e-flux journal

issue #76

10/2016

e-flux Journal is a monthly art publication featuring essays and contributions by some of the most engaged artists and thinkers working today. The journal is available online, in PDF format, and in print through a network of distributors.

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Sven Lütticken, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Stephen Squibb, and Anton Vidokle

Editorial— "The Perfect Storm"

"How Much Fascism?" asked the curatorial collective WHW. Quite a bit, it would appear. As always, the prefix "neo-" can stand for many differences in the repetition, yet the noun asserts itself with all the subtle grace of an elephant in the room. Historical fascism, too, was a many-headed hydra, and scholarly struggles over exact definitions are ongoing, and will continue, for there is no Platonic Idea, but rather a set of historically grown family resemblances—revolving around tropes such as a cult of strong male leadership that will reverse a country's decline, the identification of the cause of that country's decline as the work of some "other," the need to purify and unite the *Volkskörper*, and an ensuing taboo regarding class conflict. Not to mention dependency on extralegal violence even while extolling Law and Order, and so on, and so on … complete, delete, bicker, and argue at will.

In January 2011, *e-flux journal* published a special issue entitled "Idiot Wind," which attempted to take stock of right-wing populist movements in Europe and the US. In recent months, with Trump ascendant and Le Pen, Wilders, Pegida, Putin, UKIP, Orbán, and Erdoğan holding Europe hostage, the editors have repeatedly been complimented on the "prescience" of "Idiot Wind." While "Idiot Wind" was more reactive than prophetic, it nonetheless identified tendencies that have continued to shape the political landscape.

Back then, the issue's title was at times attacked as evidence of lefty-liberal arrogance, and as a failure to engage with the underlying economic and social logic of political developments; recasting Benjamin's storm of history in a Dylanesque idiom, the title was intended as a caustic reference to the fundamental destructiveness of movements that claim to speak and act for the "populous"—defined in ethnically homogenous and often socially conservative terms—yet may harm their core voters as much as the "others" they vilify (immigrants, etc.). Now that the idiot wind has become a perfect storm, terms such as "right-wing populism" increasingly seem like euphemisms for what are varieties of neofascism.

These are marked by strong continuities as well as by disruptive innovations. One innovation may be precisely that today's neofascisms are rarely contained within the pathological and pathetic body of various postwar fascists or neo-Nazi parties; this is viral fascism for the networked age. Clearly, the penchant for Busby Berkeley–style military spectacles is also no longer what it once was—at least in Western Europe. There are other ways of showing the *Volkskörper*'s strength and ability to repel alien parasites, for instance by making Muslim women take off their clothes on the beach.

How can neofascist ideologies and policies of exclusion and fortification be countered now that growing surplus populations and migration movements put pressure on old social structures? Can we take pointers from the classics—Wilhelm Reich, Benjamin, Adorno? What are the

new conceptual weapons, and what are the alternative political, social, and cultural projects? And can art be anything other than part of the problem—part of an international, urban-cosmopolitan elite that has for too long been factually complicit in the extreme inequality that fuels the fascist success? Fascism may have aestheticized politics (*dixit* Benjamin), but what interventions are possible in the aesthetic-political economy of twenty-first century fascism?

X

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Christie's auctioneers vend a Mark Rothko painting.

Hito Steyerl

If You Don't Have Bread, Eat Art!: Contemporary Art and Derivative Fascisms

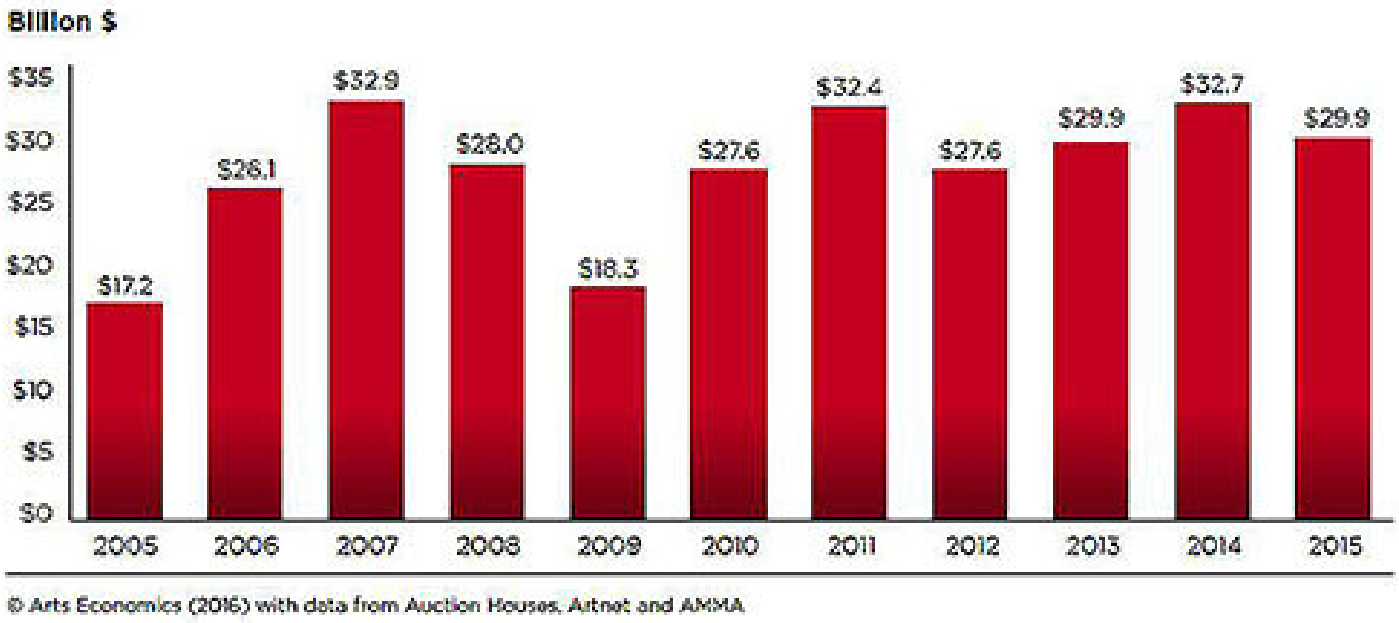
Is art a currency? Investor Stefan Simchowitz thinks so. He wrote with uncompromising clarity about the post-Brexit era: "Art will effectively continue its structural function as an alternative currency that hedges against inflation and currency depreciation."[1] Have silver paintings become a proxy gold standard?[2] How did it come to this? During the ongoing crisis, investors were showered with tax money, which then went into freeport collections, tower mansions, and shell companies. Quantitative easing eroded currency stability and depleted common resources, entrenching a precarious service economy with dismal wages, if any, eternal gigs, eternal debt, permanent doubt, and now increasing violence. This destabilization is one reason the value of art looks more stable than the prospects of many national GDPs. In the EU this takes place against a backdrop of mass evictions, austerity, arson attacks, Daesh run amok, and Deutsche scams. Results include child poverty, debt blackmail, rigged economies, and the fascist scapegoating of others for widely self-inflicted failed policies. Art is an "alternative currency" of this historical moment.[3] It seems to trade against a lot of misery.

Meanwhile, reactionary extremism intensifies in many places. I won't bore you with specifics. There's always another attack, election, coup, or someone who ups the ante in terms of violence, misogyny, snuff, or infamy. Derivative fascisms[4] continue to grow, wherever disenfranchised middle classes fear (and face) global competition—and choose to both punch down and suck up to reactionary oligarchies.[5] Ever more self-tribalized formations pop up that prefer not to abolish neoliberal competition—but instead eliminate competitors

personally. Derivative fascisms try to fuse all-out free trade economics with (for example) white nationalism [6] by promoting survival of the fittest for everyone except themselves. Authoritarian neoliberalism segues into just authoritarianism.

A permanent fog of war is fanned by permanent fakes on Facebook. Already deregulated ideas of truth are destabilized even further. Emergency rules. Critique is a troll fest. Crisis commodified as entertainment. The age of neoliberal globalization seems exhausted and a period of contraction, fragmentation, and autocratic rule has set in.

and insider information. Fraudsters and con artists mix helter-skelter with pontificating professors, anxious gallerists, and couch-surfing students. This informal ecology is eminently hackable, but since everyone does it, it sometimes evens out—even though at highly manipulated levels. It is at once highly malleable and inert, sublime, dopey, opaque, bizarre, and blatant: a game in which the most transcendental phenomena are on collectors' waiting lists. Further down the food chain, media art, like Bitcoin, tries to manage the contradictions of digital scarcity by limiting the illimitable. But for all its pretense to technological infallibility, Bitcoin is potentially just as dependent on group power[8] as art-market values



The growth of the global auction market from 2005 to 2015, according to data from Auction House, ArtNet, and AMMA.

Alternative Currency

Art markets seem not overly concerned. In times in which financial institutions and even whole political entities may just dissolve into fluffy glitter, investment in art seems somehow more real. Moreover, as alternative currency, art seems to fulfill what Ethereum and Bitcoin have hitherto only promised.[6] Rather than money issued by a nation and administrated by central banks, art is a networked, decentralized, widespread system of value.[7] It gains stability because it calibrates credit or disgrace across competing institutions or cliques. There are markets, collectors, museums, publications, and the academy asynchonously registering (or mostly failing to do so) exhibitions, scandals, likes and prices. As with cryptocurrencies, there is no central institution to guarantee value; instead there is a jumble of sponsors, censors, bloggers, developers, producers, hipsters, handlers, patrons, privateers, collectors, and way more confusing characters. Value arises from gossip- *cum*-spin

are dependent on consent, collusion, and coincidence. What looks like incorruptible tech in practice hinges on people's actions. As to the encryption part in art: art is often encrypted to the point of sometimes being undecryptable. Encryption is routinely applied, even or especially if there is no meaning whatsoever. Art is encryption as such, regardless of the existence of a message with a multitude of conflicting and often useless keys.[9] Its reputational economy is randomly quantified, ranked by bullshit algorithms that convert artists and academics into ranked positions, but it also includes more traditionally clannish social hierarchies. It is a fully ridiculous, crooked, and toothless congregation and yet, like civilization as a whole, art would be a great idea.

In practice though, art industries trigger trickle-up effects which are then flushed sideways into tax havens. Art's economies divert investments from sustainable job creation, education, and research and externalize social cost and risk. They bleach neighborhoods, underpay,

overrate, and peddle excruciating baloney.

This does not only apply to art's investor and manager classes. The lifestyles of many art workers also support a corporate technological (and antisocial) infrastructure that whisks off profits into fiscal banana republics. Apple, Google, Uber, Airbnb, Ryanair, Facebook, and other hipster providers pay hardly any taxes in Ireland, Jersey, or other semisecret jurisdictions. They don't contribute to local services like schools or hospitals and their idea of sharing is to make sure they get their share.

But let's face it—in relation to the scale of other industries, the art sector is just a blip. Contemporary art is just a hash for all that's opaque, unintelligible, and unfair, for top-down class war and all-out inequality. It's the tip of an iceberg acting as a spear.

Degenerate Art

Predictably, this leads to resentment and outright anger. Art is increasingly labeled as a decadent, rootless, out-of-touch, cosmopolitan urban elite activity. In one sense, this is a perfectly honest and partly pertinent description.[10] Contemporary art belongs to a time in which everything goes and nothing goes anywhere, a time of stagnant escalation, of serial novelty as deadlock. Many are itching for major changes, some because the system is pointless, harmful, 1 percent-ish, and exclusive, and many more because they finally want in.

On the other hand, talk of "rootless cosmopolitans" is clearly reminiscent of both Nazi and Stalinist propaganda, who relished in branding dissenting intellectuals as "parasites" within "healthy national bodies." In both regimes this kind of jargon was used to get rid of minority intelligentsia, formal experiments and progressive agendas; not to improve access for locals or improve or broaden the appeal of art. The "anti-elitist" discourse in culture is at present mainly deployed by conservative elites, who hope to deflect attention from their own economic privileges by relaunching of stereotypes of "degenerate art."

So if you are hoping for new opportunities with the authoritarians, you might find yourself disappointed.

Authoritarian right-wing regimes will not get rid of art-fair VIP lists or make art more relevant or accessible to different groups of people. In no way will they abolish elites or even art. They will only accelerate inequalities, beyond the fiscal-material to the existential-material. This transformation is not about accountability, criteria, access, or transparency. It will not prevent tax fraud, doctored markets, the Daesh antiquities trade, or systemic underpay. It will be more of the same, just much worse: less pay for workers, less exchange, fewer perspectives, less circulation, and even less regulation, if such a thing is even possible. Inconvenient art will fly out the window—anything non-flat, non-huge, or remotely complex or challenging. Intellectual perspectives, expanded canons, nontraditional histories will be axed—anything that requires an investment of time and effort instead of conspicuous money. Public support swapped for Instagram metrics. Art fully floated on some kind of Arsedaq. More fairs, longer yachts for more violent assholes, oil paintings of booty blondes, abstract stock-chart calligraphy. Yummy organic superfoods. Accelerationist designer breeding. Personalized one-on-one performances for tax evaders. Male masters, more male masters, and repeat. Art will take its place next to big-game hunting, armed paragliding, and adventure slumming.

Yay for expensive craft and anything vacuous that works in a chain-hotel lobby. Plastiglomerate marble, welded by corporate characters banging on about natural selection. Kits for biological "self-improvement." Crapstraction, algostraction, personalized installations incorporating Krav Maga lessons. Religious nailpaint will slay in all seasons, especially with a Louis Vuitton logo. Hedge-fund mandalas. Modest fashion. Immodest fashion. Nativist mumbo jumbo. Genetically engineered caviar in well-behaved ethnic pottery. Conceptual plastic surgery. Racial plastic surgery. Bespoke ivory gun handles. Murals on border walls. Good luck with this. You will be my mortal enemy.

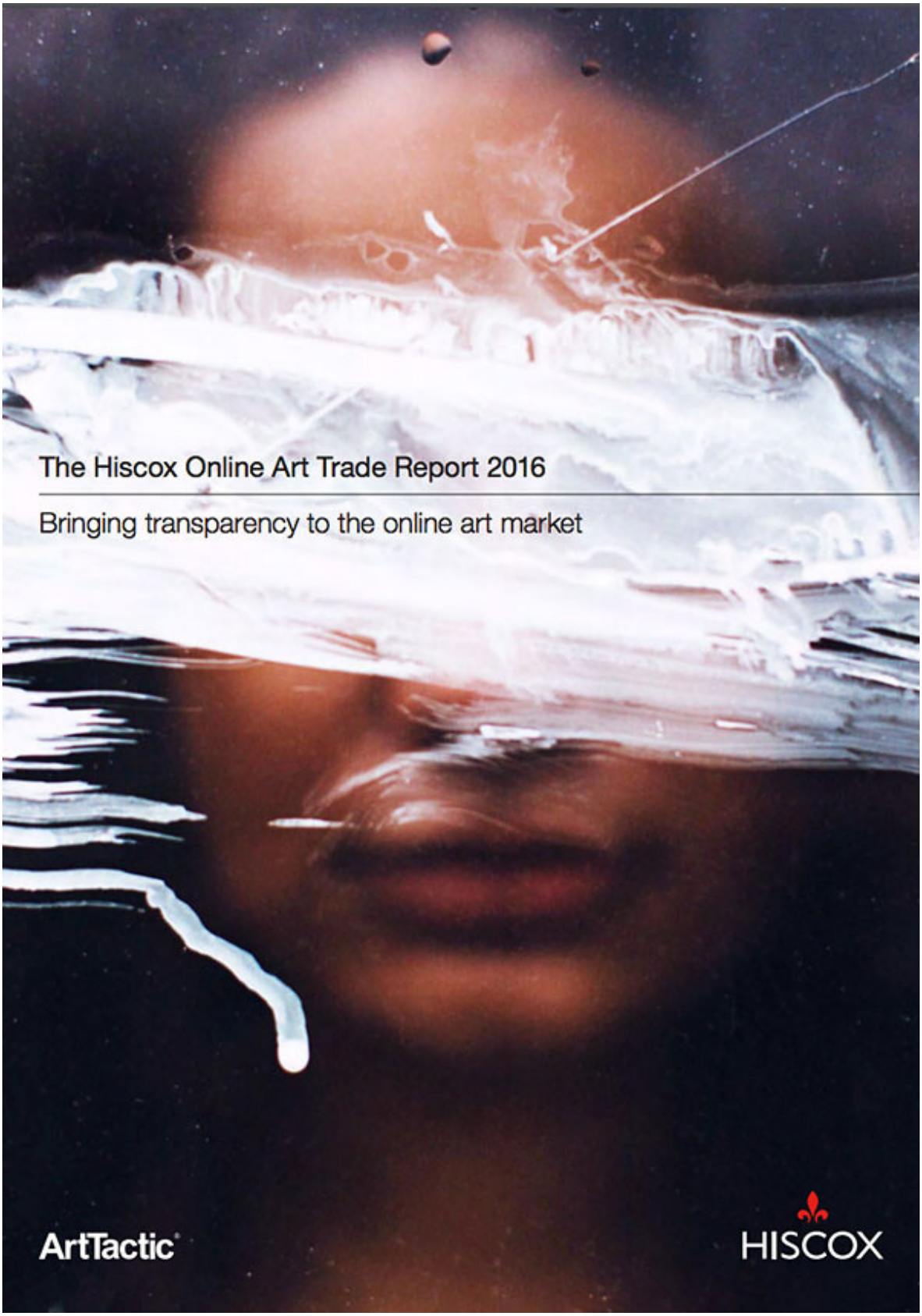
Just like institutional critique was overtaken by a neoliberal Right that went ahead and simply abolished art institutions, the critique of contemporary art and claims for an exit from this paradigm are dwarfed by their reactionary counterparts. The reactionary exit—or acceleration of stagnation—is already well underway. Algorithmic and analogue market manipulation, alongside the defunding, dismantling, and hollowing-out of the public and post-public sector,[11] transforms what sometimes worked as a forum for shared ideas, judgment, and experimentation into HNWI interior design. Art will be firewalled within isolationist unlinked canons, which can easily be marketed as national, religious, and fully biased histories.

An Alternative Alternative Currency?

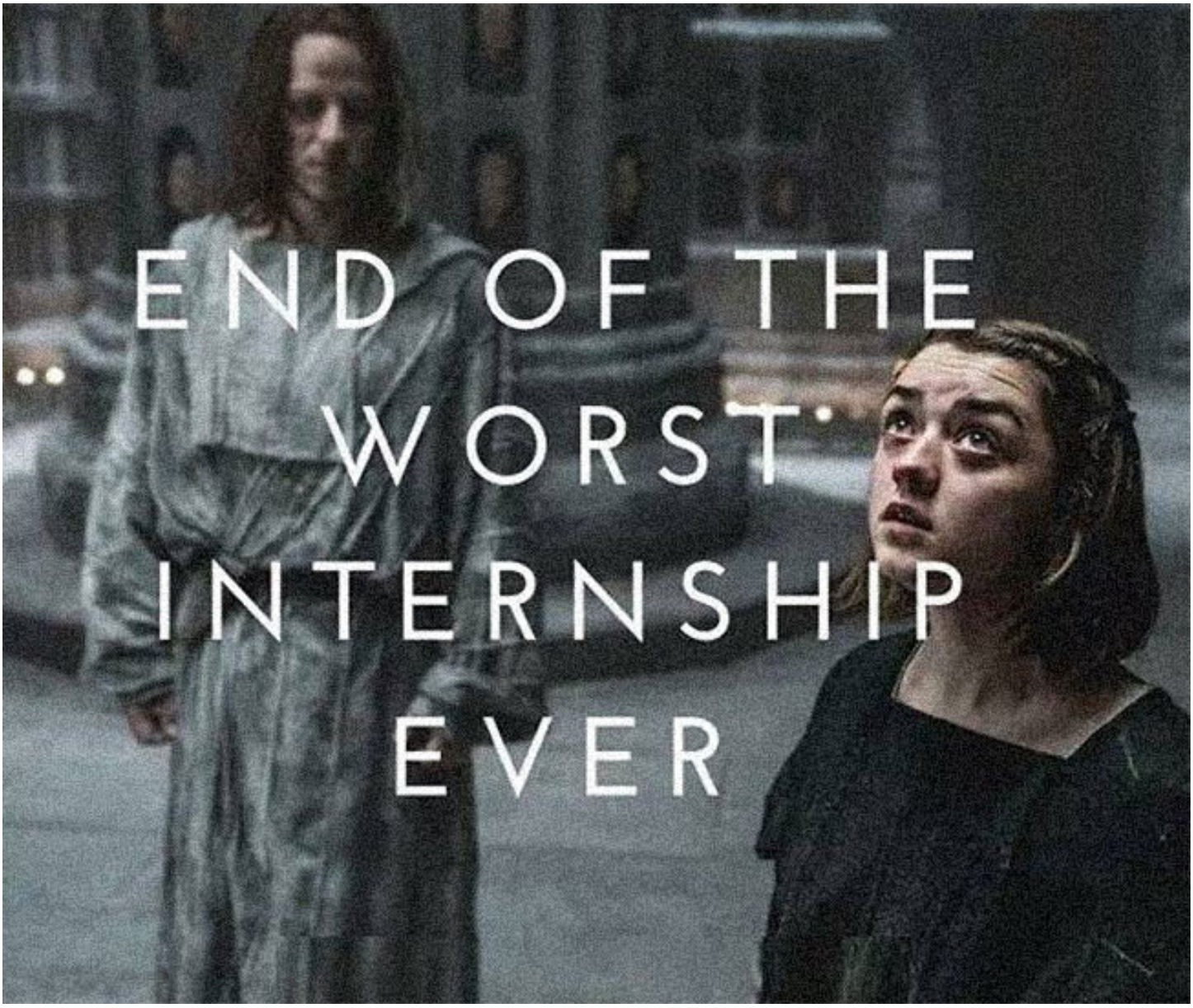
Now what? Where does one go from here?

Let's put the next paragraph into brackets. It just indicates a hypothetical possibility.

If art is an alternative currency, its circulation also outlines an operational infrastructure. Could these structures be repossessed to work differently? How much value would the alternative currency of art lose if its most corrupt



"The online art market has continued to grow strongly (up 24 percent to $3.27 billion) despite the global art market slowing in 2015," states the foreword of this art insurer's report.



Game of Thrones lends itself to serving as a metaphor for fanstastic precarity.

aspects were to be regulated or restructured to benefit art's larger communities? How about even a minimum of rules in the market—gallery contracts, resale-time minimums, artist fees,[12] remunerated internships? Introducing blockchain public records for the production, transaction, and locating of artworks in order to reign in tax fraud and money laundering?[13] Declining the most mortifying sponsor and patron relationships instead of artwashing fossil extraction, weapons manufacturing, and banks bailed out with former cultural funding? How about asking for fees on resales similar to those asked on photocopies to pay for art workers' health insurance? Or on any offshore art-related transaction? Could art as alternative currency not only circulate within existing systems but even launch not-yet-existing economies (publics, institutions, markets, parallel art worlds, etc.)?

But to expect any kind of progressive transformation to happen by itself—just because the infrastructure or technology exists—would be like expecting the internet to create socialism or automation to evenly benefit all humankind. The internet spawned Uber and Amazon, not the Paris Commune. The results may be called "the sharing economy," but this mostly means that the poor share with the rich, not vice versa. Should any less unilateral sharing be suggested, the bulk of capital will decamp immediately.[14] One of the first steps towards parallel art sectors would thus be to organize even partial sustainability in the absence of bubble liquidity and barely limited amounts of free labor. Whatever emerges will be a new version of art-affiliated autonomy

In contrast to the modernist autonomy of art schemes, this

autonomy is not solitary, unlinked, or isolated. Nor will it come about by some fantasy of progress in-built into technology. On the contrary it can only emerge through both a conscious effort and exchange among diverse entities. It's an autonomy that works through circulation, transformation, and alchemy. The links it could build on exist as weak links (aka, air-kiss links) and reshaping them would need to happen within a compromised mess of contradictory activities. But simultaneously people can try to synch with the art-related undercommons[15] by building partial networked autonomy via all means necessary. If art is a currency, can it be an undercurrent? Could it work like an Unter, not an Uber?

How to do this? People are used to perceiving the art world as sponsored by states, foundations, patrons, and corporations. But the contrary applies at least equally well. Throughout history it has been artists and artworkers, more than any other actors, who have subsidized art production.[16] Most do so by concocting mixed-income schemes in which, simply speaking, some form of wage labor (or other income) funds art-making. But more generally, everyone involved also contributes in all sorts of other ways to art's circulation, thus making it stronger as currency. Even artists who live "off their work" subsidize the market by way of enormous commissions in relation to other industries. But why should one sponsor VIP prepreviews, bespoke museum extensions without any means to fill them, art-fair arms races, institutional franchises built under penal-colony conditions, and other baffling bubbles? This bloated, entitled, fully superfluous, embarrassing, and most of all politically toxic overhead is subsidized by means of free labor and life time, but also by paying attention to blingstraction and circulating its spinoffs, thus creating reach and legitimacy. Even the majority of artists that cannot afford saying no to any offer of income could save time not doing this.[17] Refusing sponsorship of this sort might be the first step towards shaking the unsustainable and mortifying dependency on speculative operations that indirectly increase authoritarian violence and division. Spend free time assisting colleagues,[18] not working for free for bank foundations. Don't "share" corporate crap on monopolist platforms. Ask yourself: Do you want global capitalism with a fascist face? Do you want to artwash more insane weather, insane leaders, poisonous and rising water, crumbling infrastructure, and brand-new walls? How can people genuinely share what they need?[19] How much speed is necessary? How can artistic (and art-related) autonomy evolve from haughty sovereignty to modest networked devolution?[20] How can platform cooperatives contribute to this? Can art institutions follow the lead of new municipalist networks and alliances of "rebel cities"?[21] In the face of derivative fascisms, can local forms of life be reimagined beyond blood, soil, nation, and corporation, as networks of neighborhoods, publics, layered audiences?[22] Can art keep local imaginaries curious, open-minded, and spirited? How to make tangible the idea that belonging is in becoming—not in having been?[23] What is art's scale, perspective, and challenge in de-growing constituencies? Can one transform art's currency into art's confluence? Replace speculation with overflow?[24]

Art's organizing role in the value-process—long overlooked, downplayed, worshipped, or fucked—is at last becoming clear enough to approach, if not rationally, than perhaps realistically. Art as alternative currency shows that art sectors already constitute a maze of overlapping systems in which good-old gossip, greed, lofty ideals, inebriation, and ruthless competition form countless networked cliques. The core of its value is generated less by transaction than by endless negotiation, via gossip, criticism, hearsay, haggling, heckling, peer reviews, small talk, and shade. The result is a solid tangle of feudal loyalties and glowing enmity, rejected love and fervent envy, pooling striving, longing, and vital energies. In short, the value is not in the product but in the network; not in gaming or predicting the market[25] but in creating exchange.[26] Most importantly, art is one of the few exchanges that derivative fascists don't control—yet.

But as a reserve system for dumb, mean, and greedy money, art's social value (auto)destructs and turns into a shell operation that ultimately just shields more empty shells and amplifies fragmentation and division. Similarly, arts venues are already shifting into bonded warehouses and overdesigned bank vaults inside gilded, gated compounds designed by seemingly the same three architects worldwide.

It's easy to imagine what the motto for art as the reserve currency of a fully rigged system might be. Just envision a posh PR lieutenant policing the entrance of a big art fair, gingerly declaring to anyone pushed aside, displaced, exploited, and ignored: "If you don't have bread, just eat art!"

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Thank you to Sven Lütticken, Anton Vidokle, and Stephen Squibb for very helpful comments.

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1
Rain Embuscado, "The Art World Responds to Brexit," *Artnet News*, June 24, 2016 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-world-responds-brexit-526400 .

2
Apparently this specific market crashed in the meantime. Art markets in general are still rather stable.

3
The idea of art as currency is also explored in fascinating detail by David Joselit in *After Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), but at a different historic moment, the moment of the expansion of neoliberal globalization. Now, at the end of this historic moment, art as currency seems to have become even more powerful.

4
The term "derivative fascisms" means a jumble of widespread extreme right-wing movements that relate to twentieth-century fascisms in terms of future options, but not by any means as equivalents, as in: creating and marketing future options for fascism. There is no point in asking whether they are really fascisms or not because fascism is the underlying entity, which may or may not have anything to do with its derivatives.

5
I use the term "middle class" in a more expanded sense—in the sense of a global middle class (which may well include both working and out-of-work classes in formerly industrialized countries) undercut by outsourcing and expanded competition. However, economic reasons are not the only explanation for the new popularity of derivative fascisms. How is it that in Germany, ninety refugee camps were attacked last year by arson alone (total attacks numbered 901 that year), while at the same time the country is doing very well economically? Indeed, the unemployment rate in Germany has fallen to its lowest level in twenty-four years. Why is Austria 53 percent likely to elect a neofascist president, when it's own unemployment rate hasn't surpassed 6 percent at any point since the mid-Nineties? How does one explain the constant and growing presence of extreme-right-wing organizations in these two countries that have profited massively from recent crises—Austria, from the so-called Eastern expansion, a pillage streak that moved the pensions of local retirees to the art collections of the Austrian financial industry; and Germany, which made a windfall from the European debt crisis and funneled centuries of Southern European peoples' futures into subsidies for domestic car industries cheating on carbon emissions? It's true that inequality has risen in both countries. But in Portugal, economic inequality is way higher, and unemployment is twice as high (not to mention state debt and related austerity policies), yet this country does not have a significant right-wing party or movement, partly due to its recent history. Look at Spain or Italy, both hit by the debt crisis; no new fascist party on the ascent. Even in Greece, hardest hit by crippling austerity, votes for the fascist Golden Dawn are going down, not up. The more than 50.000 refugees stranded there by the closing down of the so-called Balkan route have been mostly generously welcomed; certainly not with 90 arson attacks. In contrast derivative fascisms are strongest either in comparatively rich European countries (France, some Scandinavian countries, Austria) or countries that are refusing to take in refugees like Hungary or trying to minimize numbers like Poland. The economy is most certainly an important reason for the acceleration of fascism. But it is also most certainly not the only reason for the boom in fascist derivatives. In light of hard facts, the correlation between economic hardship and fascist popularity is very much complicated. The latter also requires a part of the population that will, if it feels threatened or just slighted, blackmail the whole of society vote fascist, destabilize, or kill.

6
To make this very clear: art is not a cryptocurrency. I am trying to point out some structural similarities between art systems and cryptocurrencies, not to suggest art as currency works in the same way. Nevertheless, the possibility of art becoming a cryptocurrency is raised in a very informative text by J. Chris Anderson, "Why Art Could Become Currency in a Cryptocurrency World," *The New Stack* , May 31, 2015 http://thenewstack.io/why-art-could-become-currency-in-a-cryptocurrency-world/ .

7
In contrast to cryptocurrencies, in art there is not the slightest pretense to decentralized transparency, nor the pretense to an automated incorruptible set of functions. Art as currency gains its relative stability precisely because of nontransparency, and because of its overwhelming reliance on human relations.

8
See https://www.bitcoinmining.com/bitcoin-mining-centralization/ .

9
This leaves art projects that deal with alternative currencies (or financial options or contracts) on a double scene. They can become representational and sometimes somewhat misleading because they show something other than they actually already do themselves.

10
I very much agree with Ben Davis's excellent text "After Brexit, Art Must Break Out of Its Bubble," *Artnet News*, June 28, 2016 https://news.artnet.com/opinion/brexit-art-532178 .

11
By "post-public" I mean semi-public corporate ventures like biennials and many institutions and museums.

12
W.A.G.E., Precarious Workers Brigade, etc., are doing a stellar job on this issue, as are new artist unions and other organizations working on related issues, including Liberate Tate, Gulf Labor, etc.

13
The use of blockchain technology in art circulation, criticism, and documentation opens up a huge can of worms relating to the quantification of different art phenomena, the manipulation of consensus, submission to the tyranny of averages, etc. Arguably, art's appeal (and value) derives at least in part from the fact that it does not always reproduce the so-called "wisdom of crowds" or other popularity-driven functions. There is enough great art about this (see, for example, Komar and Melamid, "The Most Wanted Paintings on the Web" http://awp.diaart.org/km/intro.html) to understand how it would be both funny and devastating for *all* art to be like this or made on demand according to futures and prediction markets. That said, it would be extremely useful to record the provenance and to a certain extent the authenticity of artworks, and to establish public registries of works and their whereabouts in order to prevent money laundering through art. And in the longer run, this kind of record-keeping could perhaps also support more ambitious projects. Of course, this also creates the potential for the total tracking and secondary data analysis of art works, thus assimilating them on another level into social marketing and metasurveillance.

14
And the currency function will be diminished by decreasing circulation, thus possibly eliminating art's function as currency altogether, reverting artworks to commodities or products.

15
Adapting a set of propositions advanced by Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013) http://www.minorcompositions.info/?p=516 .

16
Pointed out by Anton Vidokle in "Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art," *e-flux journal* 43 (March 2013) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60205/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art/ .

17
I am fully aware that it is a major luxury for most artists to be able to say no to anything; but even in this case one could still rethink one's participation in circulation.

18
One of many excellent examples is Neue Nachbarschaft in Berlin, where Berliners—both longtime residents and newcomers—come together for art courses and lessons in German or music.

19
See the Platform Cooperativism website http://platformcoop.net/about . The idea is to use technology to connect workers and service-providers to users through platforms that are worker-owned or organized cooperatives. Blockchains are used in many of the already existing examples. A lot of art projects incorporate different versions of blockchain elements.

See, for example, Sami Emory, "BitchCoin Is a New Cryptocurrency for Art," The Creator's Project, February 10, 2015 http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/bitchcoin-is-a-cryptocurrency-for-art ; and Steven Sacks et al. in conversation, "Monegraph and the Status of the Art Object," *dis magazine* http://dismagazine.com/discussion/73342/monegraph-and-the-status-of-the-art-object/ . An excellent critical reflection on art projects dealing with blockchains can be found in Sven Lütticken, "The Coming Exception," *New Left Review* 99 (May–June 2016).

20
This question requires a long paragraph reexploring the idea of "delinking" under conditions of simultaneously networked and fragmenting global systems—an idea which has been explored by Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank, and Giovanni Arrighi, among others. A more fully developed version of this text will rely heavily on Karatani Kojin's idea of "autonomous modes of exchange." In his book *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* (2014), Karatani foregrounds circulation as a mode of production and highlights cooperativism and associationism as sites of creative organization. Art systems combine most modes of circulation mentioned by Karatani: pre-agricultural clan-based modes; modes based on plunder, expropriation, and statehood; and capitalist modes. Art also contains seeds of a potential future mode of circulation based on sharing, the dissolution of enclosures, locally actualized diverse constituencies, and the creation of parallel economies using LETS and other pre-blockchain alternative currencies. On the one hand, this means utter corruption; on the other, a parallel form of exchange. On a related note, see Aria Dean's excellent recent text "Poor Meme, Rich Meme," which maps vectors of a Black circulationism projected by shared motion, history, movement, and multiplicity http://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/ .

21
I suppose big art institutions could see themselves as cities.

22
How do we defend municipalities under attack, like the twenty-four deposed municipalities administrated by the pro-Kuridish Democratic Regions Party (DBP) in southeast Turkey, including Nusaybin, Cizre, Sur, and Suruç, some of which have declared self-rule and operate on a model of assembly-based autonomy?

23
A proposition advanced by Brian Massumi in "Conjunction, Disjunction, Gift," *transversal*, January 2011 http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/massumi/en .

24
Confluence instead of coalition, a way to let movements move. Overflow: productive loss of control over dynamic developments. See the new issue of the journal *transversal* on these and other notions http://transversal.at/transversal/0916 .

25
By trying to gauge artists' lifespans or investing according to the number of the kids female artists have.

26
I learned this from Elie Ayache's fascinating treatise *The Blank Swan: The End of Probability* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010).

Ilya Budraitskis

What Can We Learn from Vampires and Idiots?

The German socialist August Bebel once called anti-Semitism "the socialism of fools." A fool from the lower classes, the thinking went, indignant at the existing state of things but unable or unwilling to locate the real source of his unhappiness in the capitalist mode of production, instead found a facile but false target in the Jews. The result of this fool's bad decision would prove catastrophic: instead of joining the ranks of socialists, he became their fiercest and most dangerous adversary. "Socialist foolishness" merits neither indulgence nor understanding. It is, moreover, a formidable weapon in the hands of elites, who are wise enough to know how to exploit it.

This kind of connection between the foolishness of the lower classes and the devious resourcefulness of the upper strata is not unique to the massive fascist movements of the twentieth century. We are talking about here is something more complex and multifaceted, which possesses a tremendous ability to adapt to the new circumstances faced by the conservative spirit today. This style of thought linking the upper and lower stratas is making electoral breakthroughs once again, like those of Trump in the Republican primaries in the US, the Brexit vote in the UK, and parties such as Marine Le Pen's Front National in Europe.

It has become a commonplace to say that support for such phenomena is a manifestation of protest. Astute observers are ever ready to discover hidden rational causes behind these irrational electoral expressions: the downfall of the welfare state, distrust of the establishment, or the consequences of austerity policies. However, when the radical Left invokes these grievances, it falls on deaf ears. But when they are reflected through the distorting mirror of conservative rhetoric, they strike a resounding chord.

This protest is expressed through a melancholic striving to recover something lost—to return to and repeat, through a disgruntled vote, a certain lost idyll. The global party of this "idiotism" (that is to say, political ignorance and civic inadequacy) is opposed today by an Enlightenment coalition of the political mainstream, the media, and a large section of the left-liberal public, who are all inclined to support the "lesser evil." A conservative, reactionary wave is undoubtedly a significant evil, because it launches its offensive at the level of meanings and values: isolationism instead of openness, racism and sexism instead of tolerance and respect, coarseness and authoritarianism instead of pluralism and a culture of dialogue. The correct choice in each of these oppositions, it would seem, is clear to everyone who is not a complete idiot. But the masses of the "unenlightened," the ill-mannered, and the irrational are growing, and their leaders have scored a series of victories—as though they know something about society and its future that is inaccessible to those in the enlightened coalition.

This figure of the sinister conservative subject who knows

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump sheds tears of blood with a little help from photoshop. The photo of Trump was taken at a news conference at the TD Convention Center, in Greenville, S.C.

enlightened society better than it knows itself was a significant presence in the historical Enlightenment during a long stretch of its history.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the figure of the vampire emerged in European culture at the same time as the birth of political conservativism. This vampire, first appearing in the pages of a well-known novel by John Polidori, was completely unlike the insurgent corpse of today's popular superstitions. The new vampire was a Byronic beauty, an intellectual, and an aristocrat whose easy prey were the naive, enlightened representatives of high society, for whom there existed nothing beyond the limits of a rational, knowable world. The vampire carried out its attacks with impunity, existing on the frontier between the rational world of the living and the irrational world of the dead—the latter having been denied and displaced by the Enlightenment.

An astute representative of the retreating pre-bourgeois era which the bourgeois could not completely bury, the aristocratic vampire posessed the secret of its unconscious. He alone was capable of revealing the contingencies of the Enlightenment's triumph, its hidden ambiguities and limitations.

Such were the first astute conservative critics of the French Revolution, such as de Maistre and Burke. They did not deny the Revolution itself—did not doubt its significance as a colossal transformation. Indeed, for them it signified something greater than it did for the revolutionaries themselves. These critics were able to discern how the revolution conceived of itself (i.e., as the triumphant victory of reason over prejudice) and posit its place in an enduring history which was essentially represented as a grand conglomeration of prejudices. Behind the illusion of the triumph of freedom, the conservatives saw dependence on, and restraint by, circumstances.

Marx also began his critique of the Enlightenment with a diagnosis of a fatal rupture between the actual significance of the era and its ambitious self-conception. The progress of the human spirit, the realization of freedom in a state governed by the rule of law, and a democratic republic were an illusion for him too—that

A film still from Martin Scorsese's 1976 Taxi Driver shows Travis Bickle at a rally.

"German ideology" behind which was hidden the unknowable abyss of reality: the social relations of labor and capital.

The bourgeois fully realized his potential as an active citizen with inalienable rights. But this realization served only to cover up his real inner schism and his alienation from himself. Behind the illusory legal and political order was hidden a great disorder: the anarchy of production, a hitherto unprecedented stratification of society, and the bewilderment of the individual enduring isolation and vulnerability.

Thus the reign of a conceited instrumental bourgeois reason was threatened by dangers emerging from two ghosts: the vampiric conservative aristocrat, embodying the unvanquished power of prejudice; and the ghost of the worker, the authentic producer of life driven out from politics and invisible to the state. Both of these ghosts were deprived of power and recognition, remaining in a twilight zone concealed from reason, and constituting a lethal danger. From time to time they would make their presence felt with headlong dashes into modernity.

With their critique of the Enlightenment and revolution from diametrically opposed positions, Marxism and conservativism opened up a long and still incomplete dialogue. The participants in this strange dialogue never realized this themselves; they thought they had nothing to debate and nothing to share.[1] But sometimes, at moments of acute social crisis, these two displaced ghosts of the capitalist world have materialized and entered the stage of history to engage in deadly combat (as was the case in the first half of the twentieth century). Both Marxism and conservativism see, beyond the illusory capitalist order, a colossal disorder—a chaos whose endlessly accumulating "ruins" were observed by the Benjaminian "angel of history" as it hurtled toward the future.

At moments of oncoming crisis, such as the one we are living through today, this state of catastrophic disorder and disarray becomes evident to many. The masses are gripped with yearning for a genuine order in which everyone can feel confident and have a valued role. Marxism and conservativism give two distinct and fundamentally incompatible answers to the question of how society can find its way forward. Marxism proposes the path of cooperation, self-organization, and self-discipline, while conservativism proposes the path of the leader figure and the restoration of the "ethical state" that disciplines the chaos of personal interests. We can conceive of these as two different interpretations of the Machiavellian Prince—the "Prince" of Lenin and Gramsci versus the "Prince" of Mussolini and Gentile.

In our time, amidst the ever more discernible ruin of society, the political reason of the bourgeoisie attempts to restore itself by mobilizing the ideology of the (liberal)

An illustration from Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood (1845–47).

values of individual self-fulfilment and freedom of choice. Indeed, the Brexit "remain" campaign and the ongoing presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton constantly repeat liberal mantras: "everything is in order," "it's not all that bad," "the important thing is to remain reasonable, not to slip into idiocy." For only a fool would fail to believe that everything is getting better in this best of worlds.

While the liberal establishment drones on about the need to defend Enlightenment values, conservatives play the troublemaker, subverting morality and casting off all decency. It's not hard to see that the resounding success of Trump is based not on rhetoric about the family, morality, and tradition, but on an aggressive and rousing cynicism. Trump and other insurgent conservatives do not observe the rules of etiquette or maintain the illusion that nothing special is going on. On the contrary, they are an embodied testimony to the fact that things are far from well and that everything is going to the dogs. The advantage that this cynical, insurgent conservatism has over traditional conservativism—which continues to observe the rules of the game of conservative values—was evident in the Republican primary debates, where Trump trounced the other conservative candidates, who clung to moralism and religion. The conservative cynic calls things by their real name, undermining the illusion of stability.

It's worth noting that Vladimir Putin, whose mutual sympathies with Trump are well known, also owes the popularity of his public image not to his loyalty to "Orthodox traditions," but to his cruel realism and cynical jokes. In Putin's Russia, state policies pertaining to moral discipline (e.g., the state's official homophobia, its limits on abortion rights, etc.) serve not to restore "traditional values," but rather to elevate the general level of cynicism. Patriotic bureaucrats send their children to study in London while Orthodox deputies enjoy themselves at private gay parties. They are permitted to do what they condemn others for doing—for the simple reason that they are on the highest rung of the social ladder. This is the "naked truth," for which all the hypocritical acts of the ruling class serve as a demonstration. In order to prevail over modernity, conservatism needs to tear off its moral veil and bring into the open any tacit inequality. Conservatives must force everyone to reconcile themselves to this very real inequality as the only lawful reality—this is the historical task of the conservative. An authentic conservative moral revolution, a real return to the greatness of the idyll of yesteryear, can be carried out only when the ethics of the Enlightenment are turned inside out and buried. One can say that this insurgent, cynical conservativism is the political consequence of the neoliberal era. It turns historical materialism on its head, calling for us to recognize the actual relations of domination and submission not in order to change them, but to reconcile ourselves to them once and for all.

The historical socialist movement, basing itself in the working class, has also staked its existence on the dominant bourgeois morality. While conservatives unmask formal equality for the sake of formal inequality, socialists expose it for the sake of actual equality. However, the social catastrophes and political defeats suffered by the Left in the twentieth century have deprived it of such an assertive antimoralistic position. Today the Left is mainly disposed to cling to a transparent politics of values, thus ceding to conservatives the role of troublemaker. Incidentally, the short-lived success of Bernie Sanders's campaign was owed precisely to his penchant for agitating against the political elite and stiring revolt, constantly using seemingly outmoded words—such as "socialism" and "revolution"—which nonetheless fired the imagination of his supporters.

A new type of elite hegemony, based on unabashed cynicism and a revolution against morality, is leading an offensive on all fronts, using fear as its main weapon. This elite hegemony appeals not only to the fear felt by ordinary people—a fear of isolation and helplessness in a ruthless world. It also appeals to the fear felt by the enlightened and the wise, who are terrified of being ruled by idiots. For the enlighted, it appears that their sole option is to choose the "lesser evil." Striving to defend themselves from the oncoming madness, they cling to any hope of preserving the status quo, convincing themselves and those around them that everything is under control, that reason will somehow prevail. This fear helps conservatives disarm their primary and most dangerous foe.

Intelligent people retreat to small defended territories: academia, the left and liberal political wings，the world of contemporary art. Their knowledge, their critical tools, their ability to reason are now directed towards preserving illusions rather than tearing them down.

In order to recognize our actual situation and to challenge the dominant ideology, we should listen, as in olden times, not to liberals but to conservatives. There is no point in demanding that idiots overcome their own idiocy. Instead, it is perhaps necessary to recall that "this demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret the existing world in a different way, i.e., to recognize it by means of a different interpretation."[2]

The Left can defeat the open cynicism of insurgent conservatives only by going even further than them in critiquing a concealed liberal cynicism. In an era when political correctness leads only to ruin, there is no need to fear being coarse and confrontational．Above all, we must speak more often and more loudly about socialism—after all, fools, in actual fact, are desperately in need of it.

An illustration by theartofrichie of Twilight character Edward Cullen, as found on Deviantart. Twilight, a chaste vampire story, was written by Mormon author Stephenie Meyer.

X

Translated from the Russian by Giuliano Vivaldi.

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1
Well, almost nothing. Anglophone Marxism, in particular, has long maintained links to conservatism. Tim Shenk, in his biography of Maurice Dobb, the only Marxist Economics professor at Cambridge, writes of Dobb's longstanding personal and professional alliance with his conservative colleagues. Eugene Genovese, the scholar of American slavery, began as a Marxist before converting to traditional conservatism. And even Perry Anderson, in his recent essay on Israel, praises Benny Morris in the following terms: "In his second phase, Morris has given voice to much crude anti-Arab sentiment. But even as his politics have changed, the historical intelligence which once allowed him to break so many patriotic taboos has not deserted him. Now in the service of a cause that once reviled him, a cool ability to call a spade a spade remains." —Ed. note

2
Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1845. Available at marxists.org https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm

Keti Chukhrov

In the Nebulous Zone between Class Antagonism and Violence

I. Why "Violence"?

Brexit, US elections, Russian elections, Georgian elections: after so many political disasters, the limits and goals of emancipation seem to be blurred. Yet they have to be reinstituted again in the midst of a most dispiriting situation—when the Left has fallen into the trap of populism, when liberals resort to conservative moralism, when neoliberals claim avant-garde subjectivity, and when a reversion to tribalism is mistaken for anticapitalism. Reactions to the Brexit vote from the cultural and enlightened Left have demonstrated a paradox: not only have many grassroots emancipatory movements collapsed into reactionary beliefs, but the agents of politically progressive thought—the cognitive Left—have in their turn also demonstrated an amazing lack of concrete knowledge, support, or understanding of the living conditions and social motivations of underprivileged social groups. The poor find more recognition of and affinities for their hardships and habitus among nationalist and conservative elites than among the transnational cognitive Left. It is in light of this situation that new forms of inequality, class antagonism, and violence are at stake.

In many works dedicated to the politics of equality, "violence" has been a legitimate term for emancipatory struggle, although some social thinkers (e.g., Arendt) have not always acknowledged its efficacy as a political force. As the history of the October Revolution and the demise of historical socialism show, freedom and coercion mean different things to different social groups; what might be liberating for one layer of society might impose limitations on another. At the same time, what seems to be *a priori* progressive in the critical discourse of our own day—the commons, equality, the general—might in practice be undesirable and vicious for the agents of that very anticapitalist critique.

All theoretical works that claim violence as an indispensible component of emancipatory struggle (Sorel, Benjamin, Lukács, Fanon, Zižek[1]) insistently place this term in the foreground, although violence is far from being the only component of insurrectionary agency or the struggle for justice. Meanwhile, no state system or penal institution would use the term "violence" in its rhetoric or its judicial documentation when carrying out legal acts of coercion. Within the language of authority, violent acts can only be committed by "perpetrators," never by the State or the Law. So the Law, which tacitly applies violence in order to realize certain goals, conceals this application behind legislative rhetoric; whereas the aforementioned theoretical works, which posit violence as a component of emancipatory struggle, lay it bare. In these works, violence as a term is meant as a kind of metaphor for the urgency of bringing about the end of the present state of affairs, when the existing system does not permit transition, progress, or transformation. The urgency in this case can be thought of as the need to block the present regime and to reject

In the opening sequence of Michael Haneke's film Code Unknown (2000), a little girl looks at the camera and slowly retreats as if hiding from it.

the present state of injustice, oppression, and inequality—that which cannot be transformed "now" or even in the near future.

In *Reflections on Violence* (1906), George Sorel differentiates the protective and establishing *force* of the state from the destructive violence of strikes and revolution. For him, the reason why violence becomes an important term is the impossibility of changing the modes of production under conditions of the capitalist state and its economy. Revolution cannot be developmental and evolutionary; it can only be eschatological and destructive. Destruction is inevitable in the struggle for a new world of noncapitalist equality. Therefore, for Sorel destruction supersedes utopia. Utopia, according to Sorel, relies on a rationalist illusion of a better world and doesn't take into account the needs of exploited social groups in concrete historical situations. It delegates the solving of problems to evolutionary reformism, which treats a better future as an imaginary horizon; whereas direct struggle by syndicalist groups and trade unions carries out concrete decisions and mobilizes for real struggle. However, the theoretical stance of revolution as destruction ignores an important part of Marxist thought concerning the historical and transformative role of the dynamic between the forces of production and relations of production. Sorel's focus on eschatology is all the more problematic in that it is unclear what would follow after destructive and eschatological rupture: Sorel's theory stops at the moment when syndicalist groups appropriate the means of production and the working class sabotages the owning class. Such conditions would be insufficient to either bring about a new "general, socialist" order or preserve the economic hegemony of the strikers.[2]

Benjamin's attitude in "Critique of Violence" (1921) is also eschatological—and consciously so—in its treatment of violence as a tool of resistance. By inventing the term "divine violence" to describe a procedure that can terminate the law-making and law-sustaining conditions of the capitalist state, he provides an explanation for the necessity of his nonpolitical eschatology. Divine violence, in contrast to law-making and law-sustaining violence, is extra-political, theologically termed, and nondevelopmental. This is because insurgence cannot be seen as the continuation of the present politics, transforming it by means of democratic resistance; it has to eschatologically sublate not only the present political situation, but also everything that abides by the present law. Benjamin's essay is perhaps the most developed effort to show that the term "violence" is not only a tool for an insurgency against bourgeois state law; it also instigates a leap out of the condition of inequality. This leap out of the "bourgeois order" cannot happen politically, i.e., within existing social and economic conditions; hence the term "divine"—which, on the one hand, marks the impossibility of radical social change, but on the other, appeals for this change despite its social and political impossibility.

Unlike Sorel, who embeds violence in the immanent proletarian syndicalist struggle and the framework of a single class (the proletariat), Benjamin's use of the term "general strike" treats the act of empirical insurgency as collateral, as the down payment towards the purchase of a more general or universal freedom. For Benjamin, to be proletarian is not possible "in itself"; one has to become proletarian "for itself." The trick here is that becoming proletarian "for itself" does not mean merely the self-emancipation of a particular oppressed class and its transformation into a political subject; it also necessitates establishing conditions for a common cause—for all classes, not solely for the working class. So "the general" as the condition of emancipation for the working class (the class that needs emancipation) should also become necessary for the privileged classes, which might not be so greatly in need of it; this implies that the common cause would lead to the loss of these privileges, in favor of a common and general interest. Thus, what is central in the "divinity" of Benjamin's general strike is the concept of "the general" rather than the act of the strike by the proletariat as a specific social group. In other words, proletarianism is a necessary condition of generality both for the working class, i.e., the oppressed, as well as for the classes that are not oppressed—that is, for everyone.

According to Benjamin, the goal is not so much to broaden the power of the proletariat by means of a strike but to assert that when the proletariat claims and exerts its will—that is, when it appears "for-itself"—then this will is a general will and thus a condition for everyone, including non-proletarians. It is at this point that certain non-proletarian social layers find themselves in conflict with the general will, since Benjamin's general strike is claimed as necessary not only for the proletariat, not only in the name of the working class, but for the sake of the *overall* condition of equality.

When the political realization of the common is impossible, then one applies methods and terms that would accomplish political change via nonpolitical means; hence Benjamin's reference to the "divinity" of violence, which shows that his application of the term "violence" is more symbolic and quasi-theological than empirical or even social.

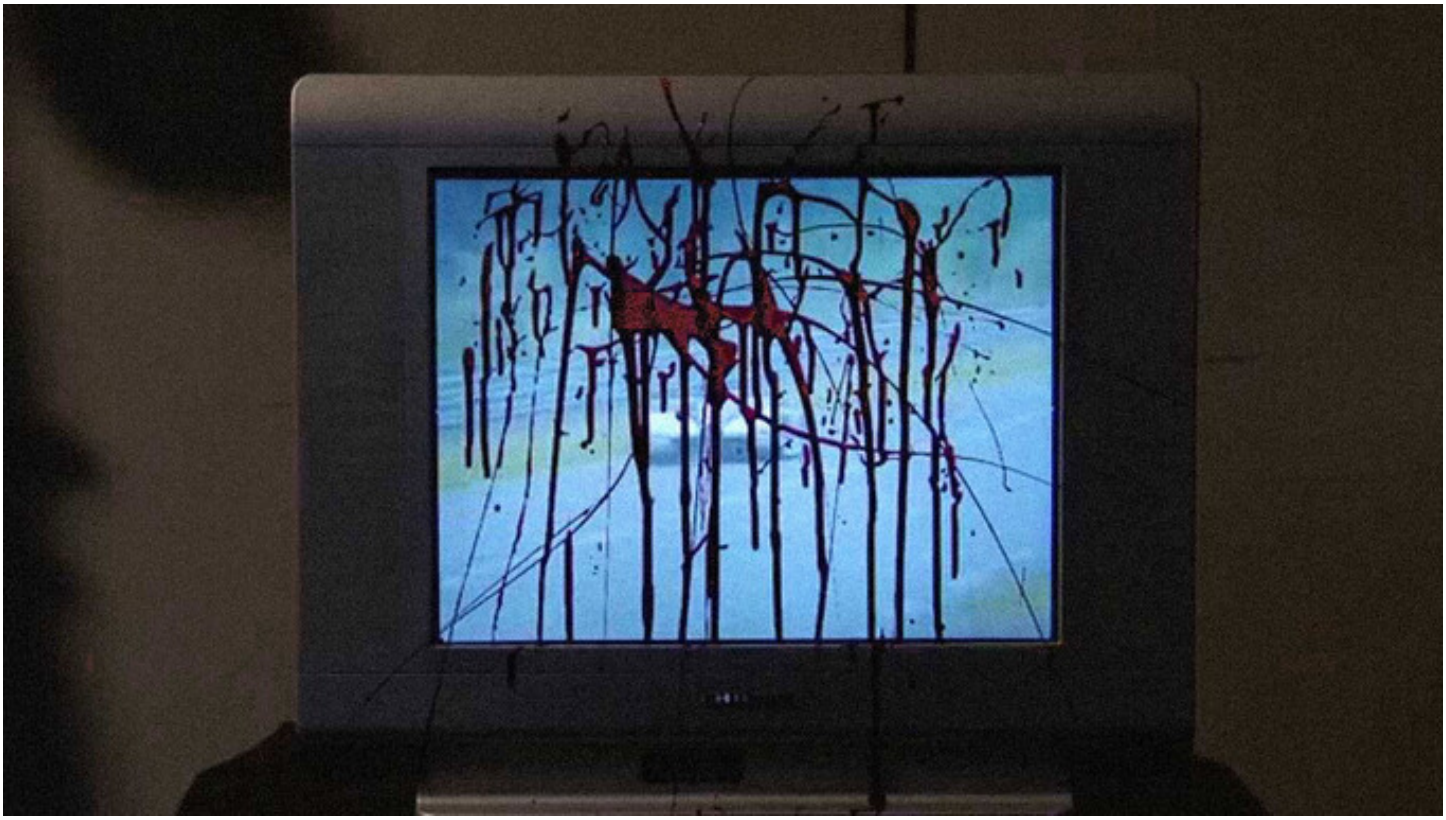
II. The Shame of "Mere Life"

In addition to the cleavage between law-making and divine violence, Benjamin puts forth another, less evident, but still very important antagonism: the ethical difference between life as such ("mere life" or "bare life") and "the living."[3] By confronting the capitalist state, proletarian violence is equally opposed to "mere life" (*blossen Leben*)—which is nothing more than normal life as part and parcel of the capitalist state's law and force. The shame of mere life is that it is confined to a mere utilitarian existence. Divine violence—when surmounting the present inequality supported by the state—is a force that sublates not only the law of the state but also the mere life embedded in that law and produced by it. Revolutionary violence asserts that the condition of mere life, if not life as such, can be transcended.

In fact, Benjamin speaks of a redemptive procedure that runs counter to the individual human life's existential intentionality. For example, when Abraham chooses to sacrifice his son Isaac, he does so out of his shame at living a mere life, which only divine violence can redeem. This act is meant to be a rejection of the old world of pagan servitude to multiple gods, opening up the new monotheistic world. Benjamin says that the new world redeemed by divine violence does not *demand* sacrifice (as the old world of worship had done), but *accepts* sacrifice as the sign of ultimate fidelity. God does not demand that Abraham make such a sacrifice, but Abraham nevertheless decides to carry out the act—the act that tears away the advantages and laws of mere life in order to live a life accepted by God, which is now for him the condition of universality and objectivity. Interestingly, the courage and the readiness to perform such a violent act ends in an act of mercy that makes the violent act unnecessary.[4]

In the film *Funny Games* (1997) by Michael Haneke, we are confronted with unconditional violence that befalls a decent, law-abiding middle-class family—a couple and their child. Visitors in white—the cruel "angels"—break into the country house where the family is spending a holiday and stage their attack as a game, mercilessly bringing gradual death to all three family members. Much has been written about Haneke's visual methodology of representing violence in the film. However, our focus here will be on the dialectic between the unmotivated attack by the perpetrators and the inevitable violent invasion into the dwelling-place of the "innocent," law-abiding bourgeoisie.

The film was made in 1997, in an era when global terrorist attacks were less prevalent than in our own era. The two villains who terrorize the innocent family are not desperate jihadists or raging subalterns. They are polite, young yuppies who look like they could be beneficiaries of Western welfare democracy. Even when arrogantly violent, they speak the language of neighborly hospitality. The plot exposes an important trait of the democratic order: the serene life of a decent family seems not to harm anyone, yet what Haneke shows is that the humanist social contract, with its humanitarian rhetoric of goodwill, hides within itself the "internal" social colonization of the unequal "other."[5] This might be the potential "other" of the commons, the other of solidarity and equality, the other with whom to share the dimension of the general. But it might also be the uncanny "other" (whom Zižek calls "a neighbor," or whom Judith Butler defines as the melancholically internalized "other"[6])—the one who cannot be loved, but who also cannot be murdered, mourned, or dispensed with either. This tacit subjugation



A still from Michael Haneke's film Funny Games (1997).

of the unequal other, which maintains the other inside and among us in order to keep our conscience clean, is an inherent component of the social security of civil society and the private security of its members. Civic life is permeated by the unconscious fear of the intrusion of this tacitly eliminated unequal "other," who sooner or later might invade.

In the film the intruders are not in any way the oppressed. However, the rhetoric used by the murderers reveals two aspects of this unconditional violent assault. On the one hand, with their communicative behavior, the cruel visitors mirror the hypocrisy of the language of democracy, which manifests social empathy but simultaneously seeks to keep the evicted "other" at a safe distance. On the other hand, structurally, the murderers occupy the position that the oppressed "others" usually find themselves in. They are the newcomers who are not welcome, who are treated like anonymous aliens, but who are nevertheless received hospitably, only in the hope that they will leave once their requests have been satisfied. The "mere" private life of a middle-class family is thus shown in the film as already guilty, since its social complacency automatically presupposes a *nonrecognition* of the "others" and an indifference to their socially evicted position. It is this tacit nonrecognition that becomes the spark for the violent act of the intruders, which at first sight seems unmotivated. (In *Code Unknown* [2000], another film by Haneke, a young migrant obscenely assaults a middle-class French lady during a subway ride. In the two or three minutes that the train is on the move—while the passengers inside have no juridical protection and while legislative rules are suspended—the young man has enough time to aggressively insult the lady merely for being a middle-class white European woman: he spits into her face and hastily exits the train at the next stop.)

III. The Conservative Turn

We increasingly hear about the resentful and conservative, even clerical, turn in layers of society that previously would have formed the proletariat class. Benjamin's divine violence in this case turns into "surplus enjoyment" attained through violence[7]—the difference being that this is the violence of resentful revenge and not at all the violence of establishing the dimension of the general. The revenge against the polite and *condescending nonrecognition* that the underprivileged receive from the civilized and enlightened classes appears as an outrageous, merciless, and senseless attack. In his comments on the assault at *Charlie Hebdo*, Zižek emphasizes the logic of contemporary fundamentalism. Rather than fighting "the sinful," liberal residents of the civilized West, the pseudo-fundamentalists fight their own temptation, their own inability to be believers—the very fact that they themselves are not fundamentalist enough—which leads Zižek to assert that their rage

comes not so much from the West's disregard for real belief and genuine values, but from the fundamentalists' experience of nonrecognition and inferiority vis-à-vis the "civilized."[8] In this case the motive might really be "envy" of the enjoyment of the privileged other—hence the attempt to retrieve some surplus enjoyment from a violent act, as Zižek puts it.

Interestingly, recent events reveal a shift from fundamentalism to fanaticism. The difference might seem insignificant at first, but it is in fact very important: fundamentalism delegates faith to the Big Other, i.e., to the "Institution," formalizing one's pragmatic conduct and regulations, which guarantees implementation of the tenets of religion without indulging in them emotionally, or without sensuous involvement. Fundamentalism, in other words, is formal. Fanaticism, on the other hand, even when it is unaware of the history and the details of confessional rules, relies on internalizing a spiritual "message," making it an existential lived experience—thus instigating a believer to experience faith at every moment of their life.

IV. Class at Stake

Democracy has to insistently assert civil equality and constantly display concern for the disinherited and underprivileged, but at the same time it cannot help but keep such groups deprived of the conditions of genuine emancipation. This disposition tacitly affirms inequality as an insurmountable social condition even as it demonstrates social and institutional concern for the non-equal.

Yet the question at stake not only concerns the vicissitudes of democracy or of "real" politics. It also concerns the possibility, in the sphere of left-leaning artistic production and cultural politics, of falling into the trap of social-democratic rhetoric. It is obvious that the leftist stance—be it in political activism, art and culture, or social struggle—is critical of representative democracy under conditions of the capitalist state. However, it is here, among the cultured, that a false democracy is implemented even as it is simultaneously criticized.

The biggest problem of the enlightened Left today is the appropriation of the voice of the oppressed by a social group (class) that, however precarious, is not the Subject of oppression itself. The support of the dispossessed in and by emancipatory discourses and institutions is positioned far from the grasp of the underprivileged; in short, this "other" is taken to be representative of alienated and lower social layers in its relation to the privileged bearers of critical theory and discourse. In this context it is worth mentioning a point made by Sorel: he claims that the shame of the bourgeoisie for its privileges and its voluntary philanthropy is much more dangerous to the working class than its indifference, since social agency on the part of the bourgeoisie for the sake of the underprivileged blocks the proletariat's own agency and makes it more difficult to maintain the possibility of consistent social change.[9]

Today's class constellation is quite reminiscent of the one described by Louis Althusser in his programmatic text "Marxism and Humanism" (1963). Althusser mentions how the bourgeoisie of the French Revolution, in its struggle with the aristocracy, formed the humanist ideology of equality, and due to this universal claim managed to unite the lower classes around itself. The bourgeoisie represented the premises of equality merely in rhetoric and in beliefs, unwilling to exert it socially (practically). This split between the classes ideally leads to a further stage in which the lower social layers coalesce into "the class for itself" and appropriate the language of emancipation. But if this does not happen and it is the enlightened intelligentsia that represents the subjectivity of the oppressed, or engages in emancipatory programs on their behalf, the oppressed do not recognize their interests in this "theater" of democracy, and choose to identify with the institutions from which one can acquire immediate recognition and self-esteem: the state; nationalist, religious, or other communities. In this case oppression is not transformed into class consciousness, turning instead into identitarian mythologies.

The well-known Marxian provision according to which the proletariat as the most dispossessed class is seen as the embodiment of the general dimension of emancipation implies an inevitable premise: the social condition that instigates egalitarian politics emerges when more privileged social groups voluntarily proletarianize themselves. Only this kind of social move can engage the dimension of the common (general). Hence, disparate social layers can unite in a common cause only if this cause has a proletarian genesis. In this case, anyone who is for the commons becomes a "proletarian." However, such conditions can only be realized (be it voluntarily or coercively) on a massive scale, which is not feasible in our present historical situation. (It was feasible, for example, in the era of the prerevolutionary Russian intelligentsia, which sought to cultivate a proletarian sensuousness.)

Unlike the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth centuries—when theories of equality were able to incorporate the dispossessed into the struggle for emancipation, both practically and cognitively—today the discursive and theoretical edifice of social critique cannot expand broadly enough into the social field to form social continuity with the underprivileged, in a way that might go beyond the mere rhetoric of solidarity.

The principal class confrontation of the present then is not between the cognitive Left and the financial elite of global capitalism, between governing forces and the governed, or between the rich and the poor. It is between the enlightened (progressive) and the unenlightened (obscurantist). (There is also an alarming gap between, on

the one hand, the "folk politics" [Nick Srnicek] of grassroots activists, and on the other the cognitively advanced Left.) In the case of the cognitive Left, knowledge is the principal means of production and is hence a form of privileged property and wealth. Thus, today's ruling class not only includes the big proprietors—the technocratic bureaucracy—but also the owners of knowledge and the operators of its mediations—i.e., to a considerable extent the progressive and cultured cognitariat.

In fact, we can notice a mutation here: the successful participants in capitalist production claim precarity and anticapitalism, whereas the outcasts of capitalist production search for icons of authority and dignity.

Among the effects of such a contradictory situation, one can point to the paradoxical outcome of the anti-Kremlin protests in Russia in 2011–12. The leftists in the anti-Putin movement appeared to be socially much closer to the creative class than to the majority of the dispossessed, who either supported Putin or were politically passive. As a result, the ones producing the discourses of emancipation and the ones who needed to be emancipated were political and social adversaries. The underprivileged population was not only being socially colonized by the ruling regime, but also manipulated by the enlightened agents of emancipation themselves. Unfortunately, this paradox exists not only in so-called failed democracies (post-socialist countries, Russia included), but also in any nation that fails to integrate the underprivileged "other."

Interestingly enough, during the transitional period of the early 1990s, despite mass impoverishment in conditions of primitive accumulation, the formerly socialist societies (and Russia in particular) managed to preserve social continuity between the completely impoverished and the suddenly wealthy. This was because the differences between social groups were not yet qualitative or systemic, but ontic. The concrete facts of impoverishment and prosperity had not yet acquired a social logic. The early post-Soviet period paradoxically retained the dimension of the commons despite the collapse of factual equality; this was because irreversible class gaps and segregated areas had not yet been established.

V. The Violence of the General

Returning to the issue of class, one can observe the following paradox. Contemporary art institutions engage with the problems of oppression, migration, and neocolonial injustices by relying on the revolutionary practices of the Russian avant-garde or the legacies of the protest movements of the 1960s. However, a solidarity confined mainly to rhetoric only widens the gap between racially or socially segregated groups and creative and academic workers.

The most uncanny effect of such a "progressive" condition arises when art institutions, with their pretensions to enlightenment, try to intervene in urban ghettos.[10] The art institution attempts, on the one hand, to research social problems and import them as research material into the art space. On the other, the institution positions itself as a site of applied education and cultural production for the socially deprived. The outcome of such activity is that the institution's work on behalf of segregated groups garners international praise, which in turn generates more funding for the institution. Thus we, the proponents of emancipation, by researching and exhibiting the dispossessed, increase the class gap between privileged and underprivileged social groups.

It is in this nebulous zone that a violent outcome might emerge: this could be an act of resentment on the part of the segregated, who might seek to violently block the contrived discourse of solidarity, which in fact hides our *nonrecognition* of them.[11] In cases when the segregated are in any way inscribed as exhibits in an art institution that claims to help "them," or even when they engage as participants in an activist or research project, they might have an incentive to sabotage the institution, to paralyze its functions and thus transcend their inferior status and nonrecognition through "the surplus enjoyment" of this act of reciprocal nonrecognition.

A second option would be to imagine an impossibly miraculous situation (miraculous in the Leninist sense) in which out of nowhere a general decision about equality becomes a matter of urgency—a decision that would not only assert but also implement the procedures of the general, in terms of the general interest, the general will, and the common cause. Such a decision would be "divinely" violent—violent because it might negatively impact the interests of many of us, who would then be compelled to bring the interests of all into real-life practice and not merely into discourse. Enlightenment and education would then involve the presumption of *general* equality and an overall civil recognition of this condition. To achieve equality, it is not enough to equally distribute property and wealth—whether material or immaterial. It can only be reached when the need of the general is established as the interest of every individual. The general—whether it is property or immaterial wealth—is not distributed piece by piece, but is something that belongs to each, in all of its fullness. This seems unrealistic at present.

The question then is the following: Is it possible to desegregate "the other" without a revolutionary procedure, without a drastic change? To put it another way, as Lukács asked in his text "Bolshevism and the Moral Problem" (1918), is it possible to attain equality via gradual democratic reforms?[12] Or should there be a decision that brings about an irreversible shift from a society of inequality to one of equality? Such a decision would presuppose that all share the necessity of the

general, and thus would very likely be undesirable and undemocratic for many. That is why it is not merely Benjamin's general strike that is violent, but first and foremost the dimension of the general in its insistent demand for overall equality.

X

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The materials for this paper were first presented at the conference "Political Violence and Militant Aesthetics after Socialism," April 17–19, 2015, Yale University, Whitney Humanities Center.

1
Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* , ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 277–300; Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* , trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* , trans. Constance Farrington (Penguin books, 2001); Slavoj Zižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008).

2
Arendt subjects the transgressive function of violence to critique. Although she admits the agency of riot and rebellion, Arendt explicitly disputes the political potentiality of violence or its capacity to produce political power. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harvest Books, 1970).

3
By "bare life" Benjamin means not the life of the deprived, but private life deprived of the dimension of the common.

4
In pre-monotheism, the various gods existed as receptacles of material sacrifice, which confirmed the centrality of mere life insofar as it was mere life's desire for the best meat that made the burning of that same meat a sacrifice worthy of the name. In Genesis, by contrast, Abraham's potential sacrifice of Isaac functions as an attack on this same faculty of mere life—for what could be more instinctually desirable than the well-being of one's child? Where polytheistic sacrifice confirmed mere life, monotheistic sacrifice denied it utterly.

5
Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

6
Zižek, *Violence;* Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), especially the chapter "Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification."

7
Zižek, *Violence*.

8
Slavoj Zižek, "Are the Worst Really Full of Passionate Intensity?," *New Statesman* , January 10, 2015 http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-i-ek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity .

9
Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 157–82.

10
A frequent practice of socially engaged art institutions.

11
In fact, no progressive cultural institution would acknowledge such nonrecognition of the socially bereft, when so much effort is invested into social work. However, the remedy here is not theoretical or conceptual; it can only be practical and sensuous.

12
Georg Lukács, '"Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," in *Social Research* 44 (1977): 416–24.

Boris Buden

With the Blow of a Paintbrush: Contemporary Fascism and the Limits of Historical Analogy

Is there such thing as contemporary fascism? Our major difficulty in trying to answer this question is that we rely almost exclusively on historical analogy. We are like dogmatic philosophical descriptivists who believe that the meaning of the word "fascism" was defined long ago by a certain set of descriptive features, and we now meticulously explore reality in search of similar ones. While these days reality, for its part, offers ever more socioeconomic, political, and cultural points of resemblance to historical fascism, they never fully converge. As a result we must constantly abstain from naming the condition under which we live "fascist."

Take the right-wing regimes flourishing in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, in countries like Poland, Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia. These regimes legitimate their rule with the most extreme nationalist rhetoric, purge their countries of minorities, wage racism-fueled wars with their neighbors, follow the logic of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) in their cultural policies, actively erase the memory of anti-fascist struggles, rename their streets and squares after notorious fascists and Nazi collaborators from the Second World War, rewrite their school textbooks from a pro-fascist angle … and yet, all this somehow fails to justify calling these societies fascist. The people living in these countries enjoy many liberal freedoms and democratic rights. They get their information from various independent media sources, vote in democratic elections, and freely choose their parliamentary representatives and governments. These nations are even admitted into the European Union. So our talk of "fascism" in these places remains limited to a vague historical analogy. In light of this, is there any reason to still use the word "fascism" today?

In fact, this kind of comparison can productively enhance our understanding of social reality, but only if we refuse to be led astray by naive optimism, in both the historical and conceptual senses.

When it comes to history, this naive optimism consists in the belief that the worst is behind us. But there is a distinct possibility that what happened less then a century ago in Europe was no more than a fascist proof-of-concept, and that a much worse form of that evil could lie ahead. This rarely occurs to us, which tremendously restricts the value of the analogy. We understand fascism only retrospectively, making us blind to the fascism to come.

The analogy also has a conceptual shortcoming. There is a danger in thinking that an accurate, objective *analysis* of the fascist tendencies in a given society will make us aware of their threat to the very survival of people and society as such. What we have learned from historical fascism is that those who studied it—who understood fascist ideology and the political and psychological mechanisms of its realization—were not only weak when it came to confronting its challenges. They also failed to recognize its danger in time, even though the fascists

In the 1940 movie The Great Dictator, Charlie Chaplin plays Adenoid Hynkel the ruthless dictator of the tomainian regime, here depicted playing with an inflatable globe.

never hid their true intentions. The best example was provided by Mussolini in 1922, in his newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*: "The democrats of *Il Mondo* want to know our program?" he snarled in response to an inquiry from *Il Mondo*, a liberal newspaper. "It is to break the bones of the democrats of *Il Mondo*." People were openly told what would happen to them but, for whatever reason they were still unable to prevent it from happening to them. This is to say that when we think about contemporary fascism as analogous to historical fascism, we should focus on the conditions of its subjective misrecognition. In short: it is not a question of what in our social reality resembles fascism from the past, but rather what deceives us into failing to recognize its coming from the future.

This contradiction is clear whenever we are told to take fascism seriously. Quite the contrary: fascism is a phenomenon most likely to be misrecognized by taking it too seriously. One cannot account for it, that is, without accounting for fascism's intrinsic ridiculousness. This is what any serious analysis of its contemporary forms should consider. Unfortunately, the social sciences are poorly equipped to reflect on social life from the perspective of comedy. Not the arts, however. Think of Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*. Or of Hannah Arendt when she took as the motto for *Eichmann in Jerusalem* a few verses from Bertolt Brecht's famous 1933 poem "O Germany, Pale Mother," of which one reads: "O Germany – Hearing the speeches that ring from your house, one laughs."

There is no reason not to laugh while analyzing fascist tendencies in our contemporary societies. Even when it comes to one of the most important topics of such analysis—the class composition and sociopolitical dynamics that give rise to and foster these tendencies—we need not abstain from laughing. Contemporary parallels to the historical burlesques of Hitler and Mussolini make us laugh while simultaneously confirming the looming fascist threat.

I.

Let us imagine a Don Quixote of our time who is a painter, a male painter of course, and a quite famous one, at least locally. He has already been added to his nation's art historical canon, admitted to its Academy of Art and Sciences, declared emeritus of the local Faculty of Fine Arts. His oil paintings feature prominently in the permanent exhibition of the National Museum of Modern Art. His drawings decorate the Parliament building and the living rooms of the local elite. He also enjoys a comfortable life in a villa in the wealthy district of the capital, as well as many forms of cultural and social recognition, from

Frequent flyer jet set artists may recognize the condensation of ice crystals outside the airplane window.

national awards to honorary positions. Local media regularly ask for his opinion on issues other than fine art, so he is also considered a sort of political person. And yet this otherwise successful and prominent person is in fact deeply unhappy. All his glory and even his very identity as an artist miraculously evaporate beyond the boundaries of his national culture. Abroad, in what he calls the "misty bubble" of the global art scene, he is simply a nobody.

However, he does not quietly accept this. He regularly vents his hatred for the international art world, calling it decadent, corrupt, and aesthetically irrelevant, and he accuses his fellow artists, who enjoy a measure of international recognition, of not only having sold their souls to the global art market and its fashionable trends, but also of having betrayed their national cultures. Although he would normally speak with disgust of any sort of artistic performance or activist art, he went so far as to stage a sort of performance of his own. He attended the opening of an international exhibition in the capital wearing a T-shirt with the slogan: "An artist who cannot speak English is still an artist." He verbally harassed the female curator. The audience didn't take him seriously and even laughed at him, which is why he is now considering more radical acts like destroying artworks by his internationally recognized colleagues. But his old friend, a local poet—himself deeply disappointed by the marginalization of his national language and its poetry within the globalized culture of a younger generation—strongly advises him against it. Tilting at windmills, says the poet, would make him even more ridiculous.

Our painter, however, is not Don Quixote until he finds his Sancho Panza, that little angry man who lost his job after the factory he worked for moved to another side of the world, and who now, watching his country being flooded by cheap migrant labor, cannot hope for a new one. It is true that he has never been rich and famous like the painter, but now he is even poorer and more irrelevant than ever. This is why, despite all their differences, these men have something strong in common: memories of a better past and the will to restore it. It is a past of which they were the heroes, one as a painter and the other as a worker, two historical figures of a local industrial modernity who perfectly epitomized its social order: above, the cultural elite responsible for the ideological reproduction of society, and below, the working class, providing its economic reproduction. Both were unified within the political frame of a then more or less welfare nation-state. This was the perfect world of their youth—transparent, manageable, stable, and safe. Not only did they both know their proper place in society and the world as a whole; they were also able to clearly discern the three main dimensions of linear time as one and the same history: yesterday was a bad past, today is a good present, and tomorrow will be a better future. Their life in this world was undoubtedly unique, but it was at the same time universal—in other words, absolutely translatable and commensurable. They lived in their own society, their own nation-state and culture; they spoke their own language, painted their own history of art, and worked in their own Fordist factories. As did, ostensibly, everyone else in the world. And so they shared something crucial, both among themselves and with the whole world: a deep feeling of national belonging—that is, of belonging to an

imagined community bound by a common narrative full of great rulers, tragic heroes, glorious events, and priceless cultural achievements. While the painter truly believed in this story, the worker believed that the painter knew best what to believe in.

But one day they realized that this world had gone and that they were both—each in his own particular sphere—left behind. Now they watch helplessly as their language crumbles into a premodern vernacular, their culture gets trashed by their own kids, their jobs are taken away, and their future becomes worse than their past. Yet they haven't given up. They have stayed put, each in his sphere, angry but self-confident because they have survived their attempted deconstruction by the most advanced anti-essentialist theories and by the neoliberal experiments of their "glocal" elites; they have survived precarization, globalization, gentrification, flexibilization, the banks, terrorism, multiculturalism, the European Union, and even the final victory of liberal democracy.

Cervantes's Don Quixote had a lunatic obsession with chivalric romances, and this makes for a nice parallel with our painter's desire for authenticity and his identification with the great heroes of his national culture. Even the former industrial worker playing Sancho Panza might recover some functional identity again, at least culturally. And it seems that they can stay there, each in his particular sphere, forever. Unless someone brings them together.

For this we will need a third figure: a politician promising a better future, if only in the form of a restoration of a better past. In this case, the adventures of our painter and worker won't be any less funny. But they will evoke a certain sense of real danger. This danger still won't be the danger of fascism, however. For this, a fourth figure is needed, one that will back the politician's promises with the material power—that is, with capital.

In his *The Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism*, Alfred Sohn-Rethel clearly demonstrated how the monopoly forces of a crisis-ridden German capitalism backed the Nazi Party in order to establish a new regime of accumulation that would allow them to transfer their losses to society by means of the state—a bailout, in today's parlance. This is what essentially paved the way for fascist dictatorship. It offered a solution to the economically generated crisis of the system. Thus, what first brought fascism onto the stage of modern history was its ability to manage the weaknesses of its political partners.

If that is so, there is no reason why fascism shouldn't be able to do it again, helping those two pitiful creatures left on the sideline of history by bringing them together and giving them each a role in its own story. Don Quixote will be given the chance to tilt at windmills again, but no longer as the hero of a burlesque. This time the painter will crush the rotten windmills of our democracy ... with a single blow of his paintbrush.

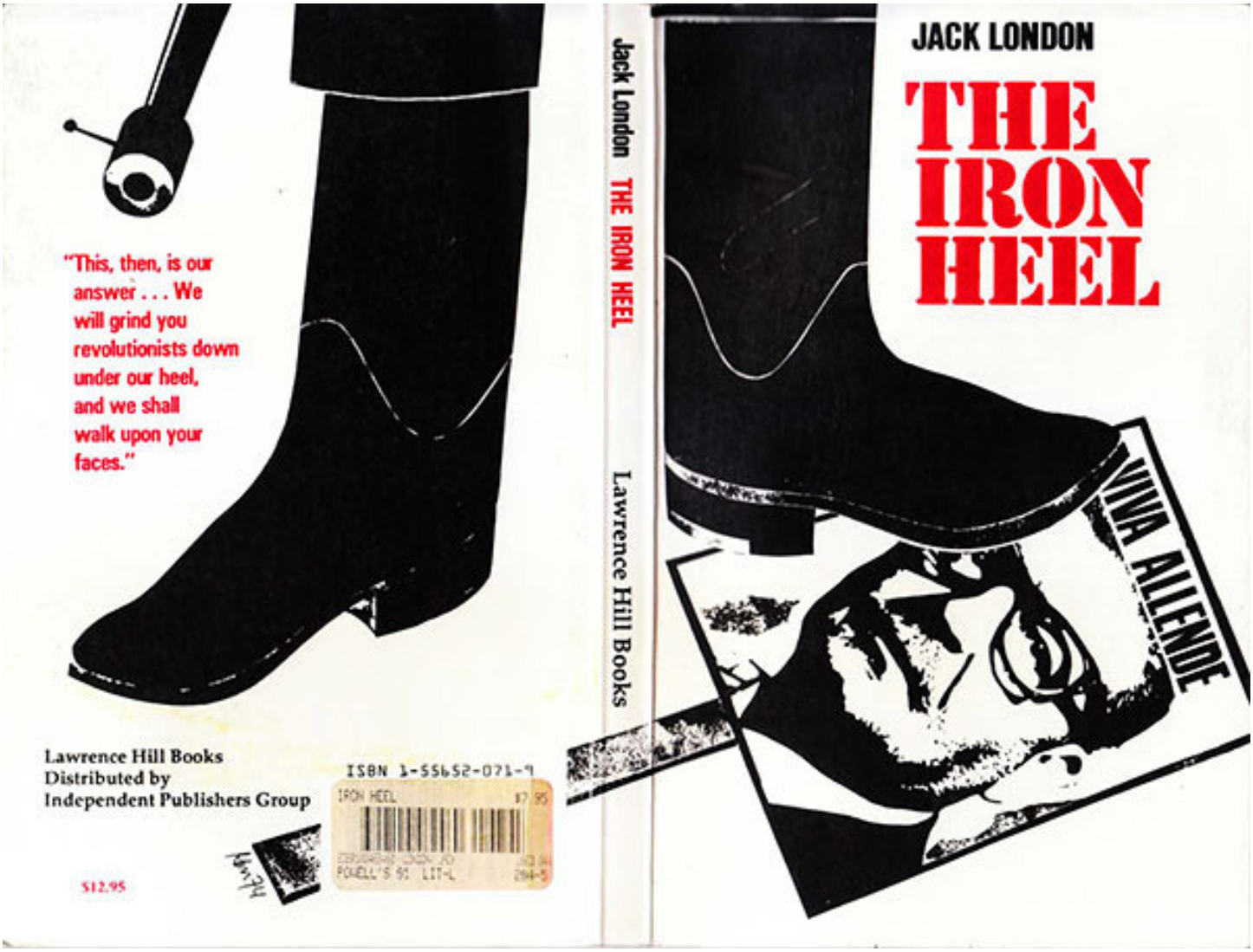
II.

Although this historical analogy might successfully laugh us into a proper recognition of the fascist tendencies in our contemporary era, it alone cannot prepare us for fascism's real threat. Something more is needed, a certain purely subjective predisposition.

This is a problem with which George Orwell dealt long ago. In March 1940, he published a review of the English translation of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in *New English Weekly*.[1] It was the second British edition of the book. The first, which had been published only a year earlier, was edited, as Orwell states, "from a pro-Hitler angle." Thus in 1939—the year when WWII officially started—Adolf Hitler was still a respectable German politician in Great Britain. In the preface to the second edition, the publisher admits to trying "to tone down the book's ferocity and present Hitler in as kindly a light as possible." The property-owning classes, as Orwell writes, were willing to forgive him almost anything. For the Right—and also for many on the Left—National Socialism was at that time merely a version of Conservatism.

What is even more frightening about this story is that the radical change Hitler's public image would undergo (from a conservative politician to a dangerous fascist) had nothing to do with any change in his ideas. On the contrary! Orwell stresses that by 1939, Hitler's opinions and political aims had hardly changed for more then fifteen years: "a thing that strikes one is the rigidity of his mind, the way in which his world-view doesn't develop." But for Orwell in March 1939 it is already perfectly clear that the Russo-German pact represents no more than an alteration of a timetable. The plan that Hitler laid down in *Mein Kampf* was to smash Russia first, and England afterwards: "But Russia's turn will come ... that, no doubt, is how Hitler sees it." All that is necessary for Orwell to recognize the fascism coming from the future is to read the words of a fascist intent on making this future. There is no need to invest in a rhetoric of the "sober-analysis-of-contemporary- *realpolitik*" variety. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is for Orwell "the fixed vision of a monomaniac and not likely to be much affected by temporary manoeuvres of power politics."

When it comes to the logic of fascist *realpolitik*, the so-called realist approach is worse than ill-advised, it is complicit. After the war, in spring 1946, Orwell wrote an article about the American philosopher and political theorist James Burnham, who had published multiple books and numerous articles during the course of WWII.[2] In the article, Orwell highlighted Burnham's many failures to predict the real historical unfolding of the war.



This curious cover design of Jack London's 1908 book The Iron Heel references the military coup against Chillean president Salvador Allende.

In his book *The Managerial Revolution*—written partly during the second half of 1940, when the Germans had overrun Western Europe and were bombing Britain—Burnham prophesied a German victory, a postponement of the Russo-German war until after Britain was defeated, and the subsequent defeat of Russia. Then in a note written for the British edition of the book at the end of 1941—when the Germans were in the suburbs of Moscow—Burnham declared that Russia's defeat was inevitable. In a short article written for the *Partisan Review* in 1944—soon after the signing of a new Russo-Japanese treaty—Burnham predicted that the Soviets would join forces with the Japanese against the United States. Then in the winter of 1944—when the Red Army was advancing rapidly in Eastern Europe while the Western Allies were still held up in Italy and northern France—Burnham published another *Partisan Review* article predicting that the Russians would conquer the whole world ... and so on. "At each point," writes Orwell, "Burnham is predicting a continuation of the thing that is currently happening." This, for Orwell, represents "a major mental disease," the roots of which lie "partly in cowardice and partly in the worship of power." In each case Burnham was obeying the same instinct: to bow down before the conqueror of the moment and to accept the existing trend as irreversible. Such an attitude toward historical and political events—which, according to Orwell, prevailed among intellectuals at the time—is at the very core of the historically catastrophic misperception of the fascist threat. It shows, for Orwell, the damage done to any sense of reality by the cultivation of what is called "realism," which is but an effect of a total submission of one's own common sense, not so much to the logic of objective reality, but rather to the existing power relations of which this so-called objective reality is a reified expression.

But not all thinking people succumb to such "realism." In contrast to Burnham, Orwell identifies Jack London as an intellectual who was sensitive to the dangers of fascism. Reviewing his 1909 book, *The Iron Heel*, in the spring of

1940, Orwell argues against the opinion, common at the time, that London's novel forecasted the coming of Hitler.[3] For Orwell, it was merely a tale of capitalist oppression. London had accepted the main ideas of Marxism, but only intellectually. Orwell emphasized that, temperamentally, London was very different from the majority of Marxists. "With his love of violence and physical strength, his belief in 'natural aristocracy,' his animal-worship and exaltation of the primitive," Orwell reasoned, London, "had in him what some might fairly call a Fascist strain." Yet far from making London susceptible to fascism, "this probably helped him to understand just how the possessing class would behave when once they were seriously menaced." The writer of this science-fiction novel succeeds exactly where, for Orwell, the majority of Marxists, or as he calls them "Marxian Socialists," have fallen short. They "failed to see any danger in Fascism until they themselves were at the gate of the concentration camp." But Jack London, Orwell is convinced, would not have made the same mistake: "His instincts would have warned him that Hitler was dangerous."

Returning now to the question of what subjective predispositions are required for a proper recognition of the fascist threat, we might draw a provisional conclusion, one that is sobering and deeply disturbing:

A person who has some sort of affinity toward fascists or shares with them certain character traits will be more likely to properly perceive the danger of fascism than someone who is clearly different from them. Being civilized, tolerant, and reasonable won't help us much in recognizing the fascist threat. Quite the contrary: a "wild" person will more quickly react to such a threat than a civilized one. Someone with an aggressive, radical character, a sort of extremist, will better deal with fascism than someone who is peaceful, tolerant, and conciliatory.

When it comes to fascism, our intellectual abilities confront their own limits. A purely intellectual attitude toward fascism is a handicap. A rational insight into the "real state of things" is useful only insofar as it prepares the will to openly confront it, even if this will is completely irrational. The same applies to so-called objective political analysis, whether it follows some verified socio-scientific paradigm or is based on critically examined historical experience. Here, knowledge or wisdom are less reliable than instinct or childish naıveté.

We also shouldn't forget about ordinary cowardice or the opportunistic worship of power. Both are mostly to blame for our blindness toward fascism, if only because they are so common.

And finally, there is the widespread fascination with fascist ideas and visions, even though they are often thoroughly ridiculous. Together with Orwell, one can only laugh at Adolf Hitler's vision of "a state of 250 million Germans with plenty of 'living room' (stretching to Afghanistan or thereabouts), a horrible brainless empire in which, essentially, nothing ever happens except the training of young men for war and the endless breeding of fresh cannon-fodder."[4]

Although Orwell showed no interest in Hitler's visions, he was deeply impressed by his image, by the picture of an acutely suffering man, a martyr, Christ crucified, the self-sacrificing hero fighting against impossible odds. "One feels ... that he is fighting against destiny, that he can't win, and yet that he somehow deserves to," writes Orwell, openly admitting that he has never been able to dislike Hitler. Yet he immediately adds: "I have reflected that I would certainly kill him if I could get within reach of him."[5] In fact, Bertolt Brecht said the same; directly after the verses quoted above, Brecht wrote: "But whoever sees you, reaches for his knife."

Drawing analogies between contemporary fascism and historical fascism is far from our worst analytic tool for confronting the dangers of today's crisis-ridden global capitalism. So we might as well make productive use of it, but only insofar as we have another tool at hand—a knife.

X

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1
Available in George Orwell, *The C ollected Essays, Journalism and Letters* , vol. 2 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968).

2
Ibid., vol. 4.

3
Ibid., vol. 2.

4
Review of *Mein Kampf*.

5
Ibid.

Ewa Majewska and Kuba Szreder

So Far, So Good: Contemporary Fascism, Weak Resistance, and Post-artistic Practices in Today's Poland

> Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one.
>
> — Walter Benjamin *, Theses on the Philosophy of History*

In the 1995 movie *La Haine*, Mathieu Kassovitz's stinging vision of the plight of the Parisian suburbs, one of the characters tells a joke: "Heard about the guy who fell off a skyscraper? On his way down past each floor, he kept saying to reassure himself: 'so far, so good ... so far, so good ... so far, so good.' How you fall doesn't matter. It's how you land." In Warsaw, this joke has recently come back in style. We repeat it at numerous social occasions, though the majority of our friends do not find it funny. It is too accurate.

So far, so good. The axe has not fallen yet. A majority of art institutions remain active. New museums are planned. Some are already under construction. Grants and stipends are still distributed. Censorship is rare, and, as of now, only two state-run theaters have new directors imposed by the government. Gallery weekends are still organized. Nobody has yet been imprisoned or assassinated. Artists, curators, and intellectuals plan projects, produce artworks, write texts.

Yet, the hard landing is approaching. The fall began in October 2015, when the hard-right Law and Justice Party upset the Civic Platform in parliamentary elections. Since then, the Polish constitutional court has been dismantled. The central courts have been staffed with judges approved by the ruling party, after the former judges were sent away. Publicly owned media outlets—now rebranded "the national media"—have been taken over by nationalists installed by the government. Racial hatred is on the rise and receives official blessing in the government's tirades against refugees. When the Pope speaks against gender, he is applauded. When he speaks about refugees, he is corrected. There are laws debated in Parliament which, if enacted, would result in the penalization of women for any attempt to terminate pregnancies or even for accidental miscarriages. Fascist marches are organized to celebrate any occasion, most recently to commemorate the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, when 200,000 Poles lost their lives. It is hard to imagine what the father of the Kaczyński twins, a fighter in the Uprising, would feel seeing his own son,

Jarosław, reinstalling fascism in the city he once defended against fascist Germany. Mr. Jarosław Kaczyński is now continuing the conservative model first imposed on Poland by his twin brother, Lech, who died in a famous plane crash in Russia in 2010. For legal inspiration the ruling party turns to Carl Schmitt, the major ideologue of Nazi Germany. Mr. Marek Cichocki, the conservative political philosopher, translator of Carl Schmitt into Polish, and active propagator of his thought, was among the deceased president's main advisors. In Schmitt's political doctrine the sovereign is beyond, or above, the law. There is no possibility of negotiation and no such thing as *accountability* for sovereign power. We see this very clearly in Poland today.

Even in the cultural sector, people feel the first breeze of the wind of change. The Ministry of Culture has completely withdrawn from subsidizing contemporary art collections. Slowly but surely, government cultural agencies are taken over by nationalistically inclined cadres, both in Poland and abroad. Cultural policies are reoriented towards so called "historical policy," a euphemism for the nationalistic rewriting of history. Instructions are being passed to the Institutes of Polish Culture that films such as *Ida*, our recent Oscar-winning production about trying to cope with the trauma of Polish anti-Semitism, should not be publicly screened.

Is There Anything "Post-" in Contemporary Fascism?

It is no surprise that this situation provokes a sense of urgency among cultural producers. We do not anticipate a soft landing. The majority of us do not have golden parachutes. But we will not go without a fight. Most people working in culture are trying to do something about the looming catastrophe, even if this is too little, too late—we demonstrate, discuss, disseminate, organize, act. In other words, we struggle against the coming fascism.

A recent discussion on post-fascisms at the Berlin Volksbühne, initiated by Boris Buden, aptly summarized the preconditions for the contemporary return of a political climate similar to that of the 1930s.[1] However, it also undermined and questioned any attempt to equate those times with our own. The choice of using the term "post-fascism" rather than simply "fascism" suggests some change or difference in emphasis typical for a progressive, linear vision of time and experience. While this perspective seems correct, it is also important to question this emphasis on difference, which logically leads to claiming an exceptional character for contemporary fascism. This understanding is at odds with descriptions of fascism as a reactionary fixation of desires on a revanchist phallic fantasy, as offered by thinkers like Wilhelm Reich, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Klaus Theweleit.

Poster design for a feminist protest against the crminalization of abortion and miscarriages, 2016.

We understand fascism as a machine which reterritorializes the social forces destabilized by neoliberalism, without attempting to overcome capitalism

as such. However, it is misleading to regard fascism as solely a misguided protest against neoliberal inequality. Without a doubt, economic conditions and the injustice inherent to class societies are key factors behind the energies propelling fascism. Yet, considering fascism as simply a misled expression of the egalitarian impulses of the contemporary demos is intellectually inadequate and politically futile.

Fascism operates on many levels. According to its own nationalistic, militaristic, and patriarchal fantasies, it rearranges the social as if it were a patriarchal family. It takes over the state apparatus, reasserts control over women's bodies, eradicates the public sphere, subsumes the judiciary, and rearranges distribution in order to gratify its supporters and exclude its opponents. The suddenly muscular, bold, masculine bodies of those promoting racism in the streets of Warsaw—the city of anti-fascist resistance during WWII—are today's war machines fuelled by a misguided identification with the heroes of the Second World War, who, if given a chance, would reject the xenophobic, resentment-driven, misogynist ideology of those who preach fascism in today's Warsaw.

Wilhelm Reich was right: the masses desire fascism. Merely saying that "they choose it" is founded on a false notion of rational politics, which denies the role of the subconscious. Fascism today is neither *neo-* nor *post-*. It is the old friend of despair, a resentful phantasm of masculine power over the feminine body—over actual women and all those identified with them, including whole groups and societies—that has always existed in modernity, especially when modernity is kicked out of its progressive safety-zones and confronted with what it expels: the unmediated myth.[2] The decentralized and diffuse character of current fascist insurgencies is puzzling, especially for liberal elites, but also for some on the Left. Nationalists present themselves as right-wing populists, as new voices of "the people," vocalizing their grievances and articulating new national pride. They rewrite history from below, organize self-proclaimed "antiterrorist cells," take over historical celebrations. Outside of metropolitan corridors and larger cities, the stranglehold of micro-fascisms on daily life becomes suffocating. Urban, liberal elites are in shock. Even though for over three decades they have dismissed all critical warnings about the growing gap between the urban center and the provinces, they cannot detach themselves from the city. It is only due to the hard work of many people who actively oppose fascism that Poland has not been entirely swallowed by bottom-up fascisms. It remains a field of struggle.

What is new in contemporary fascism? It seems that fascist agents are not entirely fixated on the state and its institutions. It is not a top-down movement. It is a kind of right-wing insurgency, organized from below. This molecular movement rewires fascism's former articulations, in which hierarchical forms of organization played a major role. Obviously, the state remains the central stake in fascists' drive to power. However, the Polish version of homemade fascism started long before the Law and Justice Party took over power. Nascent state-fascism is aligned with fascisms-from-below, or with what Deleuze and Guattari called micro-fascisms.[3]

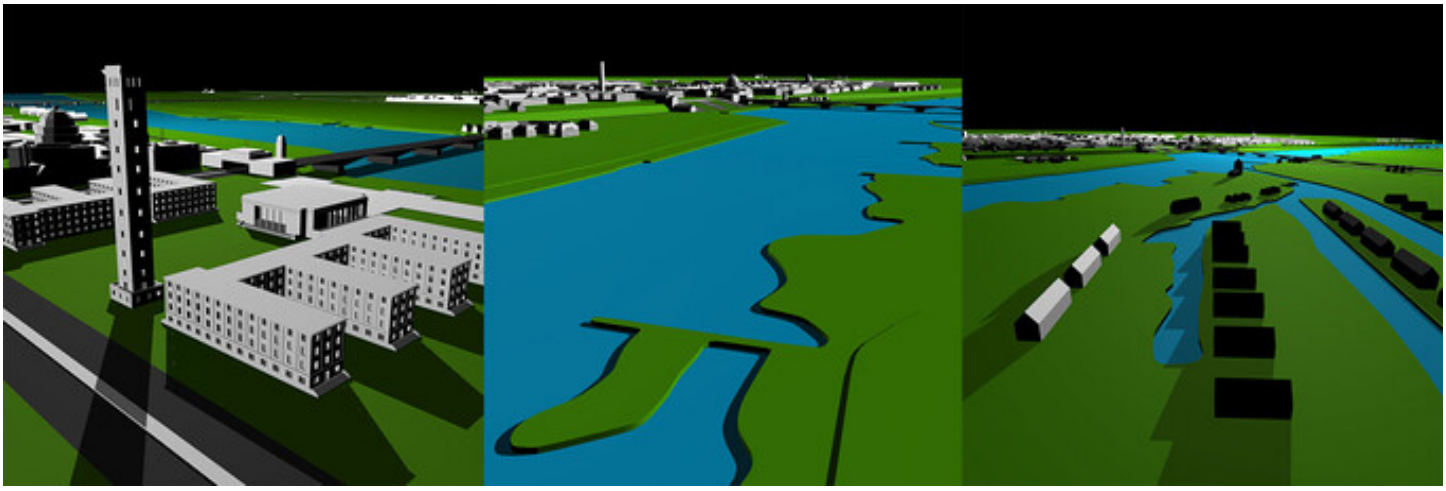
The Rhizomatics of Contemporary Fascism

Fascism is frequently portrayed as a backlash against globalization, as a protest of the localized, *ergo* disenfranchised, classes against ultra-mobile elites and forces of capital. The same refrain resurfaces in the liberal commentariat's rationalizations of Brexit, Trumpism, Orbanism, and the Polish version of nationalism. We do not subscribe to these explanations, finding them entrenched in the liberal ideology of "enlightened globalization." We consider fascism to be not an attempt to block the lines of flight supposedly opened up by neoliberalism, but rather a dynamic machine propelled by global flows.

Many Polish people know the experience of migration first hand. They either joined the most recent wave of economic migration to the UK, Ireland, and Iceland, or participated in earlier migrations, primarily to the US, Germany, and other Western countries. It is therefore astonishing to see the extent of the hatred towards refugees, as well as towards Poles who escape the traditional, predominantly white image of the "Polish citizen" which permeates our daily lives. We could say that what is happening in Poland is a fascist revolution at the level of everyday life.

In *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Sara Ahmed rightly warns against investing too much hope in love. She argues that in nationalist, exclusive groups, love is the principal element—love of a phantasmagorical, imagined, homogenous homeland inhabited solely by those who "are just like me." Love of the "same" as opposed to love of the other. The latter is a love that dare not speak its name, not because it is unconventional, but because it is hated.

To *détourne* Simone de Beauvoir's famous maxim into an antinationalist statement: Europe, with Poland at its core, did not *become* multicultural, it was born that way. Indeed, migrating Poles demand inclusion anywhere they go. And they seem to go everywhere. Yet at the same time, they deny all non-Europeans entry to Poland (which they consider to be a bastion of "Fortress Europe"). Probably, they would gladly expel half of the Polish population, chasing out Jews, queers, ecologists, leftists, and emancipated women. When we say "In Poland, meaning everywhere," we are twisting a phrase from Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. Nevertheless, wherever we turn, the pictures we see are strikingly similar to what has happened already in our homeland. People seem to be enjoying colonial mock-multiculturalism abroad (think: expats, cheap



Aleka Polisiewicz, Wartopia, 2006/8. Lambda prints on acrylic, 80 x 80 cm. Polis's project renders the Nazi urban plans to rebuild Warsaw, cancelled due to the end of WWII.

properties in warmer yet poorer countries, mass tourism) while turning into outright xenophobes in their own backyards.

In 2015, Isabell Lorey delivered a lecture in Warsaw as part of the Former West project. In the lecture she claimed that the Western model of the autonomous subject has always required keeping all of Europe's "others" in precarity. This is not only a reminder of how and why we should geopolitically contextualize and historicize precarity. This is also a necessary component of any analysis of fascism. Both fascism and precarity can be seen as two sides of the same coin—of the alienated part of European heritage, the dystopia of the supposedly enlightened civilization of the West.

Considering the insidious nature of micro-fascism, the old alternative between socialism and barbarism resonates more than ever. Fascism, perceived from Warsaw, seems to be a politically conservative and authoritarian articulation of the same sentiments of fear, cynicism, and opportunism that Paolo Virno identified as intrinsic to the precarious conditions imposed by neoliberal capitalism.[4] Despite their claims to be or do otherwise, fascists are cynical and opportunistic, and their popularity is motivated by anxiety. The masculine and patriarchal power-drive of fascism articulates these sentiments, providing a false reconciliation of the desires aroused by consumer capitalism—false, because it fails to undermine inequality or to address the systemic impossibility of satisfying those desires, which capitalism endlessly provokes. Paradoxically, this fallacy is a condition of fascism's popularity, as fascists do not need to challenge the contradictions of neoliberal common sense; they rather cynically ride on its wave of dissatisfaction. For this reason, fascism "spontaneously" permeates social desires and penetrates the public sphere, even before being superimposed by the state apparatus.

As Isabell Lorey suggests, presentist democracy could provide an alternative to the perils of the precarious multitude.[5] We would add to this, after Virno and Hardt and Negri, that a solidarity of the multitudes, the emancipation of the general intellect, and the emergence of a commons could also provide such an alternative.[6] However, we also agree with Gayatri Spivak when she suggests that the subaltern cannot speak.[7] The epistemic violence that results from the constant process of reinstalling the subject of the West as the universal subject proceeds as a constant erasure of excluded voices whenever they even approach the possibility of gaining visibility. The colonial process of representation works as a "catachresis," always producing a shadow that dissimulates the excluded voice. The Polish case, however, clearly shows that one does not need an external colonizer to exclude subaltern classes. One can be colonized from inside by comprador neoliberal elites. Contemporary fascism sometimes claims to be a voice of subaltern resentment. In fact, it only replaces international neoliberal elites with local ones, without changing the structure of public discourse. In a structurally similar yet distinct way, progressives, due to our anticapitalist politics, are being eradicated from public discourse not only by fascists, but first and foremost by defenders of the neoliberal utopia of productivity, meritocracy, and consumerism.

Fascism is a direct result of the crisis of the bourgeois public sphere and the systems of distributing authority and expertise inherent to (neo)liberalism. It fills the discursive power vacuum created by the eradication of leftist political positions and systems of solidarity. In Poland—similar to what has happened worldwide—the Left has been viciously ravaged, ridiculed, dismissed, and erased by (neo)liberal media for the last thirty years. After this onslaught, fascism is the only populism left standing.

For many years now the media spectacle of

phantasmagorical symmetry has presented the remaining anti-fascists as leftist radicals, equally ridiculous as their fascist counterparts. According to this narrative, the only reasonable fellow is a neoliberal expert (it is no surprise, then, that people have been rebelling against "expertise"). According to this logic, a good talk show would feature Hannah Arendt and Adolf Hitler as misguided lunatics, with the middle ground held firmly by Margaret Thatcher. This perturbed logic of supposed symmetry regards fascism as yet another legitimate point of view, foreclosing the possibility of the sort of non-platform strategy necessary for genuine anti-fascist politics.

scenario—a new beginning from a place of fear and uncertainty—is similar to the conditions for the appearance of a territory as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus.* Importantly, the core of artistic creativity is found in the same place: a place of fear and weakness, not of power. The political agency of the weak— *weak resistance*—is therefore much more appropriate than traditional forms of resistance for discussing artistic responses to the micro-fascist takeover of desires and souls.

Our interest in weak resistance merges with our fascination with the realm of post-artistic practices, which

Jakub de Barbaro, Agnieszka Polska, Janek Simon, Szalona Galeria [Crazy Gallery], 2016. Exhibition views from the project as installed in Bojadła, Poland (left) and Józefów, Poland (right).

Weak Resistance and Post-artistic Anti-fascism

Responses to the complex character of contemporary fascism are equally multidimensional. There are many battle lines and thousands of anti-fascist fronts. Anti-fascist struggles unfold variously as political mobilizations, interventions in public space, and everyday nonheroic disobedience, or "weak resistance."

Already in 1976, a Czech philosopher, Jan Patočka, wondered about the experience of a world in transition.[8] Although politically persecuted for his active opposition to the Communist Party, he did not limit his perspective to the local situation of his country. In 1968 and after, he conceptualized the "solidarity of the shaken" and asked how the phenomena of decolonization and resistance would impact future generations. In 1978, another Czech, Vaclav Havel, wrote the essay "Power of the Powerless," where he discussed the rebellion of the everyday that was so important in the events of May 1968. He argued that the powerless have political power and bring change through everyday gestures of disobedience.[9] This logic of the political agency of the weak is what makes it possible to understand today's excluded as those who, even if they "cannot speak," can have an impact on the political, sometimes even changing it without planning to. This unfold beyond the narrow confines of the gallery-exhibition nexus. In our discussion, we will follow in the footsteps of the research begun during the recent exhibition "Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times" (curated by Sebastian Cichocki and Kuba Szreder for the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2016).[10] "Post-artistic" practices should not be read as some sort of pessimistic "end-of-art" scenario. On the contrary, this term, coined already in the 1970s by the Polish theoretician of conceptual art Jerzy Ludwiński, denotes a realm of expanded artistic practice.[11] Karen van der Berg and Ursula Pasero, following Rosalind Krauss, call it an "expanded field of art"; Gregory Sholette talks about "artistic dark matter"; Stephen Wright and Basecamp explore "plausible art worlds"; and John Roberts analyzes "art's secondary economy."[12] This is not a "new" tendency either; the Museum of Arte *Ú* til, initiated by Tania Bruguera, has traced forms of socially actualized art back to the nineteenth century.[13] Such practices, developed outside the gallery-exhibition nexus, do not only rearticulate what it means to make art contemporarily. They also enable us to rethink the role of art in anti-fascist struggles. They embody the universalist, progressive, emancipatory, and antiauthoritarian legacy of the artistic avant-gardes.

Natalia Romik, Nomadic Shtetl Archive, 2014. Installation views of the mobile project in Józefów, Poland (left) and Kock, Poland (right).

A Summer of Nomadism

The summer of 2016 in Poland was a season for nomadic, post-artistic, weak resistance. The artist and architect Natalia Romik ventured to southeastern Poland with her Nomadic Shtetl Archive, visiting over ten formerly Jewish towns.[14] The archive was conceived, constructed, and operated in close partnership with local NGOs and residents. They joined forces in order to hold a vigil for the communities of murdered Jews who lived in these towns before 1939, maintaining their heritage. During her travels, Romik took the Nomadic Shtetl Archive to local cultural houses, staying in every town for a day and displaying reminders of Jewish history. She collected scattered memories, pictures, and stories of the inhabitants. She also organized walks to formerly Jewish places, screenings about Jewish heritage, and discussions about its current status. The mirror-covered, synagogue-shaped façade of the Nomadic Shtetl Archive blended into the landscape of small towns, haunting the field of vision, just as the skeletons of formerly Jewish buildings refuse to let go of tragic memories. The main function of Nomadic Shtetl Archive was to weave a spectral Jewish presence back into the social fabric, without imposing a ready-made version of this past/presence—thereby avoiding archivistic violence and combining stored knowledges with storytelling and lived histories. It joined what is out of joint, mediating between the living and the gone, them and us, then and now. As Jacques Derrida argued, the archive has a power over the future. It does not only regulate the past.[15] The Nomadic Shtetl Archive is a mobile center of weak resistance against the nationalist rewriting of history that is intrinsic to a fascist program. It materializes memories and hybridizes identities in a non-heroic act of refusal against the whitewashing of Polish anti-Semitism. Everyday racism is an effect of these manipulations, just as a perpetrator who refuses to expiate for his sins is eager to commit them again.

Crazy Gallery is another example of post-artistic anti-fascist nomadism.[16] It is organized by a core team consisting of Kuba de Barbaro, Janek Simon, and Agnieszka Polska, known from the notorious anarcho-artistic cooperative Goldex Poldex. They are joined by a crew of designers, artists, and curators (such as Katarzyna Przezwańska, who helped design the project). Crazy Gallery visited small towns and villages all around Poland, setting up impromptu exhibits of contemporary art, occasional lectures, and concerts. Its curatorial program was ironically modeled after propagandistic travelling Soviet exhibitions. However, instead of presenting state propaganda, Crazy Gallery was a manifestation of rebellious, dadaist humor—a demonstration of the everyday power of artistic imagination. The gallery presented works by numerous artists who infuse daily reality with poetic gestures, such as Adam Rzepecki, a Polish artist from Łódź who vowed to raise Poland's highest mountain, Rysy, by one meter, so that it would reach a height of 2500 meters above sea level (currently it is "just" 2499 meters tall). Documentation of this and other "actions" and projects was presented to audiences unaccustomed to the language of contemporary art, winning them over through ironic idealism and a mixture of perseverance and lighthearted humor. Rzepecki's piece epitomizes Crazy Gallery, which fashions itself as a mobile center for an anarcho-artistic gospel—living proof that another world is possible and that artists can help subvert the fascist stranglehold on social desires.

Similar ideas guided the artists and activists who organized the collective performance *Polacy! Refugees and Citizens,* an intervention staged in August 2016 at the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising and outside the Warsaw headquarters of Frontex, the EU border agency.[17] When planning the action, artists Dorian Batycka and Ehsan Fardjadniya had proposed a performative historical montage that would remix the fraught memory of the Warsaw Uprising—the ultimate fight against a fascist occupier—with the current plight of refugees. The

performative intervention in the museum consisted of a nonviolent reenactment of PTSD symptoms (fainting, screams, repetitive body movements) and the secret placement of a *détourned* pamphlet about the Warsaw Uprising. Afterward, participants marched to the nearby Frontex headquarters while carrying a small coffin and singing a Kaddish song.

During the action Ehsan, who was born in Iran, was "arrested" by the private security personnel who guard the skyscraper that Frontex calls home. No surprise there—he was the only one of us with a dark complexion. Later, real policemen arrived and briefly detained Ehsan, until they verified his Dutch citizenship and released him. In the meantime, several lawyers on hand informed us that under an "antiterrorist" law passed in January 2016, any person deemed by the police to be a potential "risk to our country" can be held without charges for up to two weeks. (Certainly, a person of Iranian descent is considered such a threat by default.) Poland is not a safe country for people of Arab and Persian descent, with the government's racist statements echoed by football fans, neo-Nazis, and ordinary "patriots"—or even sometimes by our neighbors and fellow academics. It seems that only art spaces, whether state-run or private, remain free of these influences.

which frequently contradicts this noble goal. In order to bridge this gap, we want to think about public institutions as institutions of the commons-under-construction.

From our perspective—which is definitely a situated one—the question of whether we can *institutionalize the commons* does not sound absurd. It is a relevant question in a context shaken by the brutal reintroduction of private property in 1990, but not stirred by any serious negotiation of capitalist privilege. As many cases show, public art institutions established during "real socialism" and not dismantled in the post-1989 wave of neoliberal euphoria seem to preserve democratic principles of participation and inclusion. It is not our intent to idealize these organizations—they suffer from many pathologies, especially when it comes to relationships with artists and employees. However, it seems relevant to discuss whether transformative practices of the commons can rearrange institutional territories. As freelancers, we are only too aware of the risks of self-organization. Our temporary autonomous zones are so ephemeral. Too often we feel doomed to merely dream about a progressive future, unable to achieve a general revolution of the everyday, which requires stability and time. The urgent need for social change prompts our reflections on artistic institutions as potential hosts of a radicalized commons.

Janek Simon's design of a Rhizomatic Star (2009) for Goldex Poldex and Free/Slow University of Warsaw.

Institutions of the Commons

Our interest in weak resistance and the extra-institutional realm of post-artistic practice should not be read as a disdain for public art institutions. On the contrary, we vehemently believe in the necessity of protecting public art institutions, as they frequently serve as public outlets for anti-fascist struggles. For this reason, art spaces might actually become important sites of anti-fascist resistance, if they can overcome their inaccessibility to the masses,

We imagine future institutions of the commons as fulfilling a double role. On the one hand, they could become active agents in moderating a (counter-)public sphere, thus undermining the fascist takeover of public discourse. On the other, they could respond to and sustain self-organized forces acting from below, countering micro-fascisms. Borrowing a phrase from Antonio Negri and Judith Revel, we call such progressive institutional practices the "common in revolt."[18]

Exemplifying this kind of institutional practice, the preparations for the upcoming Polish Congress of Culture demonstrate that anti-fascist resistance need not take the form of a defense of the (neoliberal) status quo; rather, it can lead to a reinvention of public institutions as institutions of the commons.[19] In Poland, the legacy of cultural congresses reaches back decades. They were usually organized at times of historical and political urgency, like the Congress of 1981, which concluded the Carnival of Solidarity and was disrupted by the introduction of martial law on December 13, 1981. The most recent Congress of Culture was organized in 2009. It was a top-down event with a distinctive neoliberal agenda. The luminaries of Polish transformation converged to celebrate what they perceived as the success of the past two decades of freedom and prosperity. (Today their toasts and boasts ring especially hollow.) The organizers sought to privatize the cultural sector and demote public institutions. These manipulations provoked sector-wide resistance. Together with our friends and colleagues from the independent research cluster Free/Slow University of Warsaw and Goldex Poldex, we joined this movement.[20] We formulated our own "blueprint" for a progressive transformation of the culture sector, and published the "Manifesto of the Committee for Radical Change in Culture," in which a group of artists, curators, and academics wrote:

> For the Polish authorities, culture appears to be just another life-sphere ready to be colonized by neoliberal capitalism. Attempts are being made to persuade us that the "free" market, productivity, and income-oriented activities are the only rational, feasible, and universal laws for social development. This is a lie … It is not culture that needs "business exercises," it is the market that needs a cultural revolution.[21]

Additionally, we self-organized alternative summits, conferences, and barcamps. Collectively, we also published articles and books which contributed to a growing critique of neoliberal cultural policies and attempted to convince both the Ministry of Culture and cultural producers to defend the not-for-profit character of culture.

After seven years of hard organizational work by initiatives such as the Trade Union for Art Workers, the Citizens Forum for Contemporary Art, and Citizens for Culture, our marginal stance has became the new normal. Responding to the fascist threat, the 2016 Congress will take an entirely different approach from the one organized in 2009. It is co-organized by artistic trade unions and programmed from below, by the demos of cultural producers, three hundred of whom formulated proposals for discussion topics and panels. Based on these discussions and panels, a new, democratic charter for culture will be drafted. It will aim to reformulate cultural policies by making a big leap forward, beyond the false alternative between fascism and neoliberalism. Even more importantly, the directly democratic mode of organizing the Congress promises to build trust, forge solidarity, and enhance labor relations within the cultural sector, which has been haunted by poverty, precarity, and inequality. At the very least the Congress will provide a forum for discussing such issues—a forum which, in a time of emerging fascism, we so desperately need.

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Postscript: We wrote this field report from Poland—that is, everywhere—during a time marked by two significant anniversaries. Thirty-six years ago, in late August 1980, the independent workers' union Solidarność emerged. And September 1 marks the seventy-seventh anniversary of a tragedy which every Pole is painfully aware of. It is precisely in this non-time of our present that weak resistance resonates so loudly. Between the future past and the present future, the fundamental alternative "socialism or barbarism" remains vital. Only the common in revolt can lead us out of this situation, without losing what we hold dear. To the Spanish slogan "No Pasaran" ("None shall pass") the Polish therefore add "Nie ma wolności bez Solidarności" ("There is no freedom without solidarity"), artistic or otherwise.

The massive protests of women in Poland on October 3 this year gathered some 150 000 participants in 103 public demonstrations throughout the whole country.
On October 6 the Parliament rejected the barbarian anti-abortion law. While celebrating this first major victory over the ruling authorities, As the ruling party wants to add more restrictions to the access to abortion, pre-natal care and contraceptives we plan to further mobilize for a Women's Strike on the October 23.

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1
The Post-faschistische Idylle, with: Boris Buden, Ewa Majewska, Ana Ofak, Ana Teixeira Pinto, Nika Radić, David Riff and Zoran Terzić; 19 May 2016

2
See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* , Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

3
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

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Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2004).

5
Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (London: Verso, 2015).

6
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

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Gayatri Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

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Jan Patočka, "Solidarity of the Shaken," in *Heretical Essays* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1996).

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Václav Havel, "Power of the Powerless ," in *Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe,* ed. J. Keane (New York: Routledge, 2010).

10
See http://makinguse.artmuseum.pl/en/ .

11
Jerzy Ludwiński, *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwiński* (Eindhoven and Rotterdam: Van Abbemuseum and Veenman Publishers, 2007).

12
Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979): 30–44; *Art Production Beyond the Art Market?* , eds. Karen van den Berg and Ursula Pasero (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013); Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011); Basecamp Group & Friends, *Plausible Artworlds* , 2013; John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2015).

13
See http://www.arte-util.org/.

14
See https://www.facebook.com/Nomadyczne-Archiwum-Sztetla-Nomadic-Shtetl-Archive-289476394735718/?fref=ts .

15
Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*: *A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

16
See https://www.facebook.com/szalonagaleria/?fref=ts .

17
The artists involved, who called themselves "Anonymous Stateless Immigrants Collective," were Dorian Batycka, Ehsan Fardjadniya, Aleka Polis, Edyta Jarząb, Damian Cholewiński, Łukasz Wójcicki, and Ewa Majewska.

18
Antonio Negri and Judith Revel, "The Common in Revolt," UniNomade, July 12, 2011 http://www.uninomade.org/commoninrevolt/ .

19
For the website of the 2016 Polish Congress of Culture, see http://kongreskultury2016.pl/ .

20
For the Free/Slow University of Warsaw, see http://wuw-warsaw.pl/index.php?lang=eng .

21
The manifesto was written and signed by Roman Dziadkiewicz, Grzegorz Jankowicz, Zbigniew Libera, Ewa Majewska, Lidia Makowska, Natalia Romik, Janek Simon, Jan Sowa, Kuba Szreder, Bogna Swiątkowska, and Joanna Warsza. See http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/1ed_2manifest.html .

Sven Lütticken

Who Makes the Nazis?

In the current political and social catastrophe, the denizens of the art world overwhelmingly take the position of concerned liberals, shaking their heads in disbelief at the rise of Trump, Le Pen, Wilders, UKIP, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Pegida, and so on. Let's call it Wolfgang Tillmans Syndrome. The photographer, who in the run-up to the Brexit referendum launched a pro-EU poster campaign, is the perfect poster boy for the EU and the international metropolitan lifestyle it enables.[1] He is clearly cultured, smart, tolerant, and empathetic—though perhaps not overly willing to acknowledge the structural violence and entrenched privilege that fosters such a subjectivity. His downloadable posters, like the "Remain" campaign as such, failed to achieve the desired goal, being up against fears and desires resistant to reasoning. That Brexit will likely hurt many of those who voted "out" more than it will hurt Tillmans has been adduced as proof of the utter irrationality of the whole thing. However, it is also clear that the likes of Tillmans have profited disproportionately from the neoliberal policies with which the EU has been, disproportionately if not entirely unfairly, identified in the minds of many (due to conservative politicians' and newspapers' scapegoating of "Brussels"). In this sense, there is a logic to pulling the plug, however (self-)destructive it may be. How have we gotten to this point, and how to get beyond it?

The rapidly emerging global alliance of irate middle-class *Wutbürger*—in Little England, in Iowa, in Saxonia—is not devoid of a certain rationality even in its most hateful, xenophobic, and homophobic manifestations. For all the differences between the Western-European welfare states and the more nakedly capitalist regime in the United States, the postwar consensus in both societies was based on an ideology of limitless growth. The working class may not have been promised jetpacks, but for decades social democrats, progressives, and socially conservative economic liberals alike held out the promise of slow but steady advance: "Your children will be better off than you." Now that this system is stuttering, the ideology of growth has been replaced with the reality of wealth redistribution from bottom to top. This is what "austerity measures" and cutbacks in social services, health, and education ultimately amount to. For a number of decades, with the 1970s as the high-water mark, free or affordable higher education was the real-life embodiment of the rhetoric of working-class emancipation. And it actually worked, up to a point.[2]

The combination of stalling economic growth and ongoing ecological devastation has created a perfect storm in which various economically, socially, or politically threatened populations are actively turned against each other. This is the core business of contemporary neofascism, from Wilders and Pegida to Le Pen and Trump, and also extending to the various degrees and admixtures of fascism in the German AfD and CSU, in the Dutch VVD, in Sarkozy's Les Républicains, in UKIP and the "Leave" camp. "Neofascism" evokes neo-styles in art,

A selection of "Remain" campaign posters organized and designed by Wolfgang Tillmans and Between Bridges.

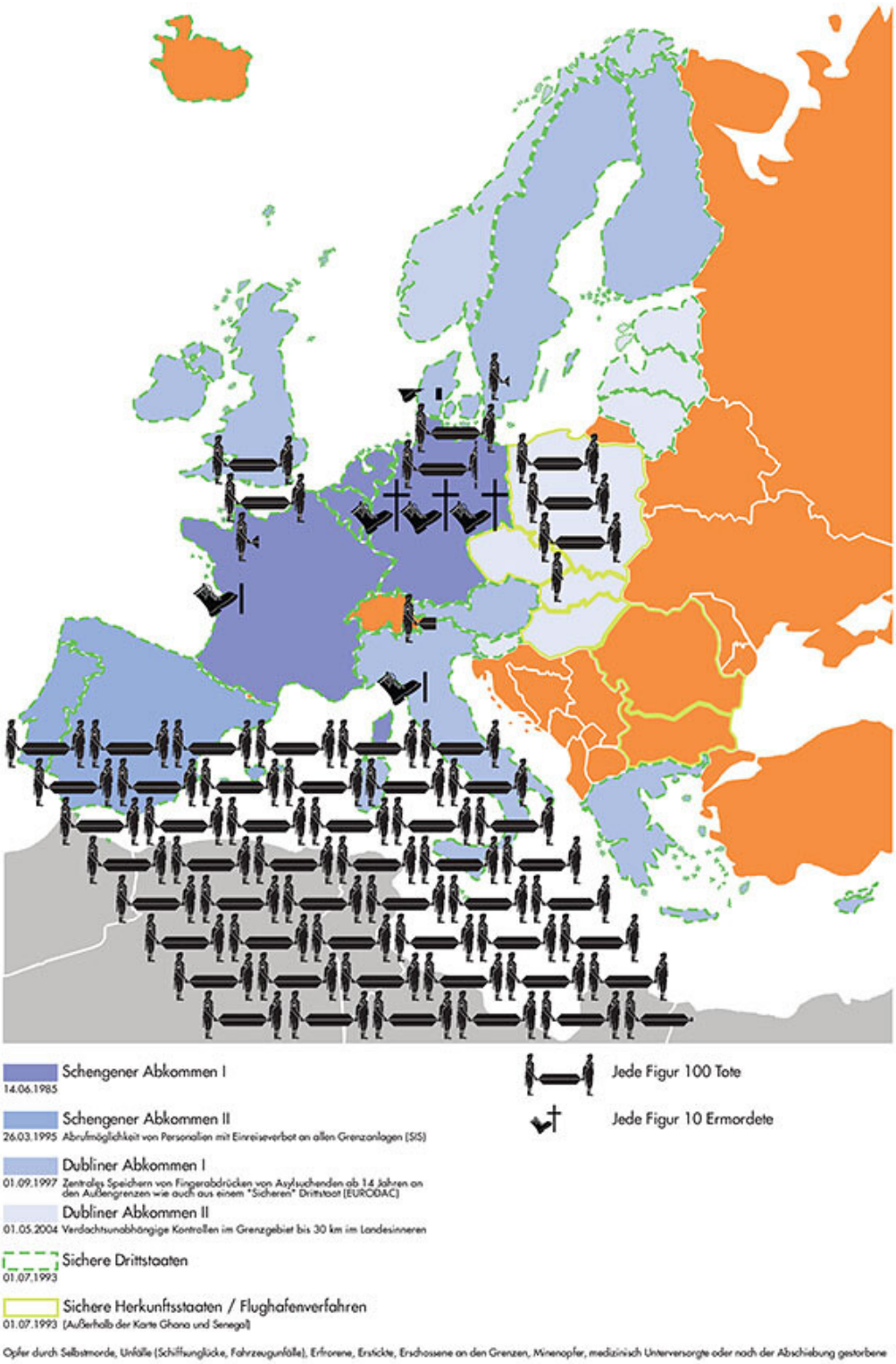
though in contrast to neo-Gothic architects, neofascist leaders and movements often refrain from publicly praising the original—or rather original *s,* from Italy to Germany and beyond. The differences in the repetitions are significant; for instance, in today's financialized economy, business leaders are often vocal proponents of internationalism, rather than rallying behind those who want to build walls. Yet genealogical linkages between historical and contemporary fascisims are as apparent as a network of family resemblances between the various neofascisms.

Time and again, in country after country, (male) white voters are mobilized against an enemy who may already be inside the walls. Usually, the main enemy is immigrant populations, for whom the postwar promise of an ever improving social contract actually still bears some relationship to reality—since they start from a far more underprivileged position. Another, relatively minor adversary is "the cultural elite," and all concerns about precarity notwithstanding, art and culture are on the winning side. Now that hymns to economic growth have been replaced by the naked upwards redistribution of wealth, art has become a crucial asset for the diversified portfolio of the 0.1 percent, and in the cultural sphere the trickle-down effect is more than mere ideology. As a result, any artistic or intellectual critique must be self-critique. Being creative and precarious in Berlin still beats being unemployed in an ex-mining town, but the two conditions are different sides of the same polyhedron. The fascists may be the others, but casting off the Bad Object will get us nowhere. We, too, are part of the problem, living large in the vanguard of destruction.

Political Economy, Political Autonomy

For many, the promise of the postwar society of affluence has been broken. Across a broad political spectrum, the recent McKinsey report *Poorer than their Parents?* has been welcomed as a much-needed explanation for the political turmoil in Europe and the US. According to this report, a solid majority of households (70 percent) in twenty-five "advanced economies" saw their incomes decline during the last ten years. As *Fortune* concluded from the data: "A huge swath of the world's population, one that had been taught to expect their material wealth to grow through their lifetimes and across generations, has learned that this promise was a lie. No wonder voters in the rich world are being seduced by radical politics and specious solutions to their economic problems."[3] One can only assume that this report was produced by McKinsey's No Shit, Sherlock Dept. The evidence has hardly been hidden.

But can we really explain the current upheavals by reference to an economic (and ecological) base, and relegate politics to a passively reflecting superstructure? In this line of reasoning, someone shouting racist invectives is *really* just concerned about their socioeconomic situation. They just need to be psychoanalyzed and their ideology approached as a symptom of their true concerns. But then, why would the fascist "distortion" be more successful than the leftist articulation of the "real" issue? Clearly, political ideology, discourse, and action attain a certain degree of autonomy by this culturalizing of the socioeconomic . While drawing strength from economic unrest, fascism has always been apt at exacerbating and exploiting the autonomy of the



Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann, Festung Europa I, 2003. Digital inkjet print.

political from the purely economic sphere. By contrast, the Left and nominally progressive forces have often opted for economism. Whether we follow Bill Clinton in saying "it's the economy, stupid," or opt for Zižek's "it's the *political* economy, stupid," there is a deep-seated tendency to reduce the political and the ideological to the economic.[4] However, for 1960s Operaismo it was evident that workers' struggle could not merely be a passive translation of underlying economic shifts. Thus, Tronti argued that the political must be accorded significant autonomy:

> The foundations of the idea of the autonomy of the political are to be found in the very core of the operaist tradition, the idea that workers' struggle drives history and not capitalist development, hence the primacy of political action. Tronti's conception of politics departed in significant ways from what he termed "vulgar Marxism": taking from Max Weber and Carl Schmitt the idea of political struggle as a clash of values and identities, rather than the Marxist idea of class struggle based on social contradictions. When this position was taken to its logical extreme, the autonomy of the political became the pretext for Tronti's return to the bosom of the Italian Communist Party. Negri has been a persistent critic of Tronti's line, which he rightly equated with "the ideology of Historic Compromise." Therefore it is no surprise that we read in *Empire* that "any notion of the autonomy of the political" has disappeared, and that "the notion of politics as an independent sphere" has "very little room to exist" in our present situation where "consensus is determined more significantly by economic factors." Negri instead opts for the other extreme, where the political is completely subsumed in the economic.[5]

Occupy's "We are the 99 percent" was an example of such economism at its most liberating. However, such inclusiveness is never uncomplicated or uncontested, for within the 99 percent some classes and groups are more equal than others. Hence the embrace and further development of identity politics as a progressive version of right-wing xenophobic culturalization. In both cases, the autonomy of the political takes the form of a culturalization of social justice. This is the half-articulated meaning of the term "social justice warrior," the preferred slur of right-wing trolls. The Left stands accused of having abandoned emancipatory action for charity on behalf of long-discriminated-against ethnic groups, women, and LGBTQ communities. Right-wing orators actually present themselves as social justice warriors, but for the white working class and lower-middle class; and in Europe, an entire white-supremacist "identitarian movement" has emerged, in which culturalism once again becomes (a desire for) fascist ethnic cleansing.[6] When neofascist movements and politicians state that "they" are coming over here to take our jobs, but also to rape our women and spread crime, they not so much occlude or displace the economic as culturalize it. It is this that gives fascism its quasi-autonomous agency.

The current culture war consist of a series of clashes between right-wing identitarianism and progressive identity politics; the latter mirrors the former in that it, too, provides means of identification beyond socioeconomic categories. It does so through a strategy of universalization-through-particularization: human rights and human dignity will finally be accorded to groups that were long regarded as less than fully human, and who can now emerge into broad daylight. When this results in a fetishization of cultural codes to the neglect of the economic aspects of social justice, ostensibly emancipatory action devolves into a feel-good politics that actually relies on the persistence of systemic inequality. The suffering of others becomes a vast resource for ruling-class soul-cleansing which must be preserved at all costs. Without a broader and radically inclusive emancipatory narrative—one that can no longer rely on endless economic growth to smooth the edges—"social justice" becomes an endless obnoxious Twitter spat, an unceasing series of inane columns in liberal clickbait media arguing over who is going to hell and who isn't. The autonomy of the political has become the autism of the filter bubble.

As the product of (mostly white) twentysomethings with college degrees rising up against their student debt, Occupy was an early instance of the protest of the educated, which today mirrors the protest of the uneducated: Sanders versus Trump supporters in the US, Corbynistas versus "Leave" voters in the UK. The Sanders campaign profited from the unrest among the educated youth (but not enough), while Trump marshals the discontent among those he himself has characterized as "the poorly educated." In Germany, the latter would be labeled members of the *bildungsferne Schichten,* which one could roughly translate as "social strata at a remove from education."[7] For years, this has been code for an ex-working class that is no longer moving forward and so is often equated with waste. The term can be specifically applied to the "white trash" element (a fairly symptomatic term in its own right), but for Thilo Sarrazin, the German social democrat turned right-wing prophet of doom, the growth of *bildungsferne Schichten* was predicated specifically on immigration; immigrants with inferior genomes will make Germany stupid and uncompetitive.[8]

At the height of his success in 2010–11, Sarrazin drew an astonishing level of support from Germany's academically educated, many of whom are plagued by *Abstiegsängste* (fear of economic and social decline). Highly educated *Wutbürger* flocked to his public appearance and shielded him from criticism. "He's not a racist, it's the media, they distort his words"—as an art historian who has worked for major German state-sponsored cultural organizations put

it to me in 2010. This was the elite precursor of Pegida's (that's "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West") lowly " *Lügenpresse*" rhetoric: a mainstay of the anti-Islam and anti-immigrant movement is their criticism of the "lying" press.[9] Some of those who once put Sarrazin on a pedestal will recoil in horror at what the white *bildungsferne Schichten* are up to these days; the most honest and the most cynical will also have to recognize a degree of complicity. Today, the "Pegida Light" that is the AfD has solid support among those who proudly—or desperately—put "Dr." or "Dipl.-Ing." in front of their name when they post angry comments online.

Many of those are retired, just as in the UK "[more] than half of those retired on a private pension voted to leave, as did two thirds of those retired on a state pension," in contrast to the employed. Generally speaking the strongest supporters of anti-immigrant, right-wing, and neofascist parties and movements are the unemployed and unemployable and the retired. Furthermore, in the Brexit vote, "Among private renters and people with mortgages, a small majority (55% and 54%) voted to remain; those who owned their homes outright voted to leave by 55% to 45%. Around two thirds of council and housing association tenants voted to leave."[10] These numbers are extremely intriguing. They suggest that the situation is more complex than groups defending their wealth and privilege against change and newcomers. Clearly there *is* an ongoing fight over wealth distribution in a stalling economy, but its mechanisms develop a certain autonomy; they do not always transparently translate any individual's economic self-interest. Even so: that more homeowners without than with a mortgage voted "Leave" suggests that the latter don't give a damn; those still paying off a mortgage realize that voting "Leave" would not be in their interest, as the economy might take a hit. Those in full possession of their house (and some other capital or a pension) don't have to care about the consequences as much—and those in council housing are truly beyond caring.

The immanent logic of the process is not one of adjusting this or that feature of the current system; it is about blowing shit up. This is ultimately what makes the current moment so eerily similar to revolutionary moments, or more particularly to moments of fascist counterrevolution. Fascism promises a triumph of Spirit over the dismal material reality of the present; the German Nazis reviled materialism and celebrated the German *Geist* just as today's neofascists attack "so-called facts."[11] This triumph can only be assured by weaponizing Spirit; its enactment can only be violent.

Reactionary Actions

In the ruins of linear narratives, actionism triumphs. With "actionism" I refer to avant-garde practice of the 1960s, in Germany in particular, and Adorno's critique of it. The term " *Aktion*" has a significant pedigree in the German-speaking world, going back at least to Franz Pfemfert's legendary literary-political journal of the 1910s, and being revived in the 1960s in the context of art forms that were called "happenings" and "events" elsewhere: the Wiener Aktionisten and Joseph Beuys with his *Aktionen*, but also the post-Situationist group Subversive Aktion.[12] The latter in particular can be said to represent the avant-garde blurring of the aesthetic and the political in voluntarist guise that Adorno considered to be proto- or crypto-fascist in nature. It is in this context that Habermas coined the term " *Linksfaschismus*."[13] Today, we see left-wing aesthetic-political actionism in the activities of the Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, for instance—but right-wing, neofascist, and Islamist varieties are far more common, and indeed hegemonic.

With former SPUR member Dieter Kunzelmann, who would later become one of the pioneers of postwar terrorism in West Germany, alongside budding student leader Rudi Dutschke and future Derrida expert Rodolphe Gasché, Subversive Aktion would have hardened Adorno in his conviction that "actionism is regressive."[14] In the later part of the 1960s, Adorno not only opposed Gehlen's conservative overvaluation of institutions, but equally rejected the *Aktionismus* of young radicals such as Dutschke (who in turn regarded Adorno as a modernist mandarin who fiddled Schoenberg while Vietnam burned). Some of the *Aktionisten* accrued remarkable intellectual and political vitae. Bernd Rabehl would later come to embrace extreme right-wing *deutschnationale* positions; more recently, Frank Böckelmann has followed suit. In 2001, Böckelmann and Herbert Nagel noted in an anthology of Subversive Aktion writings:

> Today, the subversives would have to say: what imposes itself cannot be real. In the era of global de-bordering (*Entgrenzung*) it becomes urgent to look for a singular place (*nichtaustauschbarer Ort*), for a form of socialization that is not represented in New York. We are always told that our wealth lies in the coexistence of a thousand forms of life. However, the decisive question is whether there is at least a single life-form that is not a priori one among a thousand options, reduced to its potentiality and thus a product of its exchangeability.[15]

This passage was partly quoted by Böckelmann himself in an editorial in the journal *Tumult* (which he coedits) in 2015, in the context of the German debates about refugees. Here, *Tumult* argued that the preciousness of a singular, " *unübertragbare*" place called Germany had to be defended not just against "New York," but also and especially against the hordes of refugees coming from the Middle East and North Africa.[16] If *Tumult* presents itself

Fear-mongering covers by both the mainstream weekly Der Spiegel (in 2007) and the far-right magazine Compact (in 2015).

as a somewhat highbrow medium of reflection, a reactionary *Aktionismus* is in fact everywhere. Some acknowledge the genealogical connections; an example is Konservativ-Subversive Aktion founded by Götz Kubitschek, which gleefully uses 1960s tactics against some *Achtundsechziger*— interrupting a public appearance by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, for instance.[17]

Some are no doubt oblivious of their antecedents. When a young Dutchman named Donny Bonsink orchestrated a racist social-media flame-war against the black TV presenter Sylvana Simons, he justified it as a " *ludieke actie*"—"ludic action" having become part of everyday Dutch parlance in the 1960s thanks to the Provo movement.[18] In the US context, Laurie Penny has characterized Milo Yiannopoulos—who was banned from Twitter after a similar campaign against Leslie Jones—as a "professional alt-right provocateur" distinguished by a "willingness to take pride in performative bigotry and call it strength."[19] Examples of crypto-fascist and neofascist actionism could be multiplied almost infinitely. Whenever a politician experiments with breaking a taboo and subsequently feigning bemusement at the online outrage, we are dealing with social-media actionism; actionism retooled for the attention economy. Needless to say, Trump is its master.

If the methods are twenty-first century, the social and cultural imaginary often resembles an army of zombies. American evangelicals' bathroom obsession is mirrored by German reactionaries' outrage over "Gender Mainstreaming."[20] In Germany, media and publishers such as *Compact* and the Kopp Verlag, AfD intellectuals such as Alexander Gauland and former Sloterdijk assistant Marc Jongen, as well as independent intellectuals such as Sloterdijk himself are busy resurrecting old narratives and images, with more or less subtlety: crusades, *Völkerwanderungen*, virile black men who want to fuck our girls, and so on.[21] Many believe passionately; others are simply happy to use the believers. Many believers seem not to care about the latter; in the end, the aim is to wreck with whatever means. Anything that will make the action destructive will do. Trump's wall is the perfect example: whereas pundits critique the "plan" for being completely unrealistic, some of his supporters acknowledge that they don't care, that this is not the point. All the insistence on how it will be built and who will pay for it barely dissimulates the fact that this is media

Portrait of Donny Bonsink, an online agitator accused of organizing a racist "hate campaign." Photo: David van Dam.

actionism; the wall is a meme.

Meanwhile, the neofascist actionists have their perfect counterpoint in the specter or the reality—the spectral reality—of Islamist terrorism. Precisely because it is cruder, ISIS-style terrorism is an even better foil than Al-Qaeda's. Their propaganda by the deed is the perfect mirror image of right-wing actionism: enabled by and made for social media. Here, too, there are claims to universal and sacred truth, to true traditions and traditional role models. That this version, created on the messy outskirts of Empire, is the cruelest and crudest product on the market, goes without saying. Precisely because ISIS-style jihadism is such a full-frontal attack on all that is humane, it is the prefect lever for redefining and abrogating the "Western values" that supposedly have to be defended against it.

Alexander Roob has pointed out that some years before his brutal murder, the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonist Charb made a cartoon for an exhibition about the late-nineteenth-century French cartoonist Gustave-Henri Jossot. In his stark linear style, Jossot made some of the most striking representations of anarchist "propaganda by the deed": anarchist actionism in the form of suicide attacks.[22] Later, Jossot sought spirituality by converting to Islam, specifically to Sufism. In Charb's 2011 cartoon, one policeman says to another: "That Jossot is an Islamist." The other responds: "No surprise there, each of his drawings was an assassination [*un attentat*]." It is clear that Charb admired Jossot, and saw himself in this artistic lineage; intriguingly, he here—however ironically—suggests a homology between jihadist terrorism and cartoons that are like *attentats.* To be absolutely clear, there is of course no moral equivalence between running a satirical magazine and going on a killing spree. There are however structural complicities and systemic entanglements. All sides culturalize the political: either in religious or ethnic terms.

ISIS justifies its actions, and the actions it inspires, by citing the need to bring about the final battle between Islam and the heathens foretold in scripture—but such a primitivist retro-narrative is less a serious offer at making sense of the world and finding ways for meaningful action in the sense of human praxis, than an alibi for (self-)destruction. As an apocalyptic narrative that comes with strong imagery, ISIS ideology desperately needs to

produce something that at least vaguely resembles the images it conjures and the promise it proffers. This is Jonestown logic; the self-fulfilling prophecy of apocalyptic cults. This is the performativity of apocalyptic actionism: total destruction—or self-destruction as its stand-in—is its own justification, as the action makes an illegitimate order built on sand, and without any meaningful future, collapse. *Après nous le deluge.* In this process, ideology itself reveals itself to be something of a sham—a disinhibiting agent that comes in a variety of brands. Hence the defections of left-wing terrorist actionists to fascism. There is something to be said for Olivier Roy's phrase regarding the "Islamization of radicalism," as opposed to the radicalization of Islam.[23]

Meanwhile, the Western citizen can become an actionist in the voting booth:

> Do not discount the electorate's ability to be mischievous or underestimate how many millions fancy themselves as closet anarchists once they draw the curtain and are all alone in the voting booth. It's one of the few places left in society where there are no security cameras, no listening devices, no spouses, no kids, no boss, no cops, there's not even a friggin' time limit.[24]

Voting for Trump is the electorate going full-on suicide bomber. On the Democratic side, Sanders, the politician who could have funneled the discontent in a more productive direction, was blocked by the DNC apparatus and Democratic primary voters (getting 45 percent of the total vote, though this in itself is not decisive in the Democrats' "superdelegate" farce). Better to gamble on the broadly reviled Clinton having a slight edge over Trump than a candidate who is not content with decorating neoliberal business as usual with some progressive policies that look nice and don't hurt donors.

The Name Game

> But the earth is a globe, of limited extent. The discovery of its finite size accompanied the rise of capitalism four centuries ago, the realization of its finite size now marks the end of capitalism. The population to be subjected is limited. The hundreds of millions crowding the fertile plains of China and India once drawn within the confines of capitalism, its chief work is accomplished … Then its further expansion is checked. Not as a sudden impediment, but gradually, as a growing difficulty of selling products and investing capital. Then the pace of development slackens, production slows up, unemployment waxes a sneaking disease. Then the mutual fight of the capitalists for world domination becomes fiercer, with new world wars impending.[25]

Anton Pannekoek wrote these words in 1944, in Nazi-occupied Holland. The ecological dimension is left implicit in this proto-anthropocenic scenario; nonetheless, in our current global reenactment of the year 1933, these words ring all too true. While Pannekoek's highly linear Marxist conception of history is often problematic when he presents the triumph of communism as inevitable—after the failed revolutions of 1918–20, he had little to back this up—his diagnosis of the inevitability of breakdown, of capitalism finally meeting its limits, reads as uncannily prescient. Waxing unemployment manifests itself in the proliferation of surplus populations for which there is no place in the capitalist workforce, in an economy subject to stagnation or stagflation even as the maintenance of its current level produces a creeping ecological and social catastrophe.

In such a situation, rehashed Enlightenment criticism is not necessarily helpful—particularly when it turns a blind eye to its own preconditions and limitations. Wolfgang Tillmans's attempt to counter right-wing rhetoric and lies (about the costs and benefits of remaining in the EU, for instance) recalls the war on Fox News by US-based comedians such as John Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and John Oliver. Colbert became a liberal household deity with his takedown of the Bush White House and Fox News's propaganda as pliable and reality-resistant "truthiness" that plays loose with the facts and does not stand up to expert scrutiny. For those hanging on to Donald Trump's every word, the expert is seen as the incarnation of the elite—or as the elite's faithful servant. National security and foreign policy experts say Trump is not fit to be president; if he upsets them, he's clearly doing something right. Experts say that crime is declining; my gut tells me something different. Or, in Britain: economists say we should remain; we'll leave. Statistics be damned.

This rejection of expertise and of the role and persona of the expert shows how apt the current neofascisms are at exploiting the performativity of language. The connotations of the term "expert" have been adjusted to make expertise a symptom of everything that is wrong. And, much as we may reject something spouted by racists and homophobes, is there not some truth to this? After all, are those seething at expertise not themselves the perverse product of centuries of expertise in science, technology, and social policy? Who makes the Nazis?[26] Sure, Fox News and *Compact* magazine help, but those media are themselves experts of divisiveness, and fundamentally the problem is the divisions—divisions of the social, of the sensible—that a technocratic expert culture fosters and maintains. How many of us can honestly say that they have not come to some kind of

Illustrations by Gustave-Henri Jossot printed in the satirical publication L Assiette au beurre, no. 144 (1904).

understanding or arrangement with this state of affairs? It is all the easier because the others can always be typecast as the hateful, racist, white troglodytes that many of them may well be. But again, how did we get here, and how did they get like that?

In 2010, at a summer school at the Van Abbemuseum with an international group of MA (art) students, one participant stated that "we'll just have to move on to another country" if Holland were to become inhospitable due to Geert Wilders and Co. To which someone responded: that's all very well, but what if "we" run out of countries to choose from? Curiously but tellingly, the language here mirrored the discourse in the German *Heuschreckendebatte* (or "locust debate") of 2005, which started when the politician Franz Müntefering compared anonymous corporate investors to a biblical plague of locusts. Once a company, or a country, has been grazed off, the migratory plague moves on. The progressive version of this kind of discourse is the hand-wringing over "investors" that might be "scared off" by high taxes or political unrest. Perhaps the summer school participant had this discourse in the back of their mind; right-wing populists might choose to use the more negative locust analogy. Each of these cases revolves around the image of a rootless international elite moving from country to country, seeking out (embattled) nation-states to host it temporarily.

Before the recent upswing in migration from the Middle East, a Dutch novelist made the cringeworthy statement that "artists are the new asylum seekers."[27] This too creates a homology between artists and migrants, but a very different group of migrants; one that stands for globalization from below rather than from above. Seemingly defined largely by its negation of the nation-state, the "creative class" finds itself both the active and the passive subject of projections. Depending on the context, it is either part of a global elite or an embattled minority. In both cases, it is suspected of being *vaterlandslos*—and while, in the face of resurgent nationalism, it makes sense to wear one's internationalism proudly on one's sleeves, it is hardly an adequate response. Some of the more precarious art-world denizens in particular are well aware of—and try to act on—their quasi-class's implication in the destructive dynamic that has unfolded across the West, but so far such critical practice is a minority pursuit. We have met the enemy, and he is us.[28] But at least we're critical, right?

Isabelle Stengers maintains that critical "denunciation fabricates a division between those who know and those

who are duped by appearances."[29] While I don't agree with Stengers's anti- or post-critical stance, it is clear that a certain type of Enlightenment criticism is part of the problem—condemning the other as irrational may be necessary, but it is not enough. This is the problem with the Colberts, Stewarts, and Olivers, who are rightly quick to lampoon and skewer Fox News and Trump, but who seem perfectly content to make Obama's drone warfare or Clinton's Wall Street friendliness and hawkishness appear acceptable in the process, or to sing and dance with Henry Kissinger. Technocratic expertise and hypocriticism are two sides of the same coin. What is needed is a dialectic of critique and composition, or in Stengers's words, artifice. Stengers is perfectly right that "we are in desperate need of artifices"—and that we need to pay close attention to naming, characterizing, personifying.[30]

The Left was once quite good at this, with notions such as the proletariat and the working class never being mere descriptions, but always performative articulations that generated "class consciousness." The general strike could also be mentioned as a leftist figure or myth—and indeed communism itself. Recent successes have been checkered. The collective persona of the multitude was an important conceptual innovation, but its efficacy was limited to autonomist circles; Occupy's 99 percent was a stroke of genius whose potential has perhaps still not been fully exploited, and the same can be said for the commons. Meanwhile, identity-based movements provide valuable and often critical sustenance to embattled minorities, but at the risk of affirming identities that were forms of profiling to begin with. What is really needed is a queering of categories, a development of transversal names that cut through divisions whose maintenance benefits the forces of reaction. That this is so much easier said than done is part of the drama. Stengers's and Latour's appropriation of the notion of Gaia in an anthropocenic context is also intriguing, even though it is unlikely many will get beyond the faux-reactionary name.[31]

For the time being, the more successful artifices are souped-up remakes from the reactionary attack: *Volk*, *Völkerwanderung*, Mexican bandits and refugee rapists, national sovereignty (rather than autonomy), and so on. Even the notion of *Festung Europa*, or Fortress Europe, which was once mostly used in a critical fashion by the Left, has been embraced by the actionistic and identitarian right.[32] Urgent work is needed on post-work and post-growth imaginaries. The odds are not good, to put it mildly. It would help if this was at least recognized more broadly as the central challenge in the ongoing catastrophe. It is in accepting this challenge that we—intellectuals, artists, former workers, and future refugees—can at least begin to engage with the enemy that is us.

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See http://tillmans.co.uk/campaign-eu .

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Even in a society with as little social mobility as France, as Didier Eribon's memoir *Retour à Reims* (Paris: Fayard, 2009) reminds us. The book, of course, is also marked by the author's painful sense of estrangement from his social origins, whose denizens are given to homophobia and xenophobia.

3
Chris Matthews, "The Death of the Middle Class Is Worse than You Think," *Fortune*, July 13, 2016 http://fortune.com/2016/07/13/middle-class-death/ . The year 2015 saw a break in the trend for the US: Robert Pear, "U.S. Household Income Grew 5.2 Percent in 2015, Breaking Pattern of Stagnation, *New York Times*, September 13, 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/22/us/politics/us-median-income-rises-but-is-still-6-below-its-2007-peak.html .

4
Zižek's phrase, from *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 1999), 347, became the basis and title of a 2012–13 exhibition by Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler.

5
Merijn Oudenampsen, "On the Autonomy of the Political and the Poverty of Theory," merijnoudenampsen.org, 2011 http://merijnoudenampsen.org/2013/05/07/on-the-autonomy-of-the-political-and-the-poverty-of-theory/ .

6
In the US, *Breitbart News* has em braced the European Identitarians as "hipster right-wingers" http://www.breitbart.com/london/2016/01/23/hipster-right-wingers-slam-merkels-migration-catastrophe/ .

7
A whole range of translations can be found at http://www.linguee.de/deutsch-englisch/uebersetzung/bildungsferne+schichten.html .

8
Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: DVA, 2010).

9
For the role of the *Lügenpresse* slogan within Pegida's rhetoric, and in the context of German political history, see Jurek Skrobala, "Vokabular wie bei Goebbels," *Spiegel Online,* January 12, 2015 http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/pegida-kampfbegriffe-was-verbirgt-sich-hinter-der-rhetorik-a-1011755.html .

10
"Lord" Ashcroft, "How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday… and why," lordashcroftpolls.com, June 24, 2016 http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/ .

11
The classic instance is Newt Gingrich's insistence, in a TV interview during the Republican Convention in Cleveland, that feelings trump statistics: the latter may show that crime rates are down, but people's gut feelings tell them otherwise.

12
Scans of Subversive Aktion publications from 1962–66 can be found at http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/ORG/SDS/Anschlaggruppe.shtml .

13
Habermas used the term " *linker Faschismus* " at the SDS congress in Hannover on June 9, 1967; later " *linker Faschismus*" b ecame " *Linksfaschismus*." For the debate between Habermas and the radical Left, see *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas* , eds. Oskar Negt and Wolfgang Abendroth (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968).

14
Theodor W. Adorno, "Marginalien zu Theorie und Praxis" (1969), in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II* (*Gesammelte Schriften 10.2)* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 760–782 (quotation from p. 776). In his attacks on "actionism," Adorno here himself uses the impoverished and undialectical notion of "praxis" (as antithetically opposed to "theory") that he accuses his opponents of employing.

15
Frank Böckelmann and Herbert Nagel, "Nachwort" (2001), in *Subversive Aktion. Der Sinn der Organisation ist ihr Scheitern* (s.l.: Verlage Neue Kritik, 2002), 492. Author's translation.

16
Frank Böckelmann and Horst Ebner, "Gibt es wenigstens eine einzige Lebensform?," *Tumult,* Fall 2015: 6.

17
On Konservativ-Subversive Aktion and German genealogies of political actionism in general, see Wolfgang Kraushaar, "Die Ethnozentriker, ihre Vordenker und die Deutschen," Perlentaucher.de, April 4, 2016 https://www.perlentaucher.de/essay/wolfgang-kraushaar-wie-umgehen-mit-der-af-d.html .

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Kim Bos, "Donny Boysink vindt zijn 'uitzwaaipagina' niet racistisch," *NRC Handelsblad,* May 26, 2016 https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/05/25/ik-wist-zon-pagina-wordt-een-succes-1623336-a1043643 .

19
Laurie Penny, "I'm with the Banned," Medium, July 21, 2016 https://medium.com/welcome-to-the-scream-room/im-with-the-banned-8d1b6e0b2932#.5r1tahqpr .

20
See, for instance, a typical rant by Eva Herman, a former newscaster turned mainstay of the right-wing conspiracist Kopp Verlag.

21
The term " *Völkerwanderung*" evo kes the period of Germanic mass migrations that contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. It is used, for instance, by the AfD in Karlsruhe to raise fears of a new kind of barbaric invasion by refugees.

22
Alexander Roob, "'Grandioser Biß' oder 'Verdammter Schlag in die Fresse' ? ---------- Abdul Jossot trifft Charlie Hebdo .... und die FAZ haut daneben," meltonpriorinstitut.org http://www.meltonpriorinstitut.org/pages/textarchive.php5?view=text&ID=208&language=Deutsch .

23
Cécile Daumas, "Olivier Roy et Gilles Kepel, querelle française sur le jihadisme," *Libération*, April 14, 2016 http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/04/14/olivier-roy-et-gilles-kepel-querelle-francaise-sur-le-jihadisme_1446226 .

24
Michael Moore, "5 Reasons Why Trump Will Win," michaelmoore.com http://michaelmoore.com/trumpwillwin/ .

25
Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils* , 1946. Available at marxists.org https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoe/1947/workers-councils.htm .

26
Among Mark E. Smith's not universally helpful answers to that question in The Fall song of the same name (on *Hex Enduction Hour,* 1982) were "bad Tele-V," "balding smug faggots," "intellectual half-wits," and "buffalo lips on toast, smiling."

27
Interview with P. F. Thomése, "Kunstenaars zijn de nieuwe asielzoekers," *Ad Valvas,* May 15 2013, 16–18 https://issuu.com/advalvas/docs/advalvas_60_17 .

28
As Walt Kelly's *Pogo* put it.

29
Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times,* trans. Andrew Goffey (Lüneburg: Open Humanities Press, Meson Press, 2015), 74.

30
Ibid., 144.

31
Ibid., 43–50; Bruno Latour, "Waiting for Gaia: Composing the Common World Through Art and Politics," bruno-latour.fr, 2011 http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/124-GAIA-LONDON-SPEAP_0.pdf .

32
"'Festung Europa' von Gegendemos Begleitet," May 16, 2016, *MDR Sachsen*.

Ana Teixeira Pinto

Male Fantasies: The Sequel(s)

"How could the masses be made to desire their own repression?" was the question Wilhelm Reich famously asked in the wake of the *Reichstagsbrandverordnung* (Reichstag Fire Decree, February 28, 1933), which suspended the civil rights protections afforded by the Weimar Republic's democratic constitution.[1] Hitler had been appointed chancellor on January 30, 1933 and Reich was trying to grapple with the fact that the German people had apparently chosen the authoritarian politics promoted by National Socialism against their own political interests. Ever since, the question of fascism, or rather the question of why might people vote for their own oppression, has never ceased to haunt political philosophy.[2] With Trump openly campaigning for less democracy in America—and with the continued electoral success of far-right antiliberal movements across Europe—this question has again become a pressing one.

Marxist theory, according to Reich, consistently depicts fascism as a mistaken choice resulting from false consciousness: the masses are ignorant and gullible, and thus easily led into contradictions. Refusing to absolve those who cheered for Hitler, Reich proposes an alternative theory. Marxism, he contends, was "unable to understand the power of an ideological movement like Nazism" because it lacked an adequate conception of ideology's "material force as an emotional or affective structure."[3] The masses did not mistakenly choose fascism. Rather, there is a more fundamental nonidentity between class consciousness and mass movements. Fascism was not a Falschkauf (mistaken purchase) followed by buyer's remorse. The people fought for it, fiercely and stubbornly—though this desire for fascism is also a desire for suppression, a "fight for servitude," if you will, or an "escape from freedom," as Erich Fromm put it in the title of his 1941 book.

The answer to this apparent paradox—how can desire desire its own suppression?—was, in Reich's view, tied to *thwarted sexual development*. The rhetoric of social revolution ran afoul of the centuries-old association of transgression with social shame and punishment. Taught to suppress the natural expression of their sexual instincts, the masses conflated social and sexual convulsions in images of tides, floods, undercurrents, disorder, and chaos: everything which represents a fear of dissolution or threatens to swallow the subject. Fascism, from Reich's perspective, constitutes the paradigmatic form of ideological displacement: the social antagonism diagnosed by communism (class struggle) is displaced "to the site of phantasmatic antagonism," as the archetypal conflict between the Germanic Aryans and the Semitic Jews.[4] The literature of anti-Semitism—fascist or otherwise—is marked by the putative illegitimacy or unnaturalness of interest-bearing capital, whose ability to generate money from money is represented as a kind of parasitical, or deviant sexuality, generating like from like. Patriarchal, land-based accumulation is threatened by both the "cheating" wife and by the "cheating"

An early twentieth-century French postcard titled "The Winner" uses tromp l'oeil for a sexist innuendo.

moneylender. Hence the all-pervasive anxiety about the potency or authenticity of the male *issue*, whether this issue is a child or a currency.[5]

Writing in 1936, Walter Benjamin also saw fascism as a mock revolution: the mobilization of revolutionary demands towards an epic feat of showmanship, which stages the power of the masses without granting them rights. Fascism, he noted, gives expression to the masses' "will to power" while preserving capitalist class structures and keeping property relations intact. The outcome of this revolutionary carnival is the spectacularization of politics: the mass rallies, the histrionics, the paranoid discourse, the need to turn the lack of material resources into a drama of presence and absence charged with sexual intensity.

For all its merits, Reich's account has a blind spot. While rejecting the dichotomy between "false consciousness" and "real conditions," he ends up introducing another binary distinction: between the "rational" political agent and the "irrational" desirous subject—the foolish passions of the latter undercutting the material interests of the former. Whereas Marxism would solve the problem of fascism by tackling misinformation, Reich would solve the problem of fascism by tackling psychic hindrances and inhibitions; yet both see fascism as a deformation (either intellectual or sexual) whose hold on the subject can be dispelled by introducing less skewed educational programs or a different mode of socialization.

As Deleuze and Guattari point out, this distinction between the social and the psychic is difficult to sustain, since "there is no particular form of existence that can be labeled psychic reality."[6] In contrast to Reich's emphasis on fascism as a psychosexual disorder, they stress that desire is social in nature: "It is not possible to attribute a special form of existence to desire, a mental or psychic reality that is presumably different from the material reality of social production. Desiring-machines are not fantasy-machines or dream-machines, which supposedly can be distinguished from technical and social machines." Desire invests the entirety of the social field, thus the libido has no "need for mediation or sublimation," nor for any other psychic operation, in order to permeate all forms of social reproduction—even the most repressive and deadly.[7]

In 1977, five years after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*, German sociologist Klaus Theweleit published *Male Fantasies*, his seminal work on the psychology of the "white terror." Though Theweleit hadn't read *Anti-Oedipus* before he began writing *Male Fantasies*, the latter could in many ways be described as the sociological counterpart of the former. Echoing Deleuze and Guattari's argument for the coextension of rational and irrational forms, *Male Fantasies* sets out to describe the dialectical entanglement of social, political, and fantasy machines.

Examining the diaries written by members of the Freikorps—the German paramilitary units which refused to disarm after the WWI armistice—Theweleit couldn't help but notice that the word "communism" was never used to refer to a form of political economy entailing the collectivization of resources; rather, "communism" was synonymous with castration, with the fear of being emasculated and rendered powerless—politically as well as sexually. As he repeatedly points out, one cannot talk here about unconscious or repressed anxieties: the Freikorps men openly equate communism and the liberalization of gender roles with lawlessness and anarchy.

Recruited from the ranks of the defeated Imperial Army, the Freikorps men felt betrayed by Kaiser Wilhelm II, who abdicated in the aftermath of the November Revolution, and by the Weimar Republicans, who negotiated the armistice. But most importantly, they had returned to a country whose changes felt shocking: civil conflicts had given rise to multiple attempts to establish communist councils (Arbeiter und Soldatenräte) throughout Germany—in Kiel, Bremen, Braunschweig, and Würzburg.[8] Bavaria and Alsace had proclaimed themselves Soviet

In this Waffen SS recruitment poster, the nazi army is portayed slaying the Bolshevist dragon. The poster reads "Germany's victory means freedom for Europe."

Republics (on April 6, 1919 and November 8, 1918, respectively). The feminist demand for suffrage, which began in the Wilhelmine period, had in 1919 won women the right to vote, while the Weimar constitution consecrated equal pay, equal opportunity, and equal access to education. The Freikorps lore thus combined an element of truth—for the military class, war, however life-destroying, was a means of social reproduction, and the preservation of their own rank and privilege implied the preservation of certain social and gender hierarchies—with an element of delusion: As Theweleit puts it, they "experience communism as a direct assault on their genitals."[9]

Though seemingly counterintuitive, the conflation of women and mass unrest was a common staple of conservative discourse at the turn of the century. In his book *The Crowd* (*Psychologie des Foules*, 1895) Gustave le Bon had already addressed the crowd as a gendered subject: impulsive, irrational, susceptible, irresponsible, unpredictable. The crowd is assimilated to the primitive, the infantile, and the feminine, the preserve of "beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution."[10] A crowd cannot have political demands because, like women, slaves, or the insane, it exists in the same state as the animal, outside of politics and history. Riots, strikes, and mass movements are thus not an expression of legitimate grievances but a lawless howl that threatens the very fabric of orderly life.

The experience of industrialization was an experience of shock, to both the social and individual body. Here, the fear of mutilation, of having the inner body's (soft) entrails spilled by an industrial injury, is translated into the polarity between the chaotic formless masses and the armored (hard) drill formations of a military phalanx—a cipher for the fascist superbody.

But the assimilation of mass movements with floods, swamps, or pits of muck is not just a literary exercise, it's a political operation. What communism promised the underpayed and underfed working poor was an overhaul of social hierarchies; the revolt of the laboring class was—literally—a threat to the old barriers and entrenched privileges: communism pledged to engulf the old Prussian order, swallowing the lower ranks of the aristocracy that Freikorps recruits typically belonged to. Conflating lifestyle (the maintenance of rentier income) with survival, the Freikorps forged an imaginary identity between the dread of revolution and the dread of drowning and physical dissolution. But everything murky and watery is also a cipher for woman, which is why Theweleit asks to what extent this patriarchal organization of life adopts fascism in order to ensure its own survival.[11]

Relations between the sexes, Theweleit argues, are never just sexual, they are socially structured and controlled, "the object of law." *Male Fantasies* thus points to a certain type of male-female relation as a producer of fascist "life-destroying reality"[12]:

> A man doesn't have "this" sexuality and a woman "that" one. If it seems possible today to make empirical distinctions between male and female sexuality, that only proves that male-female relations of production in our culture have experienced so little real change for such a long time that structures have arisen whose all-pervasiveness tempts us into regarding them as specific to sex. But if male-female relations of production under patriarchy are relations of oppression, it is appropriate to understand the sexuality created by, and active within, those relations as a sexuality of the oppressor and the oppressed. If the social nature of such "gender-distinctions" isn't expressly emphasized, it seems grievously wrong to distinguish these sexualities according to the categories "male" and "female." The sexuality of the patriarch is less "male" than it is deadly, just as that of the subjected women is not so much "female" as suppressed, devivified.[13]

The Freikorps men hated women, particularly working-class ones. They feared being swallowed by their shrieks, engulfed by their hordes. These imaginary assaults justified all forms of real aggression. In their diaries, members of the Freikorps fictionalized the killing of women, describing in lurid detail how bullets and bayonets penetrated their bodies, how hand grenades turned living, breathing beings into a "bloody mass."[14] For order to be restored, women had to die gruesome deaths; only after all traces of their existence were gone could the world be made "safe and male again."[15]

Unlike the New Left, for whom sexual repression was not merely a characteristic of fascism but its very cause,[16] Theweleit didn't see genocide as the thwarted expression of inhibited sexual energies. His point was rather that the production of gender and sexuality are intimately tied to the content of anti-Semitism and overt racism—both before, during, and after the fall of the Weimar Republic. Fascist sexuality is not so much repressed as it is ideological: it idealizes virility and fertility as *political* imperatives.[17] Its tropes are worth revisiting not only because there is a continuity between every day sexism—for example, the culturally tolerated misogyny of expressions such as "I would fuck her brains out"[18]— and the Freikorps murderous frenzy; or because conflicts over sexual mores and gender roles have again become an decisive site for political struggle; but mostly because the question of gender is always instrumental in defining the "enemy," as the "act that brings the collective into being."[19]

The content of fascism is a national-social form of Darwinism. This is what lends it ideological coherence—it ties its racial policy to its patchy economic program. As

A woman is beaten by Wehrmacht soldiers and Ukranian nationalists during the Lviv pogroms, in 1941, Ukraine. Historians estimate that 4,000 Jewish people were murdered during the first pogrom, between June 30 and July 2, 1941.

Hitler allegedly said: "The basic feature of our economic theory is that we have no theory at all."[20] The only economic policy he did sustain was a lofty belief in inequality, since ruthless competition promoted the rise of "superior individuals." This was the domestic equivalent of his foreign policy, which was based on ruthless competition among nations. Social Darwinism is also the link in the otherwise bumpy ideological continuum between fascism and capitalism.

As Susan Buck-Morss points out, the imaginary of nation-states is "purely political."[21] The economy plays no role in it. But precisely because economic actors are not recognized as political agents, capitalism is "incapable of providing a code that will apply to the whole of the social field."[22] Instead, it sets in motion a deterritorializing machine plagued by contradictions: theoretically at least, the free movement of capital should lead to a corresponding free movement of workers, in which case capitalism, unable to sustain its mode of production, would dissolve into a different socio-historical figure. From this perspective, capitalism requires fascism to violently and artificially reterritorialize social and sexual mores. Immigrants, for instance, are the ideal capitalist subjects: most migrants on temporary work arrangements are not entitled to vote or to receive formal benefits, but even when working illegally they are still taxable through VAT. On the other hand, the abolition of immigration restrictions would eventually even out wages across the globe, and the labor supply would dry up in the places that exploit it the most.[23] This possibility explains the surge in nationalist rhetoric and the need to fix unmoored labor by reinstituting national boundaries. As long as capitalism remains able to recruit fascist rhetoric to wage war on the same underclass it feeds on, the two figures can happily coexist. But the balance is precarious, which is why liberal democracies tend to cultivate fascist fantasies whilst marginalizing fascist parties.

The reactionary modernism of the fascist state was at

once technologically progressive and socially conservative. In fascist fantasies, the lack of a totalizing social narrative is masked by the triangulation of potency, technology, and masculinity, expressed in the ideal figure of the male as totality. Capitalism shares the attributes of phallic manhood: it is bold, ambitious, and competitive. Consistent with this hidden gender dimension, only so-called productive labor is remunerated; unproductive labor—i.e., labor that does not yield a product, like domestic or informal labor—is simply appropriated.[24] To paraphrase Matteo Pasquinelli: capital can be regarded as an abstract machine, which, like any other machine, can be analyzed according to its inputs and outputs, and the divisions of labor it engenders.[25]

The notion of gender becomes an organizing category in all aspects of social life at roughly the time when nineteenth-century scientific anthropology ties distinct gender roles to differences in biology. Since the very notion of progress is grafted onto masculinity, the heightened anxiety about female emancipation is not just epiphenomenal: for the Freikorps the "red nurse," the woman who dared trespass onto the domain of the male (both politically, by fighting for socialism, and professionally, by performing medical functions) was a cipher for the total disintegration of the social. But this fantasy of the castrating female did not die with National Socialism—quite the contrary: it merged with it.

In the 1960s and '70s—ironically, the golden decades for social democracy—yearnings for lurid titillation found a ready-made outlet in Nazi fetishism. Tapping into the reservoir of sexual energy that fascism epitomized, "Nazisploitation" movies became a pop-culture staple. As Susan Sontag argued, fascism provides an obvious décor for the staging of violence and submission, and a recognizable storyline for the exercise of absolute power—which also feeds on sadistic fantasies that typically prey on the female body. The novelty, however, is that women are here both victim and victimizer: the supreme evil that National Socialism came to symbolize cannot be personified as male. Nazisploitation movies are filled with she-wolves, monstrous *torturers* with an insatiable sexual appetite. Though these depictions were extreme (read: pornographic), their diluted correlates trickled down to the mainstream as the trope of the sadistic female SS officer and its allegorical offspring, from "bunny boilers" to all other variations of the femme fatale hell-bent on destruction.[26] The tenacity of such imagery is also captured in the oxymoron "feminazi," popularized by Rush Limbaugh to undermine pro-choice activists. The term originates from a TV series called *Hitler's Daughter,* whose plot revolves around an attempt by a Nazi conspiracy to seize power in the US via a Manchurian candidate who is, in fact, Hitler's child. Because the Nazi-hunting heroes do not know who she is, all office-holding women come under suspicion. Here too, the message couldn't be clearer: "all ambitious women should be suspected of secretly being feminazis."[27] Defeating them at the polls is not enough, which is why Trump has made not-so-veiled calls for Hillary Clinton to be killed. Then as now, when sexuality adheres to a dominance-and-submission model, any challenge to the social hierarchy will be experienced as a "direct assault on your genitals."

Though fantasizing about forcing women to yield does not necessarily mean one votes conservative, there is a continuity between the sexualization of supremacy and the narratives that tie uneven distribution of wealth to economic growth: both see parity as an impediment to potency—the political correlate of dominance and submission is a society predicated on inequality.

Capital, as Shimshon Bichler and Jonathan Nitzan argue, is not a simple economic entity, but a symbolic quantification of power, whose logic is inherently differential. There is no such thing as "economic power"; nor is there "political power" that "somehow 'distorts' the economy." Instead, all social institutions and agents—from ideology and culture to organized violence, religion, and law; from ethnicity and gender to international conflicts, labor relations, manufacturing techniques, and financial organisms—hinge on the "differential level and volatility of earnings." As the authors point out, from this perspective we cannot discern "economic exploitation from political oppression." Instead, there is a dialectical entanglement of capital accumulation and social formation, through which " *power is accumulated as capital*."[28]

One could perhaps invert Lyotard's formula and say that every libidinal economy is political: gender is the value form of capitalism; sexuality is its mode of representation (men appear as money and power, women as beauty, youth, and sex appeal). The exaggerated masculinity of fascist fantasies is the magnified form of "normal" sexual norms, whose maleness already entails denying that anything coded as "feminine" could be a legitimate dimension of social and political experience. From this viewpoint, only male sexuality is "sexual," and all kinds of issues can be reframed as narratives of masculinity: the Left is seen as emasculated and lacking in libidinal energy; liberals are viewed as whiners; demands for inclusion are a symptom of (hysterical) oversensitivity; political correctness is castrating; the preoccupation with "local" politics is said to signal surrender and impotency. Teeming with male fantasies, the entertainment industry speculates that neither the Holocaust nor slavery would have happened if their victims had "manned up" and fought back (i.e., Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards* and *Django Unchained*).[29] These armored images of manhood also linger in fields as diverse as evolutionary biology (ideology by another name), with its naturalization of rape as evolutionary strategy,[30] and lifestyle trends, which echo hunter-gatherer fantasies (the Paleo diet, the biopolitics of attachment parenting). Feeding off the conflation between the digital revolution and Reagan's conservative

The 1975 Nazi exploitation movie, Ilsa the She Wolf of the SS, initiated a franchise of three sequels.

revolution, a certain type of subjectivity seems to have returned with a vengeance, grafting the markers of social Darwinism (competition for resources, survival of the fittest) onto software and information processing. This symbolic system, dripping with ill-disguised desire, finds its apex in the martialization of artificial intelligence, personified as a distilled form of white-maleness-without-white-men, even though the intelligence of "deep-learning" algorithms does not necessitate consciousness,[31] and the putative potential of the "cyborg" as a man-machine hybrid has become reality in the form of the fully responsive environment of the "smart city;" not in the over-explicit phallicism of a "Terminator-like figure."[32]

Epilogue

The defining move for the twentieth-century global order, Susan Buck-Morss argued, was the geopoliticization of communism: by forging an identity between communism and the Soviet Union, the Western Block could equate internal dissent (and constituencies as diverse as African-Americans, feminists, socialists, workers, ecologists, and pacifists) with treason, casting unionized labor as unpatriotic. In the US, to be a leftist was to be un-American. The geopoliticization of the protests that became known as the "Arab Spring" mirrors this strategy: it confines dissent to a specific geolocation, obscuring the continuity between these uprisings and other protest movements such as the Indignados and Occupy. But the demise of the USSR also dissolved the nexus between communism and the nation-state: resistance to capitalism can no longer be portrayed as a sign of Soviet intrusion. Once again social struggles are displaced onto the phantasmatic antagonism between the "Free World" and "Islamic Fundamentalism." "Wars on Terror" notwithstanding, this time around the masses do not want fascism; they want equality.

X

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1
Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* , 1933.

2
This question first appears in Spinoza: "Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" The latest iteration possibly being: "Why do those who would benefit from universal health care fight for its suppression?"

3
Quoted in Etienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 179.

4
Sami Khatib, "May Day School 2015: How do We Think about Fascism Today?," Ljubljana, April 30, 2015.

5
To this day, the security force responsible for protecting American kings—the presidential Secret Service—is also tasked with eliminating counterfeiters.

6
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 27.

7
Ibid., 30.

8
These councils were brutality repressed by the Freikorps, who executed circa 1,800 of their members and supporters.

9
Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 74.

10
Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* , 2nd ed. (London: Dunwoody, 1968), 15–44.

11
Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 89.

12
Ibid., 227.

13
Ibid., 221.

14
Ibid.

15
Barbara Ehrenreich, Foreword to Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, xiv.

16
Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism:Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* , (Princeton University Press, 2005)

17
Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory: Critical Perspectives on Fascist Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 212.

18
Ehrenreich, xv.

19
Susan Buck-Morss, *Dream World and Catastrophe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 9.

20
Hans-Joachim Braun, *The German Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990), 78.

21
Buck-Morss, *Dream World and Catastrophe* , 18. A case in point is the current European debate about the distinction between "refugees" and "migrants": because the violence and coercion resulting from economic conditions is not perceived as violence, people fleeing hunger or exploitation are denied the status of refugees.

22
Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* , 33.

23
At present, the survival of global capital depends on the Chinese Communist Party providing cheap, non-unionized labor for outsourced industries, whose low-cost products, in turn, meet the purchasing power of an increasingly impoverished Western working class.

24
This gendered division of labor is the household equivalent of the international division of labor, which hierarchizes the stages of manufacturing geographically.

25
Matteo Pasquinelli, "Capital Thinks Too: The Idea of the Common in the Age of Machine Intelligence," *Open! Commonist Aesthetics* , December 11, 2015 http://matteopasquinelli.com/capital-thinks-too/ .

26
It is worth noting that though women were implicated in Nazi war crimes, they were never allowed to join the all-male SS.

27
Brian E. Crim, "The Monstrous Women of Nazisploitation Cinema," in *Selling Sex on Screen: From Weimar Cinema to Zombie Porn* , eds. Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Catriona McAvoy (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 105.

28
Shimshon *Bichler* and Jonathan *Nitzan, Capital as Power* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 36–37.

29
Similarly, the French, we are told, could have stopped the Paris attacks if they'd been armed.

30
See Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

31
Even in its more realistic versions, as Orit Halpern notes, the current conception of deep learning is predatory: the world becomes a standing reserve of data to be greedily absorbed by pattern-recognizing algorithms. See Halpern, "The Smart Mandate," in *Nervous Systems: Quantified Life and the Social Question* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2015), 223.

32
Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 149.

Tony Wood

Some Theses on "Populism"

1. *Populism is in the air.* Establishment media outlets have struggled to make sense of the unaccustomed turbulence that has seized hold of politics in the US and UK this past twelve months. Trump, Sanders, Corbyn, Brexit: these things were not supposed to even stand a *chance* of happening. One term a great many pundits and analysts have fastened onto, like an analytical life jacket, is "populism." Columnists and political reporters in the US have described both Trump's and Sanders's campaigns as being fueled by "populist sentiment"; they are "two populist peas in a pod," "populism peddlers"—much like Corbyn, who according to the *Financial Times* has tapped into "a rising mood of populism."[1] Brexit, too, was interpreted both inside the UK and beyond it as part of a "populist backlash," a worrying harbinger of "nativist populism," and so on.[2] This rush to apply the populist label has several meanings, only a few of which have anything to do with the word itself.

2. *Populism is a cypher.* As a category of political analysis, the term is famously malleable, its definition so vague that it has been applied to a huge range of movements and phenomena, from Atatürk to Mao, Perón to Thatcher. Minimally, "populism" is supposed to involve a leader or party making direct appeals to "the people"—as if this were a strange thing for a politician or a party to do. Most attempts to list its identifying traits end up trapped in a circular logic: *x* movement is populist because it possesses *y* features, and we can classify *y* features as specific to populism because we have seen them in *x* movement. But what if this slipperiness is precisely the point? One of the more useful interpretations of the instability of the term remains that of the late Argentine political theorist Ernesto Laclau, who described populism not as an ideology but a discursive strategy, forged in the midst of crises in the ruling order. Amid this kind of breakdown, one or other social group might try to forge a new hegemonic bloc, and for this they would need to cobble together an ideological discourse capable of drawing in the different parts of their coalition. Laclau's work as a whole explored the politics of discursivity in a range of contexts, but his initial concern in the 1970s was to explain the uncanny successes of Peronism. As he put it then, "A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized."[3] Populism, for Laclau, is effectively the name for this strategy of articulation: the attempt to absorb and neutralize social antagonisms by appealing to the larger abstraction of "the people." But this also means that it can have no particular ideological or political content: it is not a system of beliefs, not an *-ism* at all, but a set of rhetorical maneuvers, deployed from behind any one of several masks. Its actual political substance, then, always comes from somewhere else.

3. *Populism is a floating signifier*. Since it need not refer to

Hollis Frampton, Spaghetti, 1964. From the series "Ordinary Pictures"

any specific political content, does the concept of populism serve any purpose at all? No and yes. Its usage in contemporary political discourse seems to be so broad as to announce its futility: in the last decade and a half, the *Economist*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal, Financial Times*, and others have applied the tag to figures as different as Silvio Berlusconi, Hugo Chávez, Vladimir Putin, Néstor Kirchner, Marine Le Pen, Evo Morales, Alexis Tsipras, and Viktor Orbán.[4] As if to prove the capaciousness of the concept, they have now done the same to Sanders, Trump, Corbyn, and Farage. In the US context, of course, "populism" has an actual historical referent: the agrarian leftist People's Party of the 1890s. Sanders's verbal attacks on Wall Street might hold some echo of the Populists' hostility to "the money power," but Trump's bizarre hate-vortex bears no substantive relation to their prairie progressivism (as opposed, say, to the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the mid-nineteenth-century Know-Nothings). What seems to be happening instead, at least rhetorically, is the extension to US domestic politics of what has long been standard practice for the Western mainstream media with regard to Latin America and Europe: the use of "populism" to describe politicians or governments that don't fit the standard mold. Indeed, this basic nonconformity, despite the many sharp ideological differences that actually divide them, is what unites "populists" in the establishment mind. "Populism," in other words, is the name for everything that falls outside the neoliberal consensus—a floating signifier for the disapproval of respectable opinion.

4. *Populism is a mirror*. The very emptiness and flexibility of "populism" is what makes it polemically useful to Western elites and opinion makers. It is a catch-all label for everything they dislike. It is predominantly a term of abuse. As Italian journalist Marco d'Eramo has pointed out, today "no one defines themselves as populist; it is an epithet pinned on you by your political enemies."[5] That being so,

d'Eramo argues in a neat reversal, "then the term populism defines those who use it rather than those who are branded with it." In that sense, the recurrent deployment of "populism" tells us more about those using it than about the phenomena it purports to describe. What had been an empty concept becomes a kind of trick two-way mirror, through which global elites think they are looking out at their enemies, when in fact they are seeing their own prejudices and fears reflected back to them in the form of assorted "populists."

5. *Populism is a screen*. Not just a term of abuse for ideas the neoliberal consensus finds uncongenial, "populism" also actively misdescribes—and thus attempts to conceal—what has been happening in Latin America, Europe, the US, and elsewhere. By labelling so much of what lies outside the accepted spectrum as "populism," Western elites and the pundit class lump together political developments that are fundamentally dissimilar, depicting them as equivalent or symmetrical challenges to the existing setup from left and right—and as if the differences between left and right don't matter. But the underlying logic of these tendencies is not the same at all. To take only current examples from the US and UK, the movements of which Sanders and Corbyn have become the figureheads represent the return of a politics that consciously seeks to undo systemic inequalities. This has involved a reassertion of the language of class, not as a deterministic predictor of political sympathies, but as a coherent vocabulary for describing different but nonetheless shared experiences of exploitation. It has also involved a partial rehabilitation of the New Deal in the US and ideas of state ownership in the UK—both gestures at a kind of social-democratic statism thought to have been banished by the combined efforts of Reagan and Thatcher, Clinton and Blair. Trump and the Brexiteers, by contrast, couching their campaigns in the language of patriotism and sovereignty, are resolutely uninterested in such policies, veering instead towards a heightened neoliberalism—effectively promising voters even bigger doses of what has been harming them, in a kind of reverse homeopathy. Behind the fog created by the term "populism" lie political alternatives that lead in very different directions. This is one of the other purposes served by the term's recurrent usage: to hide from public view the fact that such meaningful choices are even possible.

6. *"Populism" against "the people."* The term "populism" has possessed all these overlapping functions—cypher, floating signifier, mirror, screen—to varying degrees for decades now. But its use has increased noticeably in the years since the 2008 financial crisis. The spread of recession and, with it, a widening array of discontents, is surely part of the reason for this. In the context of a stubborn global downturn, with unemployment, precarious employment, and poverty multiplying, the frequency with which elite and mainstream media deploy the term "populism" betrays a mounting nervousness about potential challenges from below. The use of "populism" is designed to meet this elite need for ideological defenses: it is a rhetorical weapon to be used against "the people" as and when they show signs of resistance to their continuing expropriation and exploitation. Here, d'Eramo is surely right to note a correlation between the increased use of the term "populism" and the rollout of distinctly antipopular austerity programs across much of the industrialized world. Any opposition to these policies has been painted as irresponsible demagoguery: "You want health care for everyone? You are a populist. You want your pension linked to inflation? But what a bunch of populists! You want your children to go to university, without carrying a lifelong burden of debt? I knew you were a populist on the quiet!"[6] When elites talk about "populism," then, what they are really expressing are their own antipopular convictions. "Populism" is a preemptive anathema on "the people" as a collective political actor.

7. *"The people" against "populism."* In seeking to head off any assertion of collective popular agency, the world's elites are trying to conjure away a shape-shifting ghost. They are not wrong to be frightened: something is changing out there, beyond the walls of their socioeconomic Green Zones. The turmoil that has gripped world politics in the last few years has, among its many other consequences, thrown up increasingly urgent attempts to recompose or redefine a collective political subjecthood. Who exactly are "the people" now—who might the category include or exclude, and what difference might these definitions make to what it can then do? Occupy's "We Are the 99 percent" and the Arab Spring's *ash-sha'b* represent wishfully maximal aggregations; others have sought out the nuclei of a new collectivity in transformative moments of protest, as in the Greek and Spanish anti-austerity movements, which had hoped to turn Syntagma Square and Puerta del Sol into spaces of constitutive power. There have been, too, projects driven from above, which have tended to take more divisive forms, based on an assertion of ethnic over civic or other kinds of belonging: Orbán's vision of a Greater Hungary, Modi's Hindutva supremacism, to some extent Putin's embrace of a Russian nationalism entwined with Orthodoxy. As well as blurring distinctions between left and right, the use of the term "populism" obscures the very real differences between, on the one hand, top-down bids to set the boundaries of the collective, and on the other, those that are driven from below, by encounters between popular protests, mass movements, labor unions, and other organizations; between elite simulacra of "the people" and the political and social experimentation that can set a real one in motion.

8. *"You can't even imagine us."* The post-2008 economic crisis has been one of the motors behind these various attempts at political recomposition. But they are not simply a reflex response to short-term material decline: they have emerged out of a longer-run process of social and political

decomposition, which brought the hollowing-out of the structures of representative democracy across the industrialized world: declining party membership, sluggish voter turnout, a broad sense of disengagement between rulers and governed.[7] In the West these scleroses could be seen as symptoms of deindustrialization and the unmooring of financialized economies from the social landscape, taking with them secure jobs and swathes of the welfare state. Similar crises of representation have struck in countries where voters didn't have these things in the first place, and have wearied of the local imitations of Western liberal democracy: after the wave of "Color Revolutions" in Eastern Europe came the Arab Spring, as well as the 2011 protests in Russia against the seemingly infinite extension of Putin's reign. One of these demonstrations featured a slogan—apparently coined by the poet Pavel Arsen'ev—that summed up the crisis of existing forms of democratic legitimation in a single phrase with a double meaning: " *Vy nas dazhe ne predstavliaete*"—meaning both "You don't even represent us" and "You can't even imagine us." The gap between systems of representation and the unmapped collectivities they misserve is not only a failure of the imagination, however: it is built into the structures of representative democracy itself, in the particular ways modern capitalist states have chosen to mediate the popular will. It is these mediations that have been slowly undermined over the past few decades, raising the specter of a sudden avalanche of popular forces they were designed to contain. What is at stake in attempts to redefine "the people" is partly the fate of these mediating structures, but also the forms of what might in the future come to replace them. Behind elite fears of "populism" looms the threatening, but as yet still dim, possibility of a larger recasting of political power as a whole—what it is used for, by whom, and for whose benefit.

9. *The people is not the sum of its parts*. One of the most glaring symptoms of the current political turbulence is the inability of established liberal-democratic structures to put out the fires flickering at their feet. Again, this is partly because these are more crisis-ridden times, and partly the product of complacency or incompetence; but it is also rooted in the widening mismatch between hollowed-out political forms and elusive, multiform collectivities. These have been given a variety of names—the people, the masses, the multitude, the precariat; in a sense, the very multiplication of concepts points to an immanent plurality. What we call this collective actor will depend on why we are talking about it; who it is will vary according to what it does. The mechanisms of Western liberal democracy find this ambiguity unbearable. The entire electoral process is based on slicing "the people" into discrete, identifiable blocs, clearly labelled according to specific geographic and sociological markers—with campaign messages duly tailored to white males in Kansas, middle-class homeowners in Northampton, Latinas in Nevada, and so on. The underlying pattern of political mobilization this is based on works according to an additive logic: focus groups find out what will pull in one set of voters, then another one, then another. The Clinton campaign slogan "I'm with Her" expresses the essence of this logic: rather than naming or identifying a meaningful collective of supporters, it instead summons one individual after another to pledge allegiance to the candidate. The real disparities or commonalities between the concrete people who may or may not be voting are of no interest here, as long as there are enough of them, taken together. This is politics as arithmetic, a monotonous summing of quantities. But given that contemporary societies are not made up of such clearly identifiable and predictable actors—given the complexities and cross-cutting forms of belonging that characterize so many people's actual lives—it's not surprising that such calculations are so often confounded.

10. *Algorithms for the people*. For the Left, the problems of building a coalition that could carry out a transformative social and political breakthrough have often been presented as similarly additive ones: how do we get $x + y + z$ to sign up for the revolution? (While avoiding factional splits by j, k, and *I[Marxist]*?) Hito Steyerl has discussed this as a problem of montage—at the programmatic level, "in the form of inclusions and exclusions based on subject matter, priorities and blind spots," but also at the organizational level, through "concatenations or conjunctions of different interest groups, NGOs, political parties, associations, individuals or groups." This kind of political montage, however, carries clear risks: "The additive *and* of the montage is far from innocent and unproblematic," she argues; "what if the *and* should really be *or*, *because*, or even *instead of*?"[8] Steyerl is effectively questioning the strategic value of arithmetical thinking, of the accumulation of known political integers, suggesting instead that room be made for other kinds of logical operation. Perhaps, indeed, what is needed is more of an algebraic understanding, capable of combining unknown social and political quantities, their dimensions and shapes uneven and unstable, now swelling with the unity of broad consensus, now jagged with the antagonism of class conflict. This kind of political algebra would involve the retrieval of older alliances and solidarities, in line with the term's original derivation from the Arabic *al-jabr*, "the restoration of broken parts." But it would also mean writing out new equations, making "the people" anew every time we seek an answer.

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6
Ibid., 27.

7
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8
Hito Steyerl, "The Articulation of Protest," in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press/e-flux journal, 2012), 78, 85.

Jonas Staal

Transdemocracy

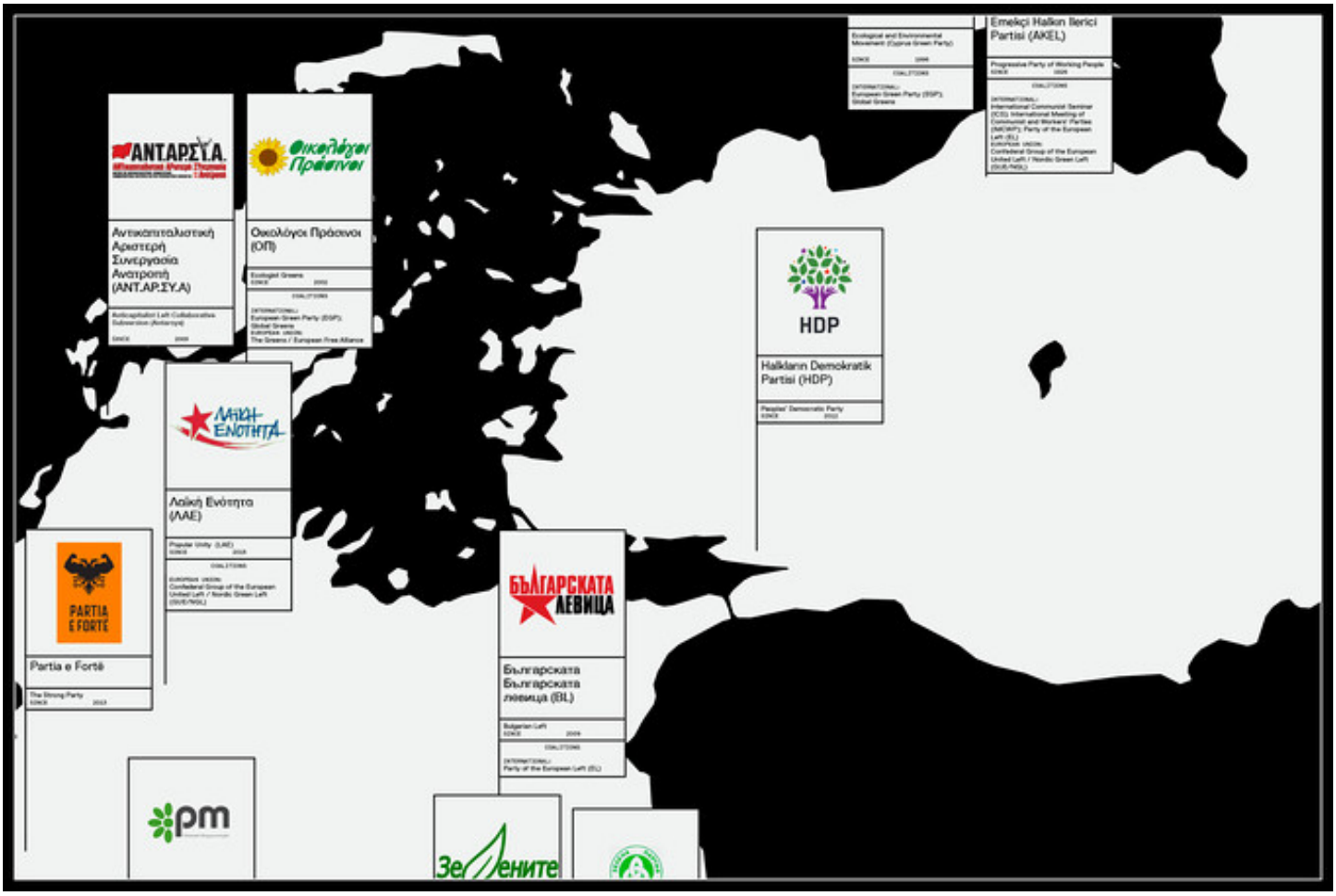
This text was originally written for the e-flux project Superhumanity, in response to the 2016 Istanbul Design Biennial, which was entitled "Are We Human?"

The EU Buffer State

Asking ourselves the question "Are we human?" in the context of Istanbul today forces us to confront the inhuman design of the European Union. Only a few years ago, Turkey was still in the race to become a new EU member state, a bid that was blocked due to, on the one hand, the regime's brutal crackdown on press and any other form of opposition, and on the other, the strengthening wave of European xenophobia that distrusted a future member state in which Islam was the predominant faith.[1] Instead, in the context of the current refugee crisis, Turkey has been turned into an EU buffer state: the outer frontier of the supranational project which now operates as the new extralegal border. Only 72,000 preselected Syrian refugees, out of the 2,700,000 currently in Turkey, have been allowed passage through.[2]

This transformation of Turkey into an EU buffer state comes at a high price. First, there is the three billion euros that the EU has handed over to Erdoğan's regime to stop the flow of asylum seekers. The second cost is that of our supposed "humanity." Creating a political dependency on the regime of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) means that the EU is directly implicated in the legitimization of a regime that has long waged a ruthless war against its Kurdish population in Bakûr (Northern Kurdistan, in southeast Turkey), while shamelessly persecuting all civil opposition: from activists and comedians to journalists and academics, to its opposition in parliament, whose immunity from prosecution was recently lifted.[3] And after the failed military coup of July 15, lists for a large-scale purge of the legal and academic professions were ready to be deployed instantly. It should not surprise us that Erdoğan has occasionally sidestepped the messy work of caring for refugees and proceeded directly to shooting them instead, all in order for the EU to keep its claim as protector of human rights intact by simply outsourcing violations to its buffer state.[4]

The three billion euros handed over to the regime perversely suggests that it provides some kind of safe haven. It might not have been intended to bolster Erdoğan's ever growing military apparatus, but it does provide for its ethical legitimacy. The EU sponsors regional human rights for its member states while sponsoring bullets for its buffer state. And while ultranationalist and



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fascist parties within the EU take every occasion to frame Erdoğan's regime as "Islamofascist," the authoritarian governments of Hungary (led by Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party, which already in 2014 declared its model to be that of "illiberal democracy") and Poland (which changed its judiciary overnight after the Law and Justice Party won elections in 2015) effectively emulate the Turkish regime, rather than distinguishing themselves from it.[5] The EU's buffer state shows what we can expect when the governments of the French Front National and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPO) take charge. The buffer state is not an exception to the EU: it is the prototype of the new European authoritarianism to come.

Transdemocracy Rising

The design of Erdoğan's EU buffer state is a paradigm through which we can understand the changing design of the European Union as a whole. While ever growing ultranationalist and fascist parties within the EU pretend that the Erdoğan regime is their nemesis, little differentiates them. The abuse of the "War on Terror" to implement systematic racist administrations, the disregard of an independent judiciary, and the relentless drive to isolate if not simply eliminate the opposition is common to far-right regimes on both sides of the Union's border. The annual trips of representatives of European ultranationalist parties to a personal audience at the Kremlin are a further sign of how the far-right is uniting.[6]

But there is a counterforce to the Erdoğan regime as well, one that does not simply oppose its current rulers, but questions the very structures of power the regime represents. It is not by chance that it is the People's Democratic Party (HDP) that led the Erdoğan regime to lift parliamentary immunity. Ever since its founding in 2012, HDP representatives have been targeted by the Erdoğan regime as members of a party with links to "terrorist" organizations, and much of the harassment and disappearances of its representatives and members, the campaigns of intimidation and even bombing of the party's headquarters, have been revealed as having links to the regime.[7] This oppression has only worsened since the party endured the regime's violence through two elections, in June and November 2015, when the HDP managed to pass one of the world's highest electoral

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thresholds of 10 percent both times.[8]

So what exactly does the supposed "terrorism" of the HDP consist of? The first charge relates to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a guerrilla struggle against what it considers as the Turkish colonization of Northern Kurdistan since the PKK's founding in 1978. That the HDP strives for the protection and recognition of the political and cultural rights of ethnic minorities—such as Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, Yazidis, and Roma peoples[9] —and is partly inspired by the political philosophy of PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan has proven enough for the regime to declare the HDP and PKK one and the same.[10] Nevertheless, membership and voter turnout has proven that the HDP has the potential to unite a radically diverse constituency consisting of social groups that until now were left a political vacuum: progressive Turks as much as progressive Kurds; religious constituencies as well as secular ones; rural traditionalists and urban youth.[11] HDP co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ describes the attempt to create a party that could unite these various social segments in the face of increasing authoritarianism:

> The HDP was established as the party of all oppressed and all peoples. All factions find a voice in the HDP … It is difficult to bring together sections of society so different from each other, but as the HDP we always believed in a unified movement of the oppressed in these lands. That is why the HDP was established, so our success and effect on society is a result of this unifying power.[12]

The HDP mediates between the imprisoned PKK leader Ocalan and the regime, and also directly engages with Ocalan's political philosophy. For these reasons it would be easy to suggest that the HDP and PKK were indeed one and the same. But the fact remains that the HDP itself is not an armed movement. It wishes to achieve what it refers to as new forms of "democratic autonomy" on a nationwide level, through a combination of parliamentary representation and intersectional grassroots mobilization.[13] And this is the real "terror" that Erdoğan fears: the combination of emancipatory ideology and popular mobilization that drives the HDP's agenda for democratic autonomy, women's and LGBT+ rights, and radical

ecology. In its political program, the HDP describes its ideal for an intersectional "we":

> We are women, We are youth, We are the rainbow, We are children, We are defenders of democracy, We are representatives of all identities, We are defenders of a free world, We are protector of the nature, We are builders of a safe life economy, We are workers, We are laborers, We are the guarantor of social rights.[14]

Erdoğan doesn't fear an opponent who merely wants to usurp his power; rather, he fears one who rejects the very organization of power that his regime represents. In other words, Erdoğan's biggest dream is for the HDP to come to parliament armed to the teeth, for this would allow him to dismiss the opposition easily. But the HDP's agenda is one that aims to challenge the design of power all together.[15]

What the HDP describes as "democratic autonomy" cannot be achieved through parliamentary elections in a nation-state alone. Instead, democratic autonomy aims at a new ideal of democratic self-governance that takes multiethnic and multireligious municipal constituencies as its political foundation.[16] This is what the HDP refers to as the "local assemblies in our neighborhoods," which it considers the foundation of a future decentralized network of self-governing municipalities that could effectively resist the increasing centralization of power by the Erdoğan regime.[17] The aim is to establish a decentralized confederation of self-governing neighborhoods and municipalities, represented in regional assemblies within a democratic Turkish state. This is a "dual-power" vision, consisting of parliamentary representation on one hand, and local assembly-based representation on the other[18]:

> The party wants to shift from Turkey's current centralized structure to a highly decentralized one, with elected regional assemblies that incorporate the principles of "self-administration" and representation of "all ethnic identities." HDP-advocated new Turkey should be based on the equality of all peoples and religions, and should signal the end of state nationalism.[19]

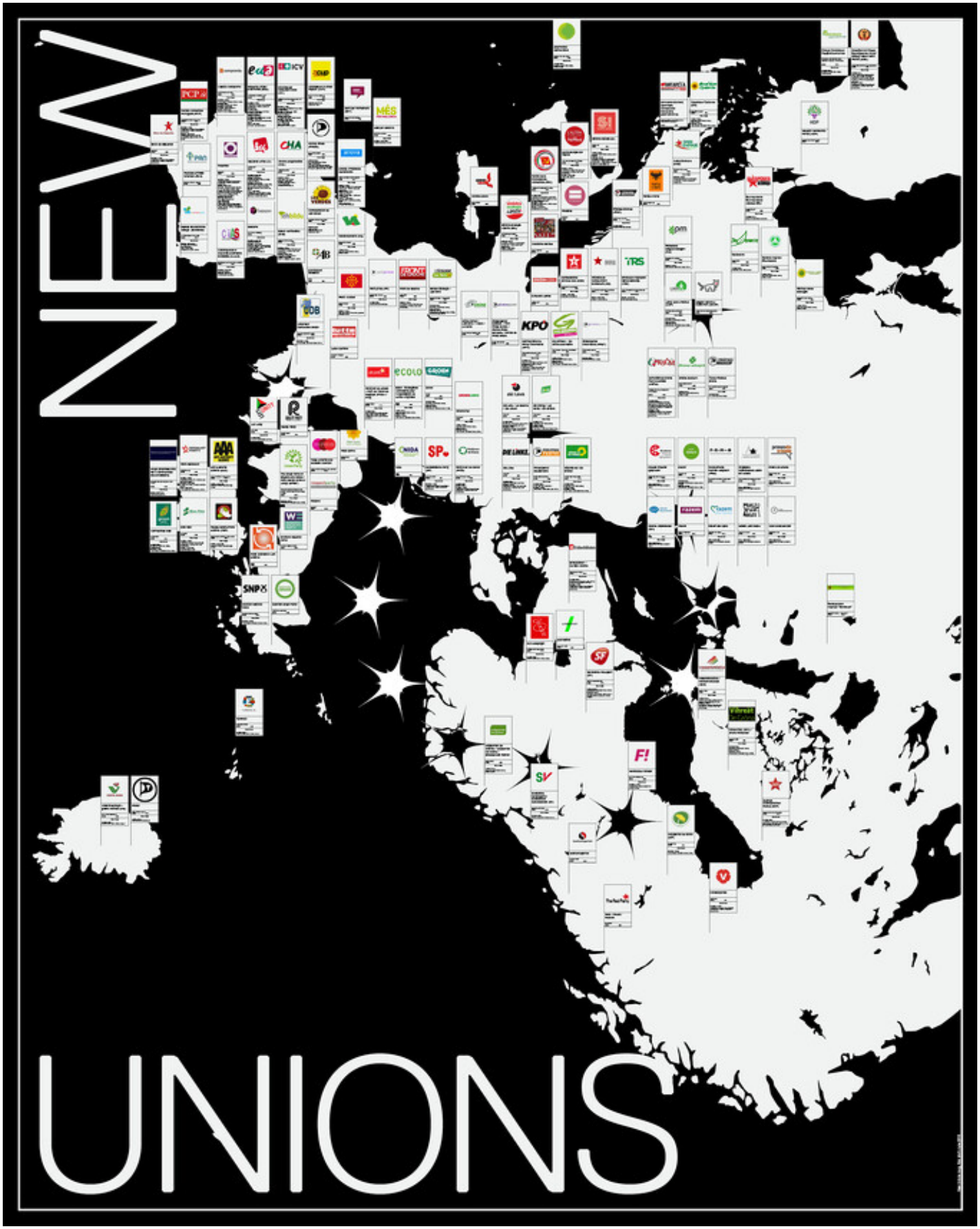
The HDP requires that 50 percent of its representatives be women and 10 percent of its membership come from LGBT+ communities. In this way the HDP takes responsibility for the structural recognition of a plurality of political subjects, rather than catering to a specific ethnic group.[20] Essentially, the HDP is a transitional party: on one hand, it aims to "transition" politics from an identitarian foundation to an intersectional foundation; and on the other, it aims to transfer state power to local municipalities in order to make the project of democratic autonomy a reality. The goal is not to take power as a party, but to establish—through the party—a confederation of local assembly-based structures of self-governance. It is this paradigm of democratic autonomy that is articulated in the HDP's "We," which breaks with the repressive identitarian nationalist politics that has plagued Turkey ever since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The HDP's vision opens a realm for a new diversified culture of the demos—or, in plural, *demoi*—to emerge.

It is this shift from the politics of nationalism and statism to a politics of the demoi and democratic autonomy that reveals the ideological frontline we in Europe face as well. If the Erdoğan regime is the equivalent of Orbán's authoritarianism in Hungary, or the Law and Justice Party's shameless takeover of the judicial system in Poland, or the regimes-to-come of the Front National and the Freedom Party, then the equivalent of the HDP are the new forms of political parties and pan-European platforms emerging from the continent's crises: from the rise of Podemos, which has replaced the "party" with the "circle," to the Icelandic Pirate Party's support of a new crowd-sourced constitution; from the rotating co-presidencies of Catalunya's Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) to the project for a new borderless Europe propagated by the Swedish Feminist Initiative.[21] In the same spirit as the HDP, these movements have interrogated the very structures of power they are up against, refusing to replicate the oppressions of their opponent. They no longer take the form of the party, state, or capital—they are the demoi of a rising transdemocratic movement. That is why Yüksekdağ, well aware that she stands on this new frontline, generously said:

> Given the crisis of the capitalist system, we see that suppressed people in Europe are also seeking alternatives. That is how Syriza and Podemos emerged … In an increasingly connected world, all these social movements influence each other and are connected. The victory of Syriza in neighboring Greece influenced the workers of our country.[22]

New Unions

The crises of the European Union are amplified in the crisis of its buffer state on the Bosphorus. We are confronted with two competing scenarios: on one hand, authoritarianism, racism, and fascism; and on the other, new intersectional forms of democratic autonomy and transdemocracy.[23] The first road is one we have walked many times before: it is that of regression in the form of brutal economic exploitation and ultranationalist rule. Regimes and parties across Europe are lining up to follow



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this historic example. The second road is one we have hesitated to walk many times, for it is one with an uncertain outcome.

In the past we have called this road "revolutionary socialism" or "internationalism." It has left its mark all over world history, from the Paris Commune to the early Russian soviets, from pan-African liberation movements to the alliance of workers and students in May '68. Today, social movements such as the Gezi Park uprising and Nuit Debout in France are the sparks that remind us of its promise of egalitarianism and collective emancipation. The HDP's gesture of solidarity towards progressive movements in Greece and Catalunya, Basque Country and Spain, shows us the possibilities for new transdemocratic alliances— *new unions*—and raises hopes for forms of being-human that cannot be reduced to a degraded humanity that sells us regional human rights under the auspices of authoritarian regimes.[24]

The question of whether the HDP's new political paradigm of democratic autonomy can be shared across Europe needs of course to be addressed. One cannot negate the specificity of the history, geography, and culture that led to a complete rejection of the nation-state in a region where its construct is interlinked with a long history of colonization, one-party rule, and religious doctrine. Nonetheless, the HDP's transitional-party strategy—moving power from government to municipalities, while remaining faithful to larger ecology of new transdemocratic movements throughout Europe—initiates a process that can help us *unionize anew*.

This process revolves around the possibility of a self-questioning form of politics, one that does not take power for granted, but ceaselessly interrogates its very foundations. As Judith Butler wrote, this process seeks to "devise institutions and policies that actively preserve and affirm the unchosen character of open-ended and plural cohabitation."[25] While one union is disintegrating, the possibility of a new union is right in front of our eyes, ready to be embraced. The HDP and its allies tell us loud and clear: we collapse or we unionize. Europe will be transdemocratic, or it will not be at all.

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I would like to thank Sven Lütticken, Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, Renée In der Maur and Younes Bouadi for their support in writing this article. My gratitude goes to iLiana Fokianaki, founder and director of State of Concept in Athens, where on June 21 2016—together with Despina Koutsoumba, Quim Arrufat, Maria Hlavajova, Angela Dimitrakaki and Van Gerven Oei—we began to unionize anew.

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At the New World Summit in Rojava in October 2015, Katerin Mendez, a representative of the Swedish Feminist Initiative (F!), gave a lecture on the concept of intersectionality as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, in relation to the work of her own party as well as to the Kurdish women's movement. Mendez defined "intersectional analysis" as a way "to see how rights, opportunities and the ability to influence society actually look like for different groups." See https://vimeo.com/162675069 .

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For Podemos in its own words, see Eduardo Maura, "Europe needs to change—and using grassroots democracy is how we do it," *The Guardian*, October 13 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/13/europe-new-politics-grassroots-resistance-podemos-syriza .

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The concept of transdemocracy emerged through a conversation among Renée In der Maur, Dilar Dirik, and philosopher Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei. It takes Ocalan's concept of democratic autonomy and other related forms of nonstate self-governance and turns them into a methodology—a series practices of transitional politics.

24
See also the debate "We, The People of Europe," held on June 2, 2016 at the conference "Re:Creating Europe" in De Balie, Amsterdam. During the debate I proposed an artistic campaign entitled *New Unions* to several organizations and practitioners whose work is related to the concept of transdemocracy, including Slawomir Sierakowski (Krytyka Polityczna), Costas Lapavitsas (Institute for New Economic Thinking), and Angela Richter (theater artist).

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