one country. In his letter to Ivanov, "On the Final Victory of Socialism in the USSR," Stalin claimed socialism in one country does not mean the final accomplishment of revolution; instead, the international alliance of the proletariat can solve the problem of one-state socialism. Moreover, "this assistance of the international proletariat must be combined with our work to strengthen the defense of our country, to strengthen the Red Army and the Red Navy, to mobilize the whole country for the purpose of resisting military attack and attempts to restore bourgeois relations."[12]

What should be stressed in Kim's speech is not his vulgar reception of Stalinism, but rather his adaption of Stalinist ideas in North Korea. Kim rejects Stalin's assumption that the USSR has successfully purged the legacy of the bourgeois society and asks rhetorically, "what, then, shall we say is the society that will exist after the triumph of the socialist revolution and accomplishment of socialist transformation, until the disappearance of the class distinction between the workers and the peasants?"[13] Kim insists that the dictatorship of the proletariat must continue in order to eliminate class differences. This is a crucial point for understanding the ideological structure of nation-building in North Korea. However, what Kim really sought to achieve was not, as Barbara Demick says, "merely to build a new country; he wanted to build better people, to reshape human nature."[14] This project to reconstruct consciousness is called *Juche*, which stands for the independence of people. Its doctrine is "holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one's own brains, believing in one's own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance."[15] On the surface at least it certainly recalls the liberal rubric of self-government. Nonetheless, one distinctive aspect could be identified in

12 Joseph Stalin, *Works, Volume 14* (London: Red Star Press, 1978), p. 320.

13 Kim, op. cit., p. 120.

14 Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), p. 44.

15 Ibid.

the ideology of *Juche*: people's confidence in their leader is essential to the establishment of such independence. This is where the psychic life of power is introduced into the political.

The Monstrosity of North Korea

North Korea may indeed be characterized as grotesque, but it is not the "Impossible State." Victor Cha describes North Korea as being caught between life and death after the collapse of the "mighty Soviet Union."[16] Cha's understanding of North Korea betrays the typical bias shown towards the country, which is often misrecognized through the liberal prism of democracy. It is intriguing that Cha confesses his inability to solve the enigma of North Korea's survival. He suggests that the reason why North Korea has survived—though "many others of its ilk have long since collapsed, and as revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa spell the demise of the few remaining ones like it"—resides in the over-the-top personality cult of the Kim family.[17] Cha correctly brings into focus what Kim Il Sung intends with the term *Juche*. The doctrine of *Juche* is nothing less than the secular version of Christianity, wherein fidelity to the supreme figure of authority sets one free from the fear of death. Kim is the "dear respected leader comrade," the symbol of a political religion. However, the idolization of a singular political leader is hardly a feature unique to North Korea.

In *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*, Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung discuss North Korea as a modern state by invoking Max Weber's concept of charismatic politics. Kwon and Chung argue that:

> There is actually no mystery about the North Korean political system. The North Korean state is not an enigmatic entity and never has been. What North Korea had was simply a highly skillful political leader who knew how to build an aura of enchanting charismatic power around him. This leader understood the efficacy of this power for mobilizing the masses toward ambitious political goals, and he was committed to keeping the power not only during his lifetime but also beyond the time of his rule. Modern world history abounds with similar charismatic, visionary leaders and the stories about their rise and fall. The same is true

16 Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Ecco, 2013), p. 7.
17 Ibid., p. 13.

> in the history of the Cold War and in the political history of the communist world that constituted the moiety of the Cold War international order.[18]

Kwon and Chung resist the demonization of the communist regime and attempt to deconstruct the fetishism of liberal democracy. They point out that "the performance of secular revolutionary politics, while aiming to demystify traditional religious norms and mystical ideas … often involved the mystification of the authority and power of the revolutionary leadership."[19] As they rightly claim, what is at issue is not the cult of personality, but its sustainability in North Korea. How does North Korea's charismatic politics outlive others? According to Weber, any charismatic authority must be subject to "interpretation or development in an anti-authoritarian direction."[20] This anti-authoritarian direction leads to the "transformation of charisma." If the enchanted charisma of the political leader is supposed to be disenchanted by the process of modernization, then the case of North Korea would seem to suggest that Weber's theory of charismatic politics is problematic.

For Weber, the concept of charisma is related to religious dogmatism. In this sense, he describes the way in which the progress of rationalization in "the organization of the corporate group" demystifies the charismatic authority for whom universal respect was once a duty. From this perspective it is easy to conclude that the ruling ideology of *Juche* contaminates North Koreans and blocks them from progressive rationalization. However, as Weber admits, the charismatic leader cannot sustain himself without the people's free will: "the leader whose legitimacy rested on his personal charisma" should be followed by the political support of those who are "formally free to elect and elevate to power as they please and even to depose."[21] Through free election, the leader loses his or her charisma and in turn genuine legitimacy. And yet the suspicion remains that Kim Il Sung and his partisan comrades successfully and "freely" managed to champion and sustain their legitimacy whilst retaining a charisma which goes hand in hand with modernization. This is where the central question aris-

---

18 Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (London: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), p. 1.

19 Ibid.

20 Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947), p. 386.

21 Ibid.

es. If North Korea thrives on the sovereign defence of its charismatic politics, is it really accurate to regard it, formally speaking, as a model socialist country? This question currently animates the political group of left nationalists in South Korea, who still concur on the pan-national authenticity of North Korea.

It seems that the problem with Weber's theory lies in his identification of rationalization or modernization with the marketization of capitalism. His conceptualization of charisma is descriptive and does not bear out the situation of North Korea. In respect of this weakness, Kwon and Chung put forward the concept of a "theater state" to account for the endurance of North Korean politics in citing the works of Clifford Geertz, Wada Haruki and Carol Medlicott.[22] In short, North Korea is a theater state in which all members of the community play a part and, at the same time, watch "the drama of power transfer from the country's founding leader, Kim Il Sung, to his eldest son and the country's former leader, Kim Jong Il."[23] With this concept, Wada also underscores North Korea's obsession with the transmission of power down the generations and regards it as the ritualization of its partisan tradition. Wada's adoption of the concept of a "theater state" seems clear; to attribute the grotesque dimensions of North Korea to its pre-modern or feudalist remnants. Furthermore, Medlicott argues that "the North Korean political order is fundamentally Confucian."[24] However, outright displays of affection towards the beloved leader hardly provide decisive evidence that North Koreans are saturated with Confucianism. As Myers points out, "almost all cultures espouse respect for one's parents, and kinship metaphors have been part of political language since time immemorial."[25] In this sense it seems that Wada's and Medlicott's premise, commonly shared by other North Korea commentators, neglects the bigger picture. Their concept of a "theater state" is too anthropological, too mired in the myths of "primitive peoples," to capture the reality of North Korea and its political regime.

The theatrical spectacle of power is just a symptom, not the cause of the grotesque. The theory of a "theater state" reiterates the problem that Weber's theory of charismatic politics reveals. These approaches fail to gain access to the

---

22 Kwon and Chung, op. cit., pp. 44–45.

23 Ibid., p. 44.

24 Ibid., p. 45.

25 Myers, op. cit., p. 97.

truth of North Korea. The spectacle they validate as evidence of pre-modern ritualization has nothing to do with the regressive re-enchantment of the secular theocracy. My contention is that the theocratic aspect of North Korea is the hidden truth of the modern state as such, the brutal revelation of extreme modernization. Its grotesque spectacle is to be discerned as the mirror image of Western modernity.

The North Korean Lesson

In *Secret State: Inside North Korea*, Will Ridley's CNN special report of 2017, a North Korean boy, whose birthday party is being prepared by his school, informs the foreign journalist that the dear respected leader, Kim Jung Un, cares for him and his classmates more than their own parents, and gives them more love than their parents could ever provide.[26] Setting aside the overt ideological agenda of such hot media, the journalist takes the interview with the boy as confirmation of an ultra-paternalist leadership in North Korea. Should we be surprised by the deep roots of such authoritarian constitutions, of which North Korea is admittedly an extreme variety?

Cicero wrote that "since our country provides more benefits and is a parent prior to our biological parents, we have a greater obligation to it than to our parents."[27] The idea of a parental constitution, or the fundamental bond that links *pater familias* and *res publica*, is in actual fact an intriguing philosophical question. As Jochen Martin has argued:

> those aspects concerning the agnatic *familia* and the power of the *paterfamilias* are not to be taken as "private" aspects relegated to domestic life. Instead they are essential to the political and social organization of the *res publica Romana* – especially the extensive powers of the *paterfamilias*, his *ius vitae necisque*, have to be paralleled to the magistrates' *potestas*.[28]

[26] *Secret State – Inside North Korea*. CNN, 2017. Available at: <youtu.be/9CozTmjMxEg>.

[27] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Commonwealth and On the Laws*, trans. James Zetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.

[28] Ann-Cathrin Harders, "Beyond *Oikos* and *Domus*: Modern Kinship Studies and the Ancient Family" in: *Families in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Ray Laurence and Agneta Stromberg (London: Continuum, 2012), p.17.

One should be wary of trying to transpose a politics from the domestic realm into the realm of real politics and the executive power of the state, which in the case of North Korea amounts to the charismatic leadership of a sole figure. In the Roman context the authority of the *pater familias* is limited—"embedded"—by and within the overriding terms of the *res publica*. Occasions were few when the *pater familias* could act on behalf of the state and take the law into his own hands.[29] One should be equally wary of practicing Orientalism by contriving to make North Korea conform to certain "universal" patterns of political constitution, which are no less embedded in Greco-Roman myth for all that.[30] For those who consume North Korea as the spectacle of grotesque political failure, its outlandish society cannot fail to be mysterious or, better still, "exotic". Nonetheless, the "strangeness" of North Korea is equally intelligible through the experience of foreign intervention and the encounter with Western political traditions. As Myers argues, North Korea's conflation of nationalism with socialism was founded on the "blood-based Japanese nationalism of the colonial era."[31] Like South Korea, the whole nation-building process in North Korea is "the slavish imitation of foreign models and an often contemptuous indifference to indigenous traditions."[32]

Kim Il Sung himself emphasized a break from the traditions of feudalism and urged his people to renovate everyday life according to the USSR's superior culture. Kim's compulsion to modernize North Korea was consistent with his theory of a socialism conceived in terms of *Juche*. Adopting Lenin's New Economic Policy, Kim set up the Seven-Year Plan to clean up the residues of feudalism:

> The fundamental tasks of the Seven-Year Plan in our country are to carry out the all-round technical and cultural revolution on the basis of the triumphant socialist system, thereby laying the solid material and technical foundations of socialism and greatly improving the material and cultural life of the people. In a country like ours, where there were no industrial revolution and normal

29 Ibid.

30 On the relation of myth and law see Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988). Jason Barker references the book in his fascinating analysis of the drama of civil war; see his contribution to this volume.

31 Myers, op. cit., p. 37.

32 Ibid.

> stages of capitalist development in the past, the technical revolution poses itself as a task of special importance during the socialist construction. In conformity with the urgent demands of social development, we have completed the socialist transformation of production relations before the technical reconstruction of the national economy, thereby opening up a broad avenue for the development of the productive forces, particularly for the carrying out of the technical revolution.[33]

It is not difficult to detect in this speech Kim's foregrounding of the "technical revolution". Needless to say this is a complete perversion of Marx's insistence on the driving *contradiction* between the forces and relations of production.[34] Interestingly, Kim identifies the technical revolution with the cultural revolution. In a characterstically circular argument, the construction of the *modern* nation-state is the *raison d'État* of North Korea as a socialist state. For Kim, moreover, the accomplishment of self-reliance and self-defense is the only path to the correct form of socialism. Needless to say Kim's grandson, Kim Jung Un, has taken this enthusiasm through his development of nuclear missile technology to its logical extremes.

It is undeniable that Kim's regime has succeeded in defending its legitimacy while ruthlessly pursuing its country's modernization. The two features of the regime strongly condition each other. Nonetheless we are still brought back to the question of how the charismatic leadership has managed to remain intact. Although it is often called a pseudo-theocracy, the political regime of the North is strongly animated by the idea of the modern nation-state. Countless observers regard North Korea as the pre-modern state ruled by sovereign power, but North Korea's incarnation of the state-form inevitably shares the disciplinary imperative characteristic of the demands of managing the masses in tandem with the real or imaginary threat of enemy populations. As Michel Foucault argues, disciplinary power and biopower are the modern forms of power to be distinguished from sovereign power. Where sovereign power wholly invests civil society with its political "will" and power of decision-making, disciplinary power and the scientific and techno-managerialism of biopower embrace "freedom" at the micro-political level.

---

33 Kim, op. cit., p. 30.

34 See Greg Sharzer's contribution to this volume on the selective readings by accelerationists of Marx's theory of the economic forces and social relations that define capitalism.

The difference between disciplinary power and biopower resides in the way in which the former focuses on the population as masses rather than on the body as a biological unit, or on human beings as a species. According to Foucault, liberalism is the framework of biopolitics: "the principle of the self-limitation of governmental reason."[35] Liberalism celebrates limited government, and governing less, and maximizing economic efficiency by setting the individual to work in the element of its own design, or "program," and thus in spite of any political structure that might limit its own self-governance. One might speculate that the relative autonomy of the social practices comprising the social formation as a whole today extends to individuals themselves: for every individual, a distinct practice; and, crucially, every individual *as* a distinct practice. Leaving the question of agency and the political *subject* aside—and there is cause to wonder whether there is any such thing in North Korea—what appears as the oxymoronic articulation of a bio-politics suggests a return to the metaphysical conception of the world as the *non*-interaction of monads.

But how does this leave the state philosophy of *Juche*? It is my contention, and in these few limited remarks I have attempted to begin to sketch out the thesis, that such a philosophy might be broadly compatible with the self-reflexive *praxis* of self-governing, and the formation of self-reliant individuals endowed with the "free will" to support the dear respected leader. It goes without saying that the state-form and the drive toward modernization is a near-universal political ambition, and has become a condition of the political the world over. All politics, whether radical or reactionary, must sooner or later "encounter" the liberal nation-state, whether in the guise of friend or enemy. But the ongoing and stubborn contradiction of North Korea resides in the fact that its grotesque incarnation of the state-form would seem untroubled by and, indeed, in certain key respects perfectly in tune with, the liberal incarnation. Accompanying the driving force and ideology of modernization there is the seeming paradox of an enduring charismatic leadership which revives and perhaps even outdoes the most blatant excesses of Stalin's cult of personality—although, let us not forget, Kim Jung Un is hardly the only would-be Superman presently grandstanding

35 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at Collège de France 1978–79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 20.

on the world stage.[36] For this reason, North Korea does not represent an alien form of humanity, but has rather come to symbolize one of modernity's monsters: the extreme outlier of a liberal system where the freedom of self-reliance on one hand, and more overtly disciplinary forms of government and state control on the other, are differences in degree, rather than qualitative differences in kind. Rethinking North Korean from this vantage point will arguably provide a more constructive basis for tackling the far more awkward question of the transition to new and more progressive political regimes.

[36] On 16 June 2018, days following the US-North Korea summit in Singapore, Donald Trump said (jokingly?) of Kim: "He speaks and his people sit up at attention. I want my people to do the same." Available at: <www.cnbc.com/2018/06/15/trump-wants-people-to-listen-to-him-like-north-koreans-do-to-kim-jong-un.html>.

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXIX | Number 2 | 2018 | 163–177

Greg Sharzer*

Accelerationism and the Limits of Technological Determinism

When the social movement Occupy declared "The system is broken" it meant that a global order supposedly devoted to equitable growth no longer provided a fair distribution of goods or access to opportunities. This analysis was partially correct: economists are declaring a new Gilded Age, in which wealth is concentrated at the very top of society in levels not seen for over a century.[1] However, more thorough-going critics, who thought inequality and crisis were endemic to capitalism, recognized that another break was needed. They proposed accelerationism: speeding up processes and potentialities immanent within capitalism to transcend rather than repair it.

Accelerationist writing has tended to focus on aesthetics and technology rather than capitalism's tendencies of motion.[2] This partiality may be because of accelerationism's catastrophic implications: in an era of generalized social crisis, speeding up capitalism appears counter-intuitive. An alternate perspective, left-accelerationism, has defined it as using technological potentialities for social, rather than private ends.[3] As Wolfendale suggests, "[w]hatever is being accelerated, and there are severe and significant disagreements about this, it is

1 R. Neate, "World's witnessing a new Gilded Age as billionaires' wealth swells to $6tn" in: *The Guardian*, October 26, 2017. Retrieved from: <www.theguardian.com/business/2017/oct/26/worlds-witnessing-a-new-gilded-age-as-billionaires-wealth-swells-to-6tn>.

2 See R. Brassier, "Wandering Abstraction" in: *Mute*, February 13, 2014. Retrieved from: <metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abstraction>; M.E. Gardiner, "Critique of Accelerationism" in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34 1/2017, pp. 29–52; S. Shaviro, "More on Accelerationism" [Blog post, November 17, 2013]. Retrieved from: www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1174; A. Toscano, "Accelerationism: questions after session 1, Mark Fisher and Ray Brassier" [Blog post, September 30, 2010]. Retrieved from: <moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-questions-after-session-1-mark-fisher-and-ray-brassier/>.

3 N. Srnicek, A. Williams, & A. Avanessian, "#Accelerationism: Remembering the Future" [Blog post, February 10, 2014]. Retrieved from: <criticallegalthinking.com/2014/02/10/acceleration- ism-remembering-future/>.

* Kyung Hee University, School of Global Commuication, Republic of Korea

not contradictions."[4] However, to break with the death spiral of neoliberalism's stagnant profit rates, it is necessary to bring a critique of political economy to bear on accelerationism. This can be best formulated using Marx's study of capitalism's central dynamic: the conflict between the forces and relations of production, which drives the crisis-ridden expansion of the system as a whole.

Efforts to show that capitalism develops solely on the basis of technological progress cannot be maintained theoretically or empirically. This was most clearly shown by Bill Warren, whose attempt to build a historically progressive role for imperialism failed to account for macro-trajectories of development in the Global South. This suggests that an accelerationist political economy must begin from the conflict between the forces and relations of production, rather than an ahistorical, additive account of development factors. An anti-determinist accelerationism remains possible, providing capitalist development is understood as a political struggle over the creation of value.

How does the critique of political economy contribute to accelerationism?

Marxism is an attempt to understand capital's laws of motion, making accelerationism's goal of appropriating "the very material infrastructure of capitalism itself, to universally emancipatory ends" a firmly Marxian endeavour.[5] The *Communist Manifesto* sees the role of a successful revolutionary proletariat as "increas[ing] the total productive forces as rapidly as possible."[6] In this vein, the *Accelerationist Reader* chooses Marx's "Fragment on Machines" as a representative accelerationist statement. In it, Marx suggests that due to dramatic improvements in the technologies of production, "[t]he surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth".[7]

4 P. Wolfendale, "So, Accelerationism, What's All That About?" [Blog post, n.d.]. Retrieved from: <deontologistics.tumblr.com/post/91953882443/so-accelerationism-whats-all-that-about>.

5 M. Gardiner, "Critique of Accelerationism", p. 31.

6 K. Marx and F. Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in: M. Cowling (ed.), *The Communist Manifesto: New Interpretations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 4.

7 K. Marx, "Fragment on Machines" in: R. Mackay & A. Avanessian (eds.), *#Accelerate: the Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2014), p. 62.

The capitalist system produces a tremendous amount of social surplus, which could be generated by machines rather than human labour.

Yet Marx was not a technological fetishist; rather, he identified capital's logic as growth driven by crises. Human labour power is the only commodity that produces more value than the energy required for its creation. The commodities produced with human labour power have a dual character: a use-value, the material qualities of the item, and an exchange-value, an abstract quantity of labour time. The latter is what enables commodities to be brought to market and sold. To raise profits, capitalists must continually improve how production is organized, raising labour's productivity, lowering production costs and thus raising the amount of surplus value going to capital. By re-organizing work and, when necessary, replacing humans with machines, technology makes production faster and removes its control from workers. As capitalism expands, it equalizes: individual capitals move from lower-profit sectors to new sources of surplus value, nationally and internationally, while destroying older, less efficient productive forces.[8]

What drives capital's expansion?

This search for equalization is accelerationist, driving the ever-faster adoption of new technologies and territories for capital's expansion. The conflict between the forces of production, which are the technologies of capitalist growth, and the relations of production, which include who owns and controls that technology, is what drives the system's crisis-ridden growth. This creates the world market, but the impact is far greater than development, understood in its narrow political-economic sense. Capitalism actively destroys or radically reshapes prior social formations. In Promethean terms, Marx describes how capital's quest for new use-values drives the "all-round exploration of the earth to discover both new useful objects and new uses for old objects, such as their use as raw materials, etc.; hence the development of the natural sciences to their highest point; the discovery, creation and satisfaction of new needs aris-

8 M. Roberts, "Getting off the fence on modern imperialism" [Blog post, July 19, 2016]. Retrieved from: <thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/07/19/getting-off- the-fence-on-modern-imperialism/>.

ing from society itself."[9] This progress, in new discoveries and the needs they create, is intrinsic to capitalism: "it is only capital which creates bourgeois society and the universal appropriation of nature and of the social nexus itself by the members of society." The natural world outside us is no longer an independent power: "capital drive[s] beyond national boundaries and prejudices and, equally, beyond nature worship, as well as beyond the traditional satisfaction of existing needs and the reproduction of old ways of life confined within long-established and complacently accepted limits." This includes subsuming "the exploitation and exchange of all natural and spiritual powers."

It is tempting to read this as a tale of the rise of capitalist factories, but when Marx speaks of "industry" he means the production of an entire society. The conflict between forces and relations is at once a conflict about ownership and control, and thus which class has the power to expropriate and which must be expropriated. Calling this "labour relations" would do a disservice to his far-reaching analysis; rather, the capital-labour nexus is the lens through which all development must be analysed. When modes of production change,

> the relation of capital and labour posits itself in a *new* form. Hence exploration of all of nature in order to discover new, useful qualities in things; universal exchange of the products of all alien climates and lands; new (artificial) preparation of natural objects, by which they are given new use values. The exploration of the earth in all directions, to discover new things of use as well as new useful qualities of the old… the cultivation of all the qualities of the social human being, production of the same in a form as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations—production of this being as the most total and universal possible social product.[10]

Although Marx talks of the search for raw materials, this is secondary: there is nothing in this passage about the traditional concerns of political economy. Rather, Marx's gaze is at the horizon: the push to find new use-values and colonize them with exchange-values drives all the forces that have shaped the modern world, both external—colonialism, imperialism and the sciences that

---

9 K. Marx, "Capital Volume III", *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 37* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), p. 337.

10 Ibid., p. 581; italics in original.

serve those processes—and internal, the sense of our needs shaped by society. Capitalism is revolutionary in shaping our relationship with the world around us, and not just the tools we use:

> Hence the great civilizing influence of capital; its production of a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere *local developments* of humanity and as *nature-idolatry.* For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself; … capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life.[11]

Capital breaks the link we have to the natural world and then reforms it as a relationship of domination. The logic of capital destroys all alternatives to the markets in actuality and in our minds (our "spiritual powers"). Our own pleasures are not immune; at stake is our "long-established and complacently accepted limits." This is Marxian accelerationism at its most fundamental, allowing us to understand both capital's awesome reach and how that reach destroys everything it touches.

To read this as an uncritical stagism is to miss how the conflict between social and technical relations drives expansion. The production of value is driven by blockages to production and circulation. The "unlimited extension of production… [and] unconditional development of the social productivity of labour" soon reaches a secular limit: the rising proportion of machines, or dead labour, compared to workers, living labour, which Marx called the Organic Composition of Capital (OCC).[12] As machines replace workers, less surplus value is available relative to overall production, the OCC rises and profit rates fall. In a system driven by use-values, this would not be a problem: society could rationally determine what is necessary to produce and in what quantity. In one driven by exchange, the decline in value production provokes a crisis of profit realization. This can be resolved through unemployment that lowers the cost of labour, an attempt by individual capitals to evade crisis by shifting value production through space, or the destruction of older fixed capitals through

[11] Ibid., p. 583; italics in original.

[12] Ibid., p. 249.

recessions and wars. In other words, the conflicts between the forces and relations of production are what cause the growth and destruction of capitalist production. Understanding this dynamic has led the brisk Marxian debate on the relationship between capital and space.

In Lenin's early work, crises in local markets pushed national capital to seek foreign markets.[13] Even something as prosaic as overproduction in the local watermelon industry drove capitalists to build railroads, seeking extra-local markets to compensate for saturated ones.[14] For Rosa Luxemburg it was the search for buyers of excess capitalist production from non-capitalist markets that drove expansion and war.[15] When German socialist Karl Kautsky predicted a seamless integration of global markets under an alliance of finance capitals, Lenin answered him with a crisis-ridden accelerationism, in which dominating a local market brings monopolizers into conflict with others who have cornered their own markets. Thus "the tendency towards monopoly… cannot realise itself in a smooth, linear fashion but must proceed… by the creation and progressive surmounting of a whole series of violent antagonisms."[16] Bukharin linked the growth of global capitalism to that of productive forces, expressing a perfectly accelerationist view of global development in which the movement of commodities creates a world economy.[17] Yet this was not a smooth transition: he agreed with Lenin that, as monopoly capitalists chafed under their national constraints, they solved their disputes by war.[18] This was not an argument for deceleration; Bukharin was simply outlining classical Marxism's point about the historical motion of both development and its contradictions.

The fullest expression of this problematic came in Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development (UCD). It described development as grafting new techniques and relations onto and among old ones. He called "historical back-

13 V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia" in: *V. I. Lenin Collected Works Volume 3* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 66.

14 Ibid. p. 309.

15 R. Luxemburg, "Social Reform Or Revolution" in: D. Howard (ed.), *Selected Political Writings* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 52–134.

16 V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Sydney: Resistance Books, 1999), p. 12.

17 N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (London: Martin Lawrence Limited, 1972), p. 28.

18 Ibid. 106.

wardness" a "privilege" because it allowed certain countries to skip stages. He used nineteenth century Russia's example of introducing advanced, large-scale factory production into its peasant-based, Tsarist society, compressing the centuries of capitalist development England underwent into decades. Yet the introduction of factory labour also prolonged Tsarism and he called this "the law of *combined development*... a combining of the separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms"[19]. The competitive advantages of established capitalist states could be overcome through the transfer of technologies to newer ones, but this did not necessarily mean political renovation of the latter regimes.

Since UCD created pockets of highly-advanced production amidst general non-capitalist relations, this raised the prospect of widespread social conflict and, with that, hope for revolutionary movements. But the development of the forces of production alone did not guarantee any progressive result: their impact was "limited by class relations and the revolutionary struggle that arises from them".[20] The Marxian problematic moved through contradiction: the extraction of surplus value came from the application of the forces of production to alienated labour, forcing any change to come from the alienated labourers themselves.

This problematic would expand into whole schools of thought after World War Two, with the rise of dependency theory and its critics. Put over-simply, the dependency thesis was anti-accelerationist, seeing capitalist development reinforce already-unequal hierarchies by cementing developing economies as a source of labour and materials for developed ones. Brewer contrasts dependency theory with the classical tradition outlined above, which suggested that capitalism implanted itself across the globe by generating economic development characterised by extreme inequality.[21]

Despite vast differences of emphasis, all of the approaches discussed above analyzed how the conflict between the forces and relations of production drove

---

19 L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1932/2008), p. 5; italics in original.

20 L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1969), p. 87.

21 A. Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul plc, 1990), p. 16.

accelerated development. This problematic would be a valid place to ground a new accelerationism, as the necessity of empirical work removes any danger of catastrophism. The theory is a new way to emphasize the inner dynamics of capitalism itself, rather than advocating its growth.

Stagist accelerationism

However, accelerationism's lack of engagement with a classical Marxian problematic may give the impression of a normative underpinning, a progressive slant to the objections that accelerationism wants, as Wolfendale says, to "speed the system to its inevitable doom".[22] It is true that Stalinism had a determinist theory of development, in which the forces of production dictated the relations of production. As a result, development would happen through linear stages: productive forces would develop to erase the vestiges of feudalism, creating capitalist social relations with a critical mass of industry and a modern working class, which would go on to create socialism. This thesis was adopted by Stalin in the 1920s, who argued that the prime mover for this productivity-socialism nexus was the Soviet state, which meant that national working classes across the globe had to subordinate their communist goals to that of Soviet industrialization. Noys thus finds an apocalyptic accelerationism in the Soviet poets who eulogized the melding of worker and machine and foreshadowed forced industrialization.[23]

A mechanistic reading of Marx is possible, particularly based on the "Preface" to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which posited an economic foundation undergirding a political superstructure; as the former developed, it would create inevitable conflicts in the latter.[24] Yet the idea that technology is a fixed, ahistorical factor structuring development externally is alien to Marxism. Mandel warned against a reification of technology that erases its embeddedness in social relationships of production: "theorists of the omnipotence of technology elevate it into a mechanism completely independent of all human objectives and decisions, which proceeds independently of class struc-

22 P. Wolfendale, "So, Accelerationism, What's All That About?".

23 B. Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014).

24 W. Suchting, "'Productive Forces' and 'Relations of Production' in Marx" in: *Analyse & Kritik* 4, 1982, p. 161.

ture and class rule in the automatic manner of a natural law".[25] Marx thought capitalism was unique for how its technical changes and social changes proceeded in lockstep: this forms "the specificity of capitalism and its distinctive 'laws of motion'."[26] The mode of production has a "special need and capacity to revolutionize productive forces", by lowering the cost of commodities through the reduction of the paid labour power needed to make them. The accelerating pace of technological development is not autonomous: it depends on the precise way capital expands its sources of surplus value, breaking down technical and geographical barriers in the process, and it can be reversed when the OCC rises high enough to lower profit rates too far below other regions or historical expectations. This denial of teleology reinforces a dynamic in which—in Wood's interpretation—the development of technology plays such a key role:

> It is specifically in capitalism that the dynamic impulse of productive forces can be regarded as a primary mechanism of social change. Capitalism is also unique in its particular *systemic contradictions between forces and relations of production*: its unprecedented drive to develop and socialize the forces of production—not least in the form of the working class—constantly comes up against the limits of its primary purpose, the self-expansion of capital, which is sometimes impelled even to destroy productive capacities.[27]

Marx had to identify the "dynamic impulse of productive forces" historically specific to capitalism, which is the systemic contradiction he unfolded in three volumes of *Capital*. This is how Wood, writing against what she calls "Technological-determinist Marxism", can reconcile a central role for technology in Marx's method, while claiming it opposes "the forced acceleration of economic development… at the expense of working people."[28] The apparent paradox resolves itself once the agency of working people themselves are considered both subject and object of technology. As Trotsky put it, "the laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism".[29] Working class power

[25] E. Mandel, *Late Capitalism*. (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 503.
[26] E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 138.
[27] Ibid., p.140; italics added.
[28] Ibid. 141.
[29] L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 5.

> depends directly not upon the level attained by the productive forces but upon the relations in the class struggle, upon the international situation and finally, upon a number of subjective factors: the traditions, the initiative, readiness to fight of the workers… To imagine that the dictatorship of the proletariat is in some way dependent upon the technical development and resources of a country is a prejudice of 'economic' materialism simplified to absurdity.[30]

Trotsky paraphrases a political opponent who uses right-accelerationism to slander his concept of revolutionary change: "Lev Davidovich [Trotsky] decided that the proletariat must maintain a permanent revolution in Russia that is, fight for the greatest possible results until the fiery sparks of this conflagration should blow up the entire world powder-magazine."[31] Here, accelerationism is an excess of revolutionary nihilism. It is also a caricature of permanent revolution, which is more properly the concept that revolutionary movements must spread between centres and peripheries of the world economy if they are to survive; what Bensaïd calls a "hypothetical and conditional link between a revolution circumscribed within a determinate space-time, and its spatial ("world revolution") and temporal (it "necessarily develops over decades") extension."[32] But it does show what happens when a fetish of stages, development or technology is substituted for a careful political analysis.

A stagist accelerationism echoes Marx's critique of Proudhon, who built an idealist metaphysic of political economy based on categories of his choosing and then simply contrasted good with bad.[33] This meant substituting his own concept of right and wrong for careful social investigation. There is a long tradition of using idealist moral codes to justify socialisms-from-above that avoid the chaos of social revolution, from the Fabian's orderly reformism to Stalinist collectivism, which justifies a stagist, unilinear view of capitalist development.[34] Yet the classical tradition did not share this view: the "systemic contradiction" is only deterministic in designating the object of investigation: how the con-

30 L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, p. 63.

31 Ibid. 186.

32 D. Bensaïd, "Revolutions: Great and Still and Silent" [Blog post, April 28, 2017]. Retrieved from: <www.versobooks.com/blogs/3188-revolutions-great-and-still-and-silent>.

33 K. Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy" in: *Marx and Engels Collected Works 1845–48, Volume 6* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), p. 169.

34 H. Draper, "The Two Souls of Socialism" in: *New Politics*, 5 (1/1966), pp. 57–84.

flict between many capitals speeds-up the circuits of capital, creating potential agents of change. The potential pitfall of this approach is when the line blurs between describing the historical movement of capital and advocating its intensification. This trap most famously waylaid Bill Warren and his critical defence of imperialism.

Accelerationism in capitalist development

Warren made one of the most accelerationist arguments against dependency theory, arguing that poor countries have achieved industrialization, and through this, are on the path towards mature capitalist social relations.[35] In doing so, he demonstrated the possibilities for accelerationist political economy, along with the dangers of assigning too much power to the forces of production. For Warren, the growth of post-war industrialization showed that the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) had a growing proportion of world manufacturing output, indicating higher living standards and rising financial reserves. LDCs would industrialize as they appropriated imported technologies and developed their own, spending more on education and research as a result. Post-colonial states would lose their subordinate status and enter inter-capitalist competition, creating working classes and revolutionary subjectivity.

The strength of his analysis is how it pinpointed the real, not just formal subsumption to the law of value in territories brought within capitalism's orbit. Some critics of Warren focused less on his data than what he concluded from it: if capitalism developed LDCs, then imperialism is a force for progress.[36] For Warren, the catastrophic consequences of capitalist development were secondary to its goals of removing barriers to the creation of independent capitalist powers in the Global South. At one point Warren even called for force to destroy older social formations, echoing earlier Stalinist stagisms. This was the reason Lipietz denounced him for practicing a "mechanistic, economist, productivist

[35] B. Warren, "Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization" in: *New Left Review*, 1 (81/1973), pp. 3–44. F.S. Weaver, "The Limits of Inerrant Marxism" in: *Latin American Perspectives*, 13 (51/1986), pp. 100–107.

[36] See A. Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) and P. Worsley, "Models of the Modern World-System" in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7/1990, pp. 83–95.

and ultimately cynical Marxism… which still sees the 'development of the productive forces' as the index of historical progress".[37]

Others praised Warren's work for critiquing the utopian anti-capitalism of dependency theory, while criticizing his developmentalist errors: using aggregate statistics about gross amounts of production and flows that confused size with control hid ownership relations in the Global North.[38] While accepting that countries must industrialize to develop, the authors researched secondary effects instead: for example, government spending on education and research, and wider, fairer distributions of social wealth. Emmanuel articulated an accelerationist premise: "what we seek to discover is whether future development of the Third World is possible along the capitalist road… or whether this road is, in fact, blocked".[39] Yet he disputed Warren's premises, arguing that industrialization is a means to development, not an end.[40]

Since this debate, major development indicators such as real GDP growth, energy consumption and research spending show that LDCs have not achieved the dramatic growth Warren expected of them. Some newly industrializing countries are growing: their productive capacity, spending power, energy consumption and research spending are evidence that the globalization of production is having some impact on national development.[41] However, this does not mean a linear progression through stages of growth: new literatures have grappled with how interstate competition has been re-oriented in the globalization era.[42] Kiely argues that LDCs are integrated into the global economy solely as centres of low-wage labour, lower-value assembling and manufacturing, while wealthy

37 A. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 194.

38 See M. Burawoy, "The Hidden Abode of Underdevelopment: Labor Process and the State in Zambia" in: *Politics & Society*, 11 (2/1982), pp. 123–166 and F.S. Weaver "The Limits of Inerrant Marxism" in: *Latin American Perspectives*, 13 (51/1986) pp. 100–107.

39 A. Emmanuel, "Myths of Development versus Myths of Underdevelopment" in: *New Left Review*, 1 (85/1974), p. 71; italics in original.

40 Ibid. 64.

41 World Bank, *Research and development expenditure (% of GDP) | Data | Table*. Retrieved January 30, 2015, from: <data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?page=6> (2015a); World Bank, *Researchers in R&D (per million people) | Data | Table*. Retrieved January 30, 2015, from: <data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.SCIE.RD.P6>.

42 L. Panitch and S. Gindin, "Superintending Global Capital" in: *New Left Review*, 2 (35/2005), pp. 101–123.

countries continue to dominate higher-value exports.[43] There is little LDC investment in research or income redistribution, with slow progress in health and wellbeing indicators. Wealth has accrued to the ruling class to such an extent that, in 2016, the richest 1% control more than the bottom 99%.[44] This is not an aberration, but a structural consequence of a system that cannot expand the forces of production without intensifying exploitative social relations.

Conclusion: from a problematic to a programme

Warren's failure to differentiate the drive of capital from its contradictions fell into a stagist accelerationism, but it also confirms the grounded accelerationism of Marx's own method: capitalism's speed is driven by crises, which themselves arise inevitably from the conflict between the forces and relations of production. This creates potentialities for a break. The system has drawn previous hinterlands into an unevenly-articulated global system, with some newly-industrializing regions as Marx's satanic mills writ large, and with that, a massive working class beyond capitalism's historical centre. An accelerationism that investigates this movement can show the contradiction between the development of the forces of production and the limits placed upon them by the relations of production. This is where accelerationism returns as a viable problematic: instead of a simplistic invocation for or against speed, it is more useful as a study of the *blockages* to speed, which are the contradictory motor forces of development itself.

Wolfendale's warning that "accelerationism is not about accelerating the contradictions of capitalism *in any sense*" is well-taken.[45] There is nothing in Marxism that dictates a single, economic or technological mechanism for social change. Perhaps for fear of appearing reductionist, the politics to move accelerationism from a problematic to a programme remain underdeveloped. Power suggests, "Accelerationism as a whole yet lacks an understanding of the order or sequence of the relationship between technology, the temporalities engen-

43 R. Kiely, "Poverty through 'Insufficient Exploitation and/or Globalization'? Globalized Production and New Dualist Fallacies" in: *Globalizations*, 5 (3/2008), p. 426.

44 E. Seery and A. Caistor Arendar, *Even It Up: Time to End Extreme Inequality*. Oxfam International, 2014.

45 P. Wolfendale, "So, Accelerationism, What's All That About?"; italics in original.

dered by technology, and the post-capitalist horizon."[46] Building a path to the post-capitalist horizon means harnessing beneficial technology and programmatic solutions to meet people's needs, not using technology to find temporary fixes to the declining rate of profit. For example, Srnicek and Williams call for a universal basic income (UBI) to replace the working hours and wages lost to automation.[47] However, while labour-saving technology and the levers of regulatory state power remain in the hands of capitalists, UBI can just as easily be used to replace more comprehensive social welfare programs and put downward pressure on wages, lowering overall costs for capital.[48]

This demonstrates how any accelerationist social policy must be accompanied by a recognition of technology's social context. It need not be about machines; social reforms themselves can be accelerationist. "Pro-poor development" includes restricting capital flows, pro-development industrial and financial policies, progressive taxation and universal social programs.[49] A sped-up programme for equitable development—what Trotsky called a transitional method—poses demands too costly to the capitalist class, showing in practice the necessity for democratic self-government.[50] Sadly, today this simply means accelerating what was common sense in pre-neoliberal developmental nationalism: productive capacity could be redirected to provide low-carbon power, free medicine, vastly upgraded public transit and meaningful, creative labour for all. Just spreading the benefits of technology under capitalism fairly would require a vast acceleration of productive capacity and, crucially, eliminating the pursuit of value in production.

---

46 N. Power, "Decapitalism, Left Scarcity, and the State", in: *Fillip*, *20* (Spring, 2015). Retrieved from: <fillip.ca/content/decapitalism-left-scarcity-and-the-state>.

47 A. Williams and N. Srnicek, "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics." in: R. Mackay & A. Avanessian (eds.), *#Accelerate: the Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2014), pp. 347–362.

48 S. Ikebe, "The Wrong Kind of UBI" in: *Jacobin*, January 21, 2016. Retrieved from: <www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/universal-basic-income-switzerland-finland-milton-friedman-kathi-weeks>.

49 A. Saad-Filho, F. Iannini and E.J. Molinari, "Neoliberalism, Democracy and Economic Policy in Latin America" in: P. Arestis & M. Sawyer (eds.), *Political Economy of Latin America: Recent Economic Performance* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 1–34.

50 D. Lorimer, "Transitional Program: a program of action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution" in: *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal,* (n.d.). Retrieved from: <links.org.au/node/3214>.

This paper has placed accelerationism within the classical Marxian analysis of the conflict between the forces and relations of production. It suggests that accelerationism need not succumb to a deterministic stagism if it focuses on analyzing how that central contradiction drives development and crises. This cannot fall into a simplistic invocation of speed, as both Stalinist stagism and Warren's attempt to contextualize imperialism did, by breaking the link between technology and its social organization. However, when it analyzes how that contradiction stops capitalist development from fulfilling the potentialities it creates, accelerationism can lead to a political programme. Broadening its focus beyond technologies can pose demands that elites are unwilling to meet. The task of accelerationists is to help normalize breaks in the social relations of production, making accelerated social change just as politically viable as technological change.

Notes on Contributors

Jason Barker is a filmmaker, novelist and theorist. He is writer-director of the documentary *Marx Reloaded* (2012) and author of the novel *Marx Returns* (2018). He teaches Marxism and Literature at Kyung Hee University.

Alberto Toscano is Reader in Critical Theory and Co-Director of the Centre for Philosophy and Critical Theory at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is the author of three monographs: *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation Between Kant and Deleuze* (2006), *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (2010), and (with Jeff Kinkle) *Cartographies of the Absolute* (2015). He edited *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics* with Lorenzo Chiesa, and has translated several works by Alain Badiou, as well as Antonio Negri, Furio Jesi and Franco Fortini.

Justin Clemens is an Australian academic known for his work on Alain Badiou, psychoanalysis, European philosophy, and contemporary Australian art and literature. He is also a published poet.

Gilles Grelet received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Paris Nanterre and has taught at the University of Paris-8 and the Collège International de Philosophie, as well as the Lorient Football Club and the Ploemeur Prison. Director with François Laruelle of the collection "Nous, les sans-philosophie," among his notable publications are *Déclarer la gnose. D'une guerre qui revient à la culture* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002); "Anti-phénoménologie" in the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 2004/2, t. 129, n° 2; and "Proletarian Gnosis" in *Angelaki*, vol. 19, n° 2, June 2014. He is also editor of the volume *Théorie-rébellion. Un ultimatum* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2005). Since 2010 he has lived aboard his boat in Brittany.

Dariush M. Doust has taught art theory at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and is a psychoanalyst and accredited psychotherapist. He has published on politics, contemporary art, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. He is a member of the art collective ARC, has curated exhibitions for Gothenburg Museum of Art, and is founder of Kurrents, a nonprofit organization that has staged international conferences on capitalism and cognitive capital.

Ana Stankovic graduated with a master's degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts Belgrade in 2013. She is a practicing painter whose work has been exhibited in Serbia and Swit-

zerland. She is currently completing graduate research at Kyung Hee University in the Department of British & American Language and Culture.

Ho Duk Hwang is Associate Professor in the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Sungkyunkwan University and teaches courses on Korean literature and critical theory. He is the author of *Animal and Imperium: Language, Biopolitics and Techne* (2011); *Franken-Marx: A Constellation of Contemporary Korean Critiques* (2008); and *The Modern Nation and Its Representations: The Other, Intercourse, Translation, and Écriture* (2005).

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee is a theorist of cultural studies, having published some seventeen books and edited collections on cultural theory, philosophy and the arts. He is the editor with Slavoj Žižek of *The Idea of Communism 3*, which contains the proceedings of the international conference of the same name held in Seoul in 2013, and attended by Žižek, Alain Badiou and Wang Hui among others.

Greg Sharzer is Assistant Professor in the School of Global Communication at Kyung Hee University, Republic of Korea. He has a PhD in Political Science from York University in Toronto, Canada. He writes on the social and political culture of late capitalism.

Povzetki | Abstracts

Alberto Toscano

The Civil War of Images
Political Tragedies, Political Iconographies

Keywords: Giorgio Agamben, civil war, T. J. Clark, Georges Didi-Huberman, Umberto Eco, Carlo Ginzburg, iconography, Pablo Picasso, tragedy

This article explores the place of civil war in recent debates on political iconography. It begins with two recent theoretical and curatorial interventions into art history, by T. J. Clark and Georges Didi-Huberman, which orbit around the question of the tragic, probing the limits of tragedy as a frame to think the politics of images and contrasting Clark and Didi-Huberman's analyses with Carlo Ginzburg's recent re-reading of Picasso's *Guernica*. The article then takes the theme of civil war to the origins of modern political thought, through a critical exploration of some recent readings of the frontispiece to Hobbes's *Leviathan*, chief among them the one proposed by Giorgio Agamben in his book on the paradigm of civil war. The article concludes with a reflection on a negative political icon that came to both crystallise and condemn, in the eyes of many, the insurrectionary movements of Italy's late 1970s.

Alberto Toscano

Državljanska vojna podob
Politične tragedije, politične ikonografije

Ključne besede: Giorgio Agamben, državljanska vojna, T. J. Clark, Georges Didi-Huberman, Umberto Eco, Carlo Ginzburg, ikonografija, Pablo Picasso, tragedija

Članek preučuje umeščenost državljanske vojne znotraj nedavnih razprav o politični ikonografiji. Prične z dvema nedavnima teoretičnima in kuratorskima intervencijama v umetnostno zgodovino T. J. Clarka in Georgesa Didi-Hubermana, ki krožita okoli vprašanja tragedije, preizkušata meje tragedije kot miselnega okvira politike podob in zoperstavlja Clarkovo in Didi-Hubermanovo analizo nedavnim ponovnim branjem Picassove *Guernice* Carla Ginzburga. Članek nato spelje temo državljanske vojne do samih začetkov moderne politične misli s kritičnim raziskovanjem nekaterih nedavnih branj slike na platnici Hobbsovega *Leviathana*, predvsem tistega, ki ga je predlagal Giorgio Agamben v svoji knjigi o paradigmi državljanske vojne. Članek se sklene z refleksijo negativne politične ikone, ki v očeh mnogih tako kristalizira kot obsoja vstajniška gibanja v Italiji poznih 70ih let 20. stoletja.

Justin Clemens

Of Avatars and Apotheoses
David Fallon's Blake

Keywords: allegory, Blake, Enlightenment, Fallon, interpretation, myth, poetry, satire

This paper provides a synoptic account of some of the themes of contemporary Blake criticism, culminating in a review of David Fallon's *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment: The Politics of Apotheosis*, in which apotheosis is considered through its mythic, literary and realist uses.

Justin Clemens

O avatarjih in apoteozah
Blake Davida Fallona

Ključne besede: alegorija, Blake, razsvetljenstvo, Fallon, interpretacija, mit, poezija, satira

Članek prinaša sinoptični pregled nekaterih tem sodobnega Blakovega kriticizma, sklene pa se z recenzijo knjige Davida Fallona: *Blake, Mit in razsvetljenstvo: Politika apoteoze*, v kateri je apoteoza obravnavana z vidika mitične, literarne in realistične uporabe.

Jason Barker

First as Farce, Then as Tragedy: Louis Rossel and the Civil War in France

Keywords: Apollo, Beckett, Commune, democracy, Dionysus, drama, Marx, Nietzsche, revolution, socialism

Despite being a leading actor in the Civil War in France, Louis Rossel is remembered far less and is far less respected than the leading lights of the Commune. Here I analyse his participation in the event and in the preceding National Defence campaign by drawing on the biography of Edith Thomas as well as on Rossel's own posthumous writings. The dominant assumption that Rossel was motivated by ambition, whose consequences were both detrimental to the Commune's fortunes and antithetical to its revolutionary egalitarian principles, would seem simplistic on the available evidence. Moreover, such an assumption can be countered by interpreting the Commune and the Civil War in France as drama, and especially by drawing on the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet on Greek tragedy.

Jason Barker

Najprej kot farsa, nato kot tragedija: Louis Rossel in državljanska vojna v Franciji

Ključne besede: Apolon, Beckett, komuna, demokracija, Dioniz, drama, Marx, Nietzsche, revolucija, socializem

Kljub temu, da je bil Louis Rossel eden vodilnih akterjev v francoski državljanski vojni, se ga veliko manj spominjamo in je tudi veliko manj spoštovan kot vodilni misleci komune. Tu analiziram njegovo sodelovanje pri tem dogodku in pri predhodni kampanji Nacionalne obrambe, opirajoč se pri tem tako na biografijo Edith Thomas kot na Rosslova lastna posthumna dela. Prevladujoča domneva, da je Rossla motivirala lastna ambicioznost, ki naj bi bila pogubna za usodo komune in nasprotujoča njenim revolucionarnim egalitarnim načelom, se na podlagi obstoječih dokazov zdi poenostavljena. Še več, takšni domnevi lahko nasprotujemo z interpretacijo komune in državljanske vojne v Franciji kot drame, še posebej če se navežemo na dela Jeana-Pierra Vernanta in Pierra Vidala-Naqueta o grški tragediji.

Gilles Grelet

Prolegomena to Brittany
Anti-politics of the Solitary Navigator

Keywords: Anti-philosophy, boat, Brittany, silence, solitude

This text establishes Brittany less as a topic than as a vanishing point; it unfolds the anti-philosophical chicanes of a rebellion against the world by means of solitary sailing. Brittany, at first a mere subjectified setting – the landscape of the soul that provides rebellion with further circumscription, finitude being the organon of the infinite – becomes one of its essential features: it serves as the constant in the rebellion formula. Taking the place into account, anti-philosophy acquires here an anti-political entrenchment which, in returning, restores the radicality of Brittany.

Gilles Grelet

Prolegomena za Bretanjo
Antipolitika osamljenega navigatorja

Ključne besede: antifilozofija, čoln, Bretanja, tišina, samota

Tekst ne prikazuje Bretanje v prvi vrsti kot predmet temveč kot izginjajočo točko kakor razkriva antifilozofske zvijače upora proti svetu s pomočjo samotnega jadranja. Bretanja, na prvi pogled zgolj subjektivirano prizorišče – pokrajina duše, ki še bolj obmeji upor, pri čemer je končnost organon neskončnosti – postane ena izmed njenih bistvenih lastnosti:

služi kot konstanta v uporniški formuli. Če upoštevamo mesto, se vključi antipolitičnost antifilozofije, ki v vračanju obnovi radikalnost Bretanje.

Dariush M. Doust

Tragic Errors and Politics of Guilt

Keywords: Antigone, Butler, Hegel, Lacan, Meinhof, pathos, politics, Sophocles, tragedy

This article aims to evaluate the implications of the ongoing fascination with the figure of Antigone in contemporary literature. For this purpose, three main themes of sacrifice, transgression and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* are discussed. The fourth and final part of the text discusses the relation between tragedy, desire and guilt. The main interpretative attitudes towards Antigone ignore the conjunction of politics and social forces in deference to the image of a transgressive figure. In opposition to a politics of debt and guilt, in conclusion I introduce the concept of desiring production and its object.

Dariush M. Doust

Tragične napake in politike krivde

Ključne besede: Antigona, Butler, Hegel, Lacan, Meinhof, patos, politika, Sofoklej, tragedija

Pričujoči članek si prizadeva oceniti implikacije še vedno žive fascinacije z likom Antigone v sodobni literaturi. S tem namenom so obravnavane tri glavne teme: žrtvovanja, transgresije in Heglove *Filozofije pravice*. Četrti in zadnji del teksta obravnava razmerje med tragedijo, željo in krivdo. Glavne interpretacije Antigone zanemarijo povezavo med politiko in družbenimi silami zaradi spoštovanja podobe transgresivnega lika. V nasprotju s politiko dolga in krivde vpeljem v zaključku članka koncept želeče produkcije in njenega objekta.

Ana Stankovic

Computer Chess and the Reverse Odyssey of *Marx Returns*

Keywords: alt-fiction, chess, *Das Kapital*, differential calculus, Glen Robert Downey, Karl Marx, *Marx Returns*, narrative

This article considers the chess metaphor in historical fiction with the aid of Susan Brantly and Glen Robert Downey's respective works before conducting a brief interpretation of Jason Barker's alt-fiction *Marx Returns*. At first glance Barker's novel is an alternative history which subverts and supplements key aspects of Marx's biography. How-

ever, a philosophical analysis suggests that by introducing Marx's posthumous notes on differential calculus into the narrative Barker achieves an elaborate representation of the historical materialist method of Marx's *Capital*.

Ana Stankovic

Računalniški šah in obratna odisejada *Marx Returns*

Ključne besede: alternativna fikcija, šah, *Das Kapital*, diferencialni račun, Glen Robert Downey, Karl Marx, *Marx Returns*, pripoved

Članek obravnava šahovsko prispodobo znotraj historične fikcije, opirajoč se na dela Susan Brantly in Glena Roberta Downeya, nato pa poda kratko interpretacijo alternativne fikcije *Marx Returns*. Na prvi pogled je Barkerjev roman alternativna zgodovina, ki subvertira in dopolnjuje ključne vidike Marxove biografije. Vendar pa filozofska analiza nakazuje, da z vključitvijo Marxovih posmrtnih beležk o diferencialnem računu, Barkerju uspe podati bolj razdelan prikaz historične materialistične metode Marxovega *Kapitala*.

Ho Duk Hwang

Asiatic Mode of Production as Method: The Discourse of Democracy and Modernity in Korea

Keywords: alternative modernities, Asian absolutism, Asian stagnation, Asiatic Mode of Production, democracy

One of the most significant and vexing theoretical issues surrounding democracy throughout Asia is the Asiatic Mode of Production. For Korean promoters of democracy, the theory of Asian absolutism and Asian stagnation were concepts that had to be discredited. This article examines the Asiatic Mode of Production debate that arose between Marxists in Imperial Japan and colonial Korea, who overcame theories of Asian exceptionalism. The paradigm of Asiatic Mode of Production as enemy of democracy, moreover, goes beyond the Asian context, being taken up by contemporary European theory. Through Deleuze and Guattari's and Spivak's allegorical appropriation of "the Asiatic," I will demonstrate the unified domain of democracy and the Asiatic. Finally, I critically examine the increasingly positive assessment in South Korea and China of pre-modern Asian society and the assertion of "alternative modernities".

Ho Duk Hwang

Azijski produkcijski način kot metoda: Diskurz demokracije in modernosti v Koreji

Ključne besede: alternativne moderne, azijski absolutizem, azijska stagnacija, azijski produkcijski način, demokracija

Eden najpomembnejših in najtežavnejših teoretskih problemov, povezanih z demokracijo v celotni Aziji, je azijski produkcijski način. Za korejske zagovornike demokracije je bila nujna diskreditacija konceptov, kot sta teorija azijskega absolutizma in azijske stagnacije. Članek obravnava razpravo o azijskem produkcijskem načinu, ki se je razvnela med marksisti v cesarski Japonski in kolonialni Koreji in ki je presegla teorije azijskega ekscepcionalizma. Paradigma azijskega produkcijskega načina kot sovražnika demokracije presega azijski kontekst, saj ga prevzema tudi sodobna evropska teorija. Opirajoč se na Deleuza in Guattarija ter Spivakino alegorično prilastitev »azijskega«, bom predstavil poenoteno področje demokracije in azijskega. Na koncu bom kritično preučil čedalje bolj pozitivno kitajsko in južnokorejsko vrednotenje predmoderne azijske družbe in trditev o »alternativnih modernah«.

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee

North Korea and the Enigma of Survival

Keywords: democracy, Kim Il Sung, *Juche*, modernization, self-reliance, socialism

This paper sets out to balance the problematic "objective" status of North Korea on one hand as a "democratic" state (a democratic people's republic), with its framing in liberal political discourse as a monstrous dictatorship on the other. The case of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is as complex and misleading as its name, and here I argue that in order to grasp the enigma of its survival as a political regime or dynasty, one must come to terms with the ongoing drive of Stalinist (pseudo-)socialist modernization that gripped the country after World War II, and which dovetails with North Korea's *Juche* ideology of self-reliance.

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee

Severna Koreja in uganka preživetja

Ključne besede: demokracija, Kim Il Sung, *Juche*, modernizacija, samozadostnost, socializem

Namen članka je soočenje problematičnega »objektivnega« statusa Severne Koreje kot »demokratične« države (demokratična ljudska republika) na eni strani z monstruozno diktaturo, preoblečeno v liberalni politični diskurz, na drugi. Primer Demokratične ljudske republike Koreje je tako kompleksen in zavajajoč kot njeno ime, zato trdim, da moramo, če naj dojamemo uganko njenega preživetja kot političnega režima ali dinastije, pojasniti še dandanes aktiven gon stalinistične (kvazi-)socialistične modernizacije, ki obvladuje državo po II. svetovni vojni in se opira na *Juche*, severnokorejsko ideologijo samozadostnosti.

Greg Sharzer

Accelerationism and the Limits of Technological Determinism

Keywords: accelerationism, critical theory, Marxism, political economy, global development

Critics who think inequality and crisis are endemic to capitalism have proposed accelerationism: speeding up the system's immanent processes and potentialities to transcend rather than repair it. This writing has tended to focus on aesthetics and technology, rather than capitalism's tendencies of motion. Efforts to show that capitalism develops solely on the basis of technological progress cannot be maintained theoretically or empirically, as the work of Bill Warren shows. An accelerationist political economy must begin from the conflict between the forces and relations of production, rather than an ahistorical, additive account of development factors. I suggest that an anti-determinist accelerationism remains possible, providing capitalist development is understood as a political struggle over the creation of value.

Greg Sharzer

Akceleracionizem in meje tehnološkega determinizma

Ključne besede: akceleracionizem, kritična teorija, marksizem, politična ekonomija, svetovni razvoj

Kritiki, ki mislijo, da so neenakost in krize omejene na kapitalizem, so predlagali akceleracionizem: pospešitev sistemu imanentnega procesa in potencialnosti z namenom preseči ga in ne popraviti. Članek se ne osredotoča toliko na kapitalistično težnjo gibanja, kot na estetiko in tehnologijo. Prizadevanj pokazati, da se kapitalizem razvija izključno na temelju tehnološkega napredka, ni mogoče zagovarjati ne teoretično ne empirično. To pokaže tudi delo Billa Warrena. Akceleracionistična politična ekonomija mora pričeti s konfliktom med produkcijskimi silami in produkcijskimi razmerji in ne z ahistoričnim, aditivnim opisom razvojnih faktorjev. Sam si nasprotno prizadevam pokazati, da antideterministični akceleracionizem ostaja možen, če je kapitalistični razvoj razumljen kot politični boj za ustvarjanje vrednosti.

Obvestilo avtorjem

Prispevki so lahko v slovenskem, angleškem, francoskem ali nemškem jeziku.

Uredništvo ne sprejema prispevkov, ki so bili že objavljeni ali istočasno poslani v objavo drugam.

Prispevki naj bodo pisani na IBM kompatibilnem računalniku (v programu Microsoft Word). Priložen naj bo izvleček (v slovenščini in angleščini), ki povzema glavne poudarke v dolžini do 150 besed in do 5 ključnih besed (v slovenščini in angleščini).

Za oddajo prispevkov prosimo sledite navodilom: http://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/information/authors.

Prispevki naj ne presegajo obsega ene in pol avtorske pole (tj. 45.000 znakov s presledki) vključno z vsemi opombami. Zaželeno je, da so prispevki razdeljeni na razdelke in opremljeni z mednaslovi. V besedilu dosledno uporabljajte dvojne narekovaje (npr. pri navajanju naslovov člankov, citiranih besedah ali stavkih, tehničnih in posebnih izrazih), razen pri citatih znotraj citatov. Naslove knjig, periodike in tuje besede (npr. *a priori*, *epoché*, *élan vital*, *Umwelt*, itn.) je treba pisati *ležeče*.

Opombe in reference se tiskajo kot opombe pod črto. V besedilu naj bodo opombe označene z dvignjenimi indeksi.

Citiranje naj sledi spodnjemu zgledu:

1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Pariz 1988, str. 57.
2. *Cf.* Charles Taylor, "Rationality", v: M. Hollis, S. Lukes (ur.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, str. 87–105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, str. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, str. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), str. 153.

Sprejemljiv je tudi t. i. sistem »avtor-letnica« z referencami v besedilu. Reference morajo biti v tem primeru oblikovane takole: (avtorjev priimek, letnica: str. ali pogl.). Popoln, po abecednem redu urejen bibliografski opis citiranih virov mora biti priložen na koncu poslanega prispevka.

Prispevki bodo poslani v recenzijo. Avtorjem bomo poslali korekture, če bo za to dovolj časa. Pregledane korekture je treba vrniti v uredništvo čim prej je mogoče. Upoštevani bodo samo popravki tipografskih napak.

Information for Contributors

Manuscripts in Slovenian, English, French and German are accepted.

Manuscripts sent for consideration must not have been previously published or be simultaneously considered for publication elsewhere.

Authors are required to provide the text written on a compatible PC (in a version of Microsoft Word), accompanied by an abstract (in the language of the original and in English) summarizing the main points in no more than 150 words and up to 5 keywords.

To submitt manuscript please follow instructions: http://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/information/authors.

A brief biographical note indicating the author's institutional affiliation(s), works published and central subject of professional interest should also be enclosed.

Manuscripts should not exceed 8,000 words (45,000 characters with spaces) including notes. Papers should be sectioned with clearly marked subheadings. Use double quotation marks throughout the text (e.g. for titles of articles, quoted words or phrases, technical terms), except for quotes within quotes. Titles of books and periodicals, and foreign words (e.g. *a priori, epoché, élan vital, Umwelt*, etc.) should be in *italics*. Note numbers should be referred to in the text by means of superscripts.

Citations should be presented as follows:

1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1988, p. 123.
2. *Cf.* Charles Taylor, "Rationality", in: M. Hollis, S. Lukes (Eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, pp. 87–105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), p. 153.

The author-date system is also acceptable with a text reference reading. References in the text are then made as follows: (author's last name, date: page(s) or section). Detailed bibliographical information should be given in a separate alphabetical list at the end of the manuscript.

Articles will be externaly peer-reviewed.
Proofs will be sent to authors. They should be corrected and returned to the Editor as soon as possible. Alterations other than corrections of typographical errors will not be accepted.

Filozofski vestnik

ISSN 0353-4510

Naslov uredništva
Filozofski vestnik
p. p. 306, 1001 Ljubljana
Tel.: (01) 470 64 70

Editorial Office Address
Filozofski vestnik
P.O. Box 306, SI-1001 Ljubljana, Slovenia
Phone: +386 (1) 470 64 70

fi@zrc-sazu.si | http://fi2.zrc-sazu.si/sl/publikacije/filozofski-vestnik#v

Korespondenco, rokopise in recenzentske izvode pošiljajte na naslov uredništva. *Editorial correspondence, enquiries and books for review should be sent to the Editorial Office.*
Revija izhaja trikrat letno. | *The journal is published three times annually.*

Letna naročnina: 21 €. Letna naročnina za študente in dijake: 12,50 €.
Cena posamezne številke: 10 €. | *Annual subscription: €21 for individuals, €40 for institutions. Single issues: €10 for individuals, €20 for institutions. Back issues are available.*

Naročila sprejema
Založba ZRC
p. p. 306, 1001 Ljubljana
Tel.: (01) 470 64 65
E-pošta: narocanje@zrc-sazu.si

Orders should be sent to
Založba ZRC
P.O. Box 306, SI-1001 Ljubljana, Slovenia
Phone: +386 (1) 470 64 65
E-mail: narocanje@zrc-sazu.si

Oblikovanje | *Design*: Pekinpah
Tisk | *Printed by*: Cicero Begunje
Naklada | *Printrun*: 380