

On being left after repression

By Mercedes Bunz & the Cheerful Destructive Character
London.

Drama in five acts.

Act One.

(Old theatre. Stage sparsely lighted. Dark red curtains. As it is just for rehearsal the theatre isn't heated. One can see the breath in the air while speaking.)

(Female speaker enters the stage. Waits. Nothing happens. Auditorium is dark and empty. Finally starts talking with a rhetoric gesture, fairy tale style.)

1 Precondition

Inspired by the young and cheerful destructive character of Walter Benjamin¹, this is the set of the following approach: everything must be thought anew, and everything is allowed to be thought. The precondition of this is, of course, that there is something new, something we have a problem to describe, observe, get at, handle, understand, act in. Therefore, new ways have to be found. The obscure object of desire I am talking about is clearly the left, in crisis; also the 21st century asking for its own, new signature - I guess I am right in assuming that in the last couple of years it wasn't only me who has been waiting impatiently for something new to happen, bitterly unhappy and bored to death.

(Waiting for contradiction the speaker is looking a bit timid at the audience. Audience is empty, hence quiet. Speaker is relieved.)

Hence, the existing theory doesn't mean a thing. Not at all. The architectural structure of left thinking, let's put it on hold for a moment. All resources of Marxism - the worker, the revolution, the strike, the state and even the social question -, all may be pointless, we have to have a look. And just for the record, I hand in all the poststructuralist preconditions as well.

There are, however, some principles which clearly dictate this cheerful destruction: it has to come up with a theory that makes sense in the 21st century and in Europe - we are not to import the revolution by conditions borrowed from somewhere else; it can still be recognised as a left political approach, from which it makes a difference to the capitalistic approach to power, life, work and happiness.

Leading us to the following four questions: -1- What is the capitalistic logic of the 21st century, how does capitalistic power affect us here, today? -2- What of our armoury was getting useless and why? -3- How to rise different and today? -4- How to trick capitalism and live a left life?

2 Gesture

Start making sense: This gesture is very widespread now. It is contemporary, and sort of leftish. It is characterized by the decision to leave the actual setting, to end the dialogue, to stop waiting, waiting for some acknowledgement, or history to make up its mind, for example.

¹ Benjamin, W., 'The Destructive Character.' In: Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, Harvard University Press 2005, pp. 541-542.

Defending the idea of a university against its crucial transformation into a plain, hazard-free administration for which students have to pay for (a lot), Alexander Garcia Düttmann² invoked a strategy of rupture and affirmation, with affirmation being a notion that flares up in his work every now and then, and now evermore. Within political philosophy and Marxism, Peter Hallward calls for a new political actuation via 'Politics of Prescription'³. Not very far from that, we find the small, smart semiotext 'The Coming Insurrection'⁴ of 'The Invisible Committee' that also pushes for starting instead of waiting, or the approach of John Holloway⁵ asking to change the world without taking power. The small beautiful manuscript 'On the gesture of abandonment' of my friend Christian Töpfer is coming to the same conclusion, and behind his left shoulder one can see a castle in the French countryside, in it a commune of theory interested choreographers debating it, too.

Even though the tasks and takes might differ, or the ideas are pointing in the same direction: where exactly to take it from here. A gesture is shared: the belief that a contemporary approach has to be created out of an autopoietic moment and move.

(Walks slowly over to an installation that becomes visible. It is 'Here and There' of Marc Camille Chaimowicz, 1978, boards, photographs, text, paints. Positions herself in front of it.)



[Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Here and There, 1978]

² Düttmann, A. G., '...and...end.... Exaggeration and Politics.' In: Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *Philosophy of Exaggeration*. Continuum 2007, pp 65-75. And: Düttmann, A. G., 'Recognition of a Change.' In: Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *Visconti. Insights into Flesh and Blood*. Stanford, University Press 2009, pp. 110-131.

³ Hallward, P., 'The Politics of Prescription.' In: South Atlantic Quarterly 2005 104(4), pp. 769-789.

⁴ Invisible Committee: The Coming Insurrection. MIT Press 2009.

⁵ Holloway, J., Change the World without taking Power. Pluto Press 2005.

In order to exist, this autopoietic moment needs to think and argue in a style that is traversed, or let me say 'informed' by its gesture: building up, and not tearing down, i.e. leaving the old left 'thinking against' attitude in order to transform critique. Instead of opposing it is carving parts of philosophical systems, maybe sometimes even kidnap or steal them – (*smiling to the audience*) – in order to re-group them and build something new. Also, it exchanges a close reading with something one would rather call a 'being closely informed by', like a friendly spectre who guides ones thinking.

3 From body to will, from exclusion to inclusion

(Walks over to the other side whereby another installation becomes visible. The artist collective Claire Fontaine's Untitled (2008) a series of black flags hung from gardening tools, displaying texts by Gilbert Simondon.)



[Image: Claire Fontaine, Untitled (2008)]

If the questions are: How to rise different? How act? How assemble? How organize? Then it is interesting to ask: What is it that does allow for this? And where is it that are we looking for it?

Obviously an autopoietic approach of affirmation shifts the focus of political theory, its pivot, from the traditional notion of the body of society to focus on an explicit active moment like willing or acting. We do not want to count. Vertical to the line of political theory that leads from Hobbes to Montesquieu to Rancière⁶ and deals with the principles of the body of society, we want to make a difference, to act, and we are willing to leave the politics of representation behind.

Instead of controlling the import and export at the borders of the body of society, the political figure of a 'we' is introduced, a 'we' that invites you openly to join, to start,

⁶ Hobbes, T., *Leviathan*. Oxford University Press 2008; Montesquieu, C., *The Spirit of Laws*. Cambridge University Press 1989; Rancière, J., *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*. University of Minnesota 1998.

become part: affirmation instead of representation. Most explicit here is Peter Hallward's project 'The will of the people'⁷, a text in which he emphasizes again and again that the will is inclusive, noticeably also in moments where it is given anyhow like 'inclusive process of collective self-determination'. Imagine it like a dancing crowd moving to the beat, and you can decide yourself if you count yourself in to move on up, or opt out.

(Stage gets illuminated by a disco ball that is lightened by a strobe. The sound of Underground Resistance, Sonic EP, 1990, 'Eye of the Storm' is becoming louder.



[Image: Underground Resistance, Sonic EP (1990) including Eye Of The Storm– music: [here](#)]

Speaker starts moving to the music, and is joined by more and more other dancers. They start to rave, a 'we' becomes visible with most people dancing, some together, some apart, some are just standing with the music; people join, leave, and towards the end carefully dissolve the 'we', with a handful of people standing together in the music till the end, then stroll off stage.

⁷ Hallward, P., 'The will of the people: notes towards a dialectical voluntarism.' In: Radical philosophy 2009 (155), pp. 17-29.

Speaker alone again, turns around, and obviously listens to something in the back of the stage, starts talking to it.)

Yes, I know that you are waiting. Relax. You want to make room, you need fresh air and open space. But you always see a way and a crossroad anywhere, my dear cheerful destructive character. Don't be too blithely, otherwise the destruction will take over yourself. Remember last time? We need to be a bit careful, we might have to obliterate some traces of destruction.

Just a sec, no, I didn't forget Christian Töpfner's project⁸, who debates with his choreographers an open 'we': 'You and me, we start it, and then other people join, or do it themselves, with others or not, and so on...' You, my dear, had the nerve to forthwith call it 'mini-revolution'.

(Turns back to the audience.)

4 On the structure of a political will

He is right. It is about time for a little destruction. Even though the cheerful destructive character and me, we are both sure, people will get worried or won't get it, they will call it 'old school', or 'romantic', and warn you 'don't do', we both think it is necessary. We need a shift, a rather big one, several shifts to be precise. As Rosa Luxemburg⁹ already knew, in order to keep left politics alive, this thing 'left' needs to move - and by now it is a whole theoretical architecture that needs to be moved. That's what makes it so exhausting. We have to make space, we have to move a whole house. We're not just inviting a new flatmate in or look out a different window or so.

You've witnessed the beginning already, let's follow the train of thought from there. The first step is to shift the political thinking from the problem of the body to the call: 'Include yourself, and you have to include yourself to change exclusion', a re-focus that troubles political theory at the moment anyhow. We all know that the traditional bind between territory and the people is falling apart. We do not live in one place anymore. Political theory therefore needs to adjust itself anew, and one way of doing that is to refocus the moment of the political from the body of society to the political will. With the body of society, we know there is one, it may have cancer or not, but we just debate about its best structure. We don't have to establish it, different to the political will. The will is a call.

(iPhone rings. Looks who it is.)

Sorry. Would you excuse me for just a minute?

⁸ Töpfner, C., *On the Gesture of Abandonment. How to become a dancer...*, London, Goldsmith College 2007.

⁹ Luxemburg, R., *The Mass Strike*. London, Bookmarks 1986; Luxemburg, R., *Leninism or Marxism?* Leeds, Square One Publications 1996.

Hi Christian. How are you, how is Graz? Oh, you've listened to us online, that's nice.

Um.

Yes, your right.

Um.

I see. Sure, I see the problem. Yes, I agree, in terms of the political will being left can't be like all-inclusive holidays for your good middle-class consciousness. Shall we ask for two militant references, or do you think it is enough if the people have to name three dead anarchists as an acceptance test? (*Laughing.*)

(*Listens.*)

I have an idea. Remember when we spoke last week about Alexander Garcia Düttmann's recent talk at the 'Future of Pedagogy' seminar at the ICA? Let me quickly look if I can find his text, I think he mailed it to me.

(*Goes to a laptop and searches.*)

Here it is, 'Ici on aime les nomes propres'¹⁰. He talked about the fact that to enter philosophy means saying 'yes' to a world. You cannot read a little bit of Hegel, and then a little bit of Kant or Deleuze, well, of course you can, but that isn't understanding philosophy. In order to understand philosophy, you must enter a world, whereby you have to overcome a certain resistance thinking things through. It isn't easy, and it also is not guaranteeing you anything particular.

We can say that becoming political is a similar gesture. Being left can't be a taster course, or as Alex put it, it must become *the* world, and he created this wonderful sentence: 'A world as if it were *the* world.' For sure, as with philosophy, being left isn't easy.

Yes, you're right, several philosophical problems cast summersaults here. Interesting, eh? Are you home tomorrow, and we meet up on Skype to debate this further? Okay, see you then. No, I think I must be home by 8pm or so. Thanks for calling and thinking along. Bye!

Sorry, for the interruption, some thoughts can't wait. Where were we... Yes, we were talking about shifting the focus from the body of society to the will, hence from the question of exclusion to the call – there is obviously an upsetting of the set-up happening, albeit the little spectre which seems to accompany the political, is still there: much like the

¹⁰ Düttmann, A. G., 'Ici on aime les nomes propres', Talk given on the 26th of September 2006 at the ICA, London.

body, a political will can, or let me say it *must* be thought of as something that is subject *and* object at the same time, and there are several conclusions to be made from that.

In order to become part of a political will, the subject has to include itself hereby agreeing to become part of something else. It starts an affaire. In an action of free will, it de-parts, detaches itself from itself, it accomplishes to rise beyond itself, and freely estranges itself. It becomes part of something else. It is estranged but isn't alienated. It is always free to split apart.

(The Michael Clark dance company enters the stage, and performs two pieces. The first isolates the strange beauty when a part of the body transforms into a repetitive machine, still being a part of the body. The second one enacts the fragile moment in which a collective falls apart to become a collective again.)



[Image: Michael Clark Company, Turbine Hall Tate Modern (2010)]

See? Being left means to agree, again and again, to become something else as ourself in order to become ourselves. In becoming ourselves, we become part of a political will, a political will beyond the subject.

In an action of free will we de-part, we detach ourself from ourself, we accomplish to rise beyond ourself and freely estrange ourself. We become ourselves - we become part of something else. We are estranged but never alienated. If so, we are free to split apart.

This is why being left can be described as a mode in which you are subject and become object at the same time, not only in order to be one and another, but also as you are one and something else; there can't be a 'we' without a form. A 'we' is always organised. A 'we' always requires the possibility to recognize one another, and it can only be recognized, when there is form. Also, a we can only exist when communication is possible. There is no 'we' without communication. There can never be a 'we' without techné.

Which form a political will is and chooses, and which one it avoids, thus how it communicates, defines its shape, and is already a political decision. For the political will, form is always content, hence crucial. Form shapes and opens a world in a certain but indeterminate way, it opens indeterminate but not unspecific possibilities, hence it is a political decision as much as a utopian weapon. Design cannot call the will to arms, but knowing about it helps. Tag this under: #hello, #access, #utopia and #elegance.

(Turns around.)

Sorry, you wanted to say something.

Ah.

Right. Correct.

(Turns back to the audience.)

The cheerful destructive character just objected that not all 'we' that are form have a political impact. He is right. We can surely agree that clicking on a 'Save the world' Facebook 'I like' button has no political impact at all, even though a 'we' is formed. Media produce crowds, as Elias Canetti¹¹ noticed with the example of newspapers, they produce 'crowds that even do not have to gather'. Most of the time this 'we' is not political, although it *always* bears a political resonance; and if it is just the one to have had no impact.

¹¹ Canetti, E., *Crowds and Power*. Penguin Books 1992.

Act Two.

5 Thinking left power

To deal with the will as being a subject *and* object at the same time, to set the will self-determined but formed, i.e. organised, implies another shift in left political thinking: the political will is not outside power. As the political will always means that you become part of something else, it cannot be described as self-present but a decision that has to be renewed again and again on all sides; also the political will is there to make a difference.

All these moments locate the will in the middle of power relations and *as* power rather than outside of power. In my opinion, in terms of left thinking this is rather *-(laughing)-*revolutionary.

(Turns around.)

Yes, your turn now. Go for it. But take it slowly.

(The destructive character comes forward, the audience can see it begins to talk, but can't hear it. It gets re-enacted by the speaker, slightly lagged.)

I think everybody would agree that in the history of left political thinking, the position of power was usually that of the other. Power was something that was opposed as there were the powerful and the powerless, and the powerless were to abolish the powerful class in a short dictatorship, a purgatory of the proletariat, before the classless society evolved. Plus and minus signs will cancel each other out; there is no need to debate power as shortly after the alienation is over-thrown, everything will be 'natural' again, fall into its place, rise of the organic society, yay.

When that was not the case, power was still not very welcome on the political scene of left thinking. While left revolutionaries and politicians and unionists always dealt with the question of left power rather openly - Rosa Luxemburg, for example, didn't make that mistake...

(Speaker stops enacting while character keeps on speaking, who then also stops.)

Do you really need that?

(Destructive Character makes a decisive rhetoric gesture.)

Well, whatever.

(Re-enacts as a re-enactment.)

Rosa Luxemburg didn't make that mistake, and like her you should all get a glimpse of the narrowness of your theoretical horizon from time to time, a fact you are usually happily and arrogantly able to ignore.

(Destructive character stops talking. Speaker looks at him a bit miffed, and turns to audience.)

Excuse him, he likes to overshoot but he has a point. Indeed, Marx starts his Manifesto with naming Communism explicitly 'itself a power'¹². So let me put it this way: for theoretically correct reasons, we were transformed into a multitude, a loose international. No force. No discipline. No organisation. No power as the thinking was: power cannot be left. So power was forbidden, power was to be banned. I think wrongly so, but Christian will, I hope, disagree with me later, and give us a good reason why there must necessarily be a way of thinking an outside of power, otherwise this and that gets lost.

(Destructive character says something, catches the eye contact of the speaker.)

You calmed down? Okay, go on.

(Destructive character starts talking again, gets re-enacted again.)

From now on a left approach has to take power into account, and the question of its quality needs to be pondered: is there simply power or do you need to think power in plural, and do not care that grammatically the word does not want you to. Or to put it in a different way: how is it to be thought that it can be formed after left and capitalistic axioms? As usual, I am pressed for time and leave that to you, in the hope you take that up before you are in pension mode, and spend your time bitching in reading groups.

Another crucial one for your reading groups, closely related to power and authority: Can the political ever be thought without the theological? Isn't the theological immediately among you if there are two or three assembled in one name, an axiom, or trans-? Don't you need to be aware that there *must* and *will* be a theological moment? Isn't it better to give it a place within in the theoretical architecture than to have it sneaking in through backdoor?

(Destructive character stops talking. Speaker towards it.)

Maybe you read too much Carl Schmitt¹³? - Okay, let me take it from here.

(From now on, the destructive character stays on the stage, wanders around a bit, but locates itself most of the time somewhere in the background.)

¹² Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto*. Longman 2004.

¹³ Schmitt, C., *Political Theology*. MIT Press 1985; Schmitt, C., *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. MIT Press 1988.

Act Three.

6 Political will and new political sequence

At the beginning of this train of thought lies an encounter with a text, the early version of 'The Will of the People'¹⁴ by Peter Hallward, which defends a notion of a trans-individual political will, understood as a rational, deliberate, and autonomous capacity for collective self-determination - I quote - 'a deliberate, emancipatory and inclusive process of collective self-determination' that 'involves assembly and organisation'. A notion that we both, the destructive character and me, decided to kidnap in a friendly way.

His project 'The Will of the People' is a successor to his earlier essay called 'Politics of Prescription'¹⁵, a trenchant project aimed against a political situation in which a theoretical reaction has become impossible, a situation against which Hallward launches a political prescription as the anticipation of its subsequent power. Here, 'Politics of Prescription' sketches the 'application' of a political principle in order to create an autopoietic political moment, or move, or movement, 'direct and divisive, but universal'. 'The Will of the People', its successor, takes a next step.

It might have been become apparent that our projects share certain assumptions, while they aim at different problems. Here is what they share.

(Pushes a flipchart to the centre of the stage, on it circles and words, i.e. the visualisation of the notion.)

It is crucial to think a left autopoietic gesture; it is necessary to introduce a strategic movement, an 'application', and tie it to principles as well as axioms – a fascinating moment soon to be elaborated upon a bit more in depth; we must ask: what does that mean, tie it? How is it tied, and to what? And why must it be tied?

Here, 'Politics of Prescription' performs in a Badiouish tradition the gesture to withdraw theory from the weight of a world, release it, in order to transform it into a weapon aimed at it. This weapon is needed, and will be used, but this project here has another call: It is deeply worried.

Today, we have to deal with a different sequence of being left as we are confronted with a new dominant power - Foucault, Deleuze, Negri/Hardt, Boltanski/Chiapello and others have already tracked the beginning of that transformation in the last century. They called it the rise of a 'homo oeconomicus'¹⁶, 'control society'¹⁷, 'empire'¹⁸ or 'new spirit of capitalism'¹⁹. What needs to be thought, though, is how that power can be opposed.

¹⁴ Hallward, P., 'The will of the people: notes towards a dialectical voluntarism.' In: Radical philosophy 2009 (155), pp. 17-29.

¹⁵ Hallward, P., 'The Politics of Prescription.' In: South Atlantic Quarterly 2005 104(4), pp 769-789.

¹⁶ Foucault, M., The Birth of Biopolitics, Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979, Palgrave, McMillan 2004.

¹⁷ Deleuze, G., 'Postscript on the Societies of Control.' In: OCTOBER 59, Winter 1992, MIT Press, pp. 3-7.

¹⁸ Negri, A. and M. Hardt, *Empire*. Harvard University Press 2000.

¹⁹ Boltanski, L. and E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Verso 2005.

We need to develop a left gesture of the new political sequence. Instead of being content with the fact that theory is able to locate and describe that power, its 'absolutization' as Hallward and Badiou correctly and correct angrily describe it, is not to be accepted.

An interesting challenge: the new dominant power, let us call it for now a 'regime of productivity', is a regime opposed to repression - and the left is armed up to its teeth to fight repression; a regime that makes productive and skims what it wants to use - and the left noticed the appropriation of creativity, its transformation to creative industries with sheer horror; a regime that doesn't care about opposition, it simply avoids or ignores it embracing ambiguity- and the left is all about obstacles and resistance. Benjamin is right: 'We cannot draw closed the net in which we stand.'²⁰

In fact, a problem that the predecessor of this text, part one of 'On being left after repression', is debating in extenso trying to track down a moment that can finally be described as 'the intentional sabotage of all left core values' following Foucault's approach to address power as 'intentional and nonsubjective', as something 'imbued, through and through, with calculation' but simultaneously not as an 'effect of another instance' behind it.²¹ Hence, to cut a long story short: Capitalist power follows a new logic. It did upgrade. We need to relaunch, and leave repression aside (not behind).

(Addressing directly the destructive character.)

This is why you are needed. A profound and cheerful destruction might never have been a better friend. We are happy that you are with us. No, you don't need to make a face.

(Addressing the audience.)

Obviously, we need to destruct our own de-territorialized terrain.

7 The social question/on losing politics

It was Hannah Arendt who argued that political interests only look like but are not at all 'political'. I am going to read that quote to you. It is important, as it sits in a very interesting, sort of vertical position cutting right across the idea of Marx that the philosophers only have interpreted the world differently, the point, however, is to change it.

(Gets her iPhone out, and tabs on it in order to open a task/text.)

Arendt writes in 'The Human Condition':

"The trade unions were never revolutionary in the sense that they desired a

²⁰ Benjamin, W., 'Capitalism as Religion.' In: Selected Writings, Volume 1, Harvard University Press 2005, pp 288-289.

²¹ Foucault, M., *History of Sexuality, Volume 1, The Will to Knowledge*. Penguin 1998, 94-95.

transformation of society together with a transformation of the political institutions in which this society was represented, and the political parties of the working class have been interest parties most of the time, in no way different from the parties which represented other social classes.¹²²

Please note, the working class parties are in Arendt's view not revolutionary subjects 'most of the time', but 'interest parties'.

'A distinction appeared only in those rare and yet decisive moments when during the process of a revolution it suddenly turned out that these people, if not led by official party programs and ideologies, had their own ideas about the possibilities of democratic government under modern conditions. In other words, the dividing line between the two is not a matter of extreme social and economic demands but solely of the proposition of a new form of government.'¹²³

Note further, there is a dividing line between the two, the social demands and the new form of government. Interesting, eh? This difference needs to be taken very seriously (*supportive silly excited up and down hopping of a very cheerful destructive character, Žižek style*). It needs to be looked into in much more depth, of course. Apparently, it is deep-rooted within the political, and it may even be one of the essential elements of the political itself.

If we follow Hannah Arendt here, we must consider the concept of not only distinct but obviously detached layers that can and maybe need to work independently and autonomously from each other, while they resonate in a certain way.

Turning with that towards Marx, this leads to the possibility of another shift for a contemporary left theoretical approach: namely that of the social question. This question is important but does not define what this thing is, left. According to Arendt, it looks political but might only be a political simulation as there is only political interest but no political will.

(*Again excited up and down hopping of a very cheerful destructive character.*)

What do we mean by that?

(*Speaker and character look at each other, smile consentingly, and perform the next sentences in unison, not time lagged.*)

When Marx wrote a theory focusing on 'the point, however, is to change it', he gained a certain and important strength by intertwining theory and praxis. However, that was in Marx' times. He also writes – and we quote:

¹²² Arendt, H., *The Human Condition*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1958, 216.

¹²³ Ibid.

'Naturally the transcendence of the estrangement always proceeds from that form of the estrangement which is the *dominant* power...' ²⁴

In today's Europe, excessive demand becomes more and more the new repression, and fear not to be able to be productive and useful for capital is the new force shaping and disciplining a subject. We need to mount our weapon anew.

(Destructive character folds triumphantly its arms.)

As my old companion Sasha recently pointed out to me in an email, ...

(fiddles shortly with the iPhone, can't find it, stops the interruption)

... he said something like ... what was it again? Ah, right. When we spoke about it, he brought up that this new power already has re-shaped the body of the very poor. Once, to be poor meant to be thin and starving; now the poor have obesity and are unproductive. Is that to be thought of as misery or resistance or both? For sure, it is used all over the papers to make the middle class feel different and afraid, you don't want to become one of them, do you? Keep your diet. Run. Live healthy. Be chained to a fitbit. Produce.

Here, the regime of productivity is shaping subjects while not bearing any political notion at all; and vice versa, what used to have a rather political feel to it, green politics, obviously is down with capitalism as it is having no political impact on the system. Hence, introducing political interests as a moment that is somewhat related to politics but is not politics itself, explains why Europe is full of formerly left realpolitiks without any political notion at all. The two spheres stopped to resonate.

From the organic supermarket chains to freezers that are using less energy and give you a good reason to buy a new, energy saving one: it is as if these projects were never related to anything left, while the left is where they clearly come from - as we all know Slavoj Žižek loves to explode over this 'cultural capitalism', as he calls it.

This situation cannot be called paradox anymore. It is absurd if not surrealistic.

(Some nodding by the destructive character.)

8 Regime of productivity

At least for Europe, the pattern - Capitalism is catastrophe/Communism is the solution - is a sequence that lies behind us, and has to be thought anew. So the question is: What is 'the idea of communism' today, if it does not matter to no one that capitalism is a catastrophe. Okay, several catastrophes, to be precise. The absence of a European revolt

²⁴ Marx, K., *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow Progress Publishers 1959.

does not mean that capitalism is alright but that capitalist power did upgrade to a fluffy, fuzzy, foggy but no less poisonous version. Today, it gives many reasons to resist but not clear shot. This must be opposed.

Clearly, to leave the regime of outright opposition behind is a challenge of thought, as it asks to reflect on resistance different than in the mode of being-against or rise against. The answer cannot be to stop being creative, and end producing. We can't allow the regime of productivity to put us out of action. We need a rupture, we need to leave the dialogue, because if we enter the logic of the regime of productivity, we get pulled in. We need to operate in the mode of an autopoietic move or movement as Peter Hallward writes.

The task is to create an outside within an inside.

(The destructive character comes forward, obviously pleased, and says something to the speaker, speaker looks a bit lovestruck at the destructive character.)

I knew you would be in love with that idea. I like it, too.

Act Four.

9 Outside/inside

(Speaker to the audience.)

Let us assume for a moment that this is a concept worthwhile reflecting upon. As there is a difference, it is obvious that an outside within an inside doesn't leave resistance behind but locates it anew. Its borders are resistant but porous and permeable. What is the difference between the outside and the inside? Why can there be borders, how are they established? What makes it an outside, albeit it is inside? When will it stop being one? What if there is only the outside left, and the inside is gone, can that ever happen? How does it move and change?

A political will as an outside within an inside is resistant due to its inner structure. This structure is established by a vertical and a horizontal thrust. The vertical one establishes the difference, an inner strain of the political will to form, stay in form and grow horizontally. It isn't dependent on one single force that goes right through, but exists of several layers, independent and autonomous from each other. Each layer is following its own logic, albeit they touch – the political interest touches the political axiom that touches the political truth that informs it, for example.

(Pauses a moment, goes to the flipchart.)

When preparing this session, the destructive character and I stumbled hand in hand curiously and not very elegant through a thick fog of thoughts, and maybe it is good that we couldn't really see very far, otherwise we would not have dared to proceed. Well, he would have, I wouldn't. Anyhow, to get a better idea of what we were doing we decided to sketch it, and it turned out to be a weird 3 D model that looks a bit like a UFO. If anyone is out there, who wants to animate this in its certain stages, feel welcome. At the moment it looks like this:

(Flips to a new chart.)

The vertical enfolds its full power only when the layers of the political truth and the political interest are interconnected. They communicate vertically, from political interest to political practice to political principle to political axiom to political truth. There is one exception, which is the last layer, truths – yes, we follow Alain Badiou's²⁵ concept of truth here. This layer can only be addressed, it doesn't answer – well hello, theological rest. But the fact that it can be addressed, the fact that there is something rather than nothing, has an immense impact as part of the answer is always already in the address. That there is an address makes a difference, that something can be addressed implies a certain a force.

When interconnected the vertical enfolds its full force at the lowest horizontal level, the level of transport: political interest. The horizontal confronts the outside but doesn't

²⁵ Badiou, A., 'The Ethics of Truths. Construction and Potency.' In: *Pli. The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*. Volume 12, What is materialism?, 2001, pp. 247-255

depend on its moves. It is founded on its own resistance, it is autopoietic - thanks to the vertical, we set our own borders.

It will be necessary to take a closer look at its border. The question how somebody can become part of that political will needs to be addressed. And this is not the only problem. When we first explored that notion, the cheerful destructive character suddenly let go of my hand to object rather worried that to create an inside in an outside is to buy into a certain assumption not at all to be accepted, namely that of capitalism as nature, as the natural ground. He was flustered, and rightly so.

Therefore, we must ask: Isn't capitalism doing what it can to hide that it is a sequence which can be ended, a sequence that had a beginning and will have an end? Isn't capitalism hiding that it is a certain narration, a narration that follows a certain logic we can opt out of? Isn't it establishing itself as a 'permanent duration,' a 'boundless, universal polemic' as Benjamin wrote in 'Capitalism as religion'²⁶? Don't we have to insist against this – as Hallward puts it - 'absolutization of bio-power' on capitalism as an outside, one that makes itself invisible in order to pretend to be the inside? And what happens if Mackenzie Wark is right – that we have left capitalism already?

(Turns to the destructive little character.)

We need to bring 'ideology' again down from the attic, instead of it becoming cobwebbed. It might be time to think it anew and differently.

(Turns to the audience.)

Creating an outside in an inside doesn't necessarily mean that this inside is capitalism. How is the inside to be thought? And what does capitalism look like in a 3D-model?

(Thinks about it. Then picks up a book from a pile, flips through the pages obviously looking for something, and starts to read.)

10 How to live a left life

'What counts is that a wrong has been done; and for this, it is irrelevant who is better off, the wrong-doer or the wrong-sufferer. As citizens we must prevent wrong-doing because the world in which we all live, wrong-doer, wrong-sufferer, and spectator, is at stake; the City has been wronged.'²⁷

The City has been wronged: There is something wrong, that is for sure. But this wrong behaves very different to the wrong in the past. If we really want to build a 'we', there needs to be a narration, a new narration – here I'm very much with Bruno Latour who

²⁶ Benjamin, W., 'Capitalism as Religion.' In: *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, Harvard University Press 2005, pp 288-289

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. - One. Thinking./Two. Willing. -* London, Secker & Warburg 1978, I, 182

also claimed the need for a new narration in his recent 'An attempt at writing a Compositional Manifesto'²⁸. Different to him I don't think it should be an ecological narration. It think we need to dig a little deeper. Social equality, equal rights, a just chance, a just society, all that is to be aimed for, but it isn't anything anymore that would re-organise Europeans.

(The cheerful destructive character rushes forward to say something, that is picked up by the speaker and re-enacted again.)

We are stuck with a horrible middle-class approach: 'O poor humans in the third world, sure I help, and it makes me feel privileged and better off, instead of recognising what pressure is put upon me.' Again, this needs to be taken seriously.

Today, people are threatened to lose their publicly funded social security, while the traditionally privately enacted one also disappears. In the last 50 years, capital has replaced nearly all social relations as people don't help each other anymore but pay someone for the help. Regardless if they need to move their household, if their children need private lessons, if they want to learn a new skill, or even want to spend some leisure time –people don't ask friends but hire someone for it.

Instead of grandparents looking after the children, people pay a fee for the crib or the nanny to help. Instead of looking after the old folks, people save money for a retirement home. And instead of going fishing with an uncle, they hire someone who teaches them on the weekend to have a leisure experience. Our individualism has become ridiculous. Marx predicted the Bourgeois family will vanish. It did, but it didn't vanish with the vanishing of capital as he wrote. It got capitalised itself.

How to deal with that, and here comes a 'forward ever, backward never' challenge for you all: without sounding like a Christian conservative crying about a tradition lost in a cold post-bourgeois oh so digital world?

(Again, destructive character positions itself triumphantly with crossed arms. Speaker alone.)

Something weird became apparent back in the days when the bank crisis hit Europe. In general, European societies did rather well. Some struggled badly but the majority of nations was not impoverished, had to hunger or got sick. Most people could keep their houses, and did not have to go to the pawnshop. If the middle class, in most European countries the populous class, was made redundant, it was compensated. The little destructive character might be very right with his idea that this was done in order to prevent anyone from thinking about real change and revolution. Anyhow, the society was in general doing fine. Still there was and is all this fear. Everywhere.

²⁸ Latour, B., 'An Attempt at Writing a Compositional Manifesto' www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/article/120-COMPO-MANIFESTO.pdf as of October 2010

Could we say that in the past we were running away from pain as in hunger, misery, or sickness, while today we are avoiding to become afraid? Can fear be the new social question?

(Picks up a book and shows it to the audience.)

Corey Robin²⁹, who wrote a book on fear as a political idea, does not want to take it that far, but we think one should give it a try - as the New York Times notes, antipsychotic drugs, until the 1990s a niche product, have become one of the top-selling pharmaceuticals in the US, surpassing even the sales of blockbusters like heart-protective statins. Robin is also, by the way, introducing a similar figure to the outside within an inside. Stunned we recognized, it kind of works as its 'other' as it is also organised horizontal and vertical.

(Flips to another chart.)

He describes a fear that produces the collective also operating with inside/outside. The first mode of fear is a threat to society like terrorism. This threat forms a liberal society from the outside as much as it destroys its quality in the inside. When the collective is threatened, or rather is made feel threatened from the outside, it is established as liberal. It is addressed, hailed into existence in an Althusserish sense, and as the pressure from the outside forms a collective, the principles of the inside can get undercut.

The second mode of fear – and this one is less known and more interesting - operates vertically alongside hierarchical conflicts using the cleavages of a society, and the intimate fear of people of their superiors. The financial crisis, for example, increased the insecurity at the work place effectively for everyone. This insecurity - not knowing what happens to you – enforces a situation which you better not question no one, and in which you better do not challenge the hierarchies. You obey to the requirements. Ulrike Meinhof³⁰ has a point when she describes it as a silent 'mobilization of people's hidden fears of the reflexes of existential fears of authorities'. Hence, with the financial crisis the notion of negative change was used as a repressive fear. We live under the rule of the uncanny, as Paolo Virno³¹ would say.

Fear is the mode the new regime of productivity operates in. If so, we must ask the following question: Can the crisis of the financial system that started at the end of 2007 be read as a new trick of capitalism? It looked like capitalism is in a crisis but the truth is, it

²⁹ Robin C., *Fear: The history of a political idea*. Oxford University Press 2004

³⁰ Meinhof, U., 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle, and the Defensive Position of the Counterrevolution in its Psychic Warfare Against the People.' In: Chris Kraus, Sylvère Lotringer: *Hatred of Capitalism*. New York, Columbia University 2001, pp 273-280

³¹ Virno, P., 'A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life.' trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, New York: Semiotext (e) (2004).

imposes a crisis, a crisis that is used to adjust the people, to enforce upon them more fear, more self-administration, to retract its responsibilities while extending its control?

To focus on fear means, we also need to think the relation of the subject and its estrangement anew.

(The cheerful destructive character says something to her.)

Yes, I know this is my private theoretical passion. Sure, I'll leave it for now. Why do you always get to be the radical one, and I am not allowed to introduce anything on my own? To think of estrangement as a productive moment that not only cuts through a subject, but must be thought immanent to it, to think of it as something that makes it a subject, makes so much sense. From there you could divide between estrangement and alienation. Ta!

(Makes a face, and leaves the stage to the right. Destructive little character shrugs indifferently its shoulders.)

(Enters again from the left. Sighs.)

Okay.

(Shouting towards the destructive little character.)

You simply don't want me to talk about you!

(Back to the audience.)

Let us leave this theoretical figure aside for the moment. Capitalism must hide its repressive fear. It must sketch this society as one which is all right for everyone. That's its ideology. Have you noticed that there is a new, albeit well known trend in advertising? Take the campaign for this gadget here, Apple's iPad. Outright ridiculous – as if there never was Situationism we're right back to a MadMen approach.

(Switches on a beamer, and clicks through its motives.)

Isn't it wonderful? This iPad world, the world that imposes itself with these motives, is one in which everybody sits relaxed with the shiny little thing in their lap in a nice environment on sofas that aren't made to hide in due to lay-offs. In this world there are no hierarchies. Hierarchies? Of course, you are friends with your boss and co-workers, and more pictures from the nice ski holidays that were a blast he will send you later. In this world, you have a nice good-looking family and kids with no pimples. You never want to get drunk. Instead, you read the email of your nice beautiful wife mentioning the new dinner invitation of your friendly boss.

By now, not only the destructive little character but also me wishes badly to find in the iPad address book the number of a really expensive divorce attorney. Or some porn. Something to stop this affirmative ideology.

Everything is fine. Everyone is thin. Your boss is your friend. Fear is somewhere else. A left approach towards fear cannot be a promise to live without it. Can a left approach leave room for fear – give it a room – as a way to make it go away?

What the left people among us have learned from the problem of the classless society: To reach out for equality must necessarily be an option but it isn't a condition that can be reached once and for all; it is to be reached again and again, we need to stay in motion. Let me translate this to the new regime of fear: As humans we aren't happy all the time, but afraid; and we always will be. Nevertheless, we have the right to live without fear. - You shouldn't need to be afraid; you don't need to be afraid, you are not alone - you are not the only one afraid. - Definitely the better narration compared with life is a blast, and if yours is not, it's your own fault.

(The destructive little character says something.)

You are right, there will always be a lot of people who'll prefer that one.

Let's sum it up, it's getting late.

Act Five.

11 Superconnected/End/Start

A line is dividing the political. Looking at political theory through the perspective of the long durée, the balance imposed by this dividing line always has been noticed as a challenging problem. Over the course of history, it was passed on from the body of the king to the body of the people, to be recently transferred further into history and a single political moment, that of a revolution.

The dividing line already cuts the king into 'The King's Two Bodies' as Ernst H. Kantorowicz³² showed. From there it moves. In Hobbes' *Leviathan*³³ the state is described as an 'Artificiall Man', divided in two, in body and soul. Accused in his own time as a 'Rebell's Catechism', the life and motion of the parts of the body are brought to life by the 'Artificial Soul' of sovereignty, a sovereignty to which the people initially have agreed to, after which it becomes absolute authority. The dividing line must be affirmed.

With Montesquieu, the political truth is not to be found in the king anymore. Instead, he counterbalances each type of state with certain principles: 'A republic requires virtue; a monarchy honor; a despotic government, fear (sic!),' he writes in "The Spirits of the Laws". The political isn't absolute anymore but is constantly threatened to collapse. "What a wretched people! They wished to be citizens, but not to share the burden of the state."

Rousseau, on the contrary, is also haunted by the dividing line, and decides not to balance but to try very hard to get rid of it. In vain. In 'The Social Contract' this leads to a paradox situation that the general will some of the people did vote against and now have to follow, does not make them obey as this general will is still their own.

Marx finally beamed the dividing line into history: before and after the revolution. For him, materialist that he was, the division of classes, of a working class and a class who owned the property, was to overcome after the revolution, when it was possible to push production into abundance through creating an 'industrial army', and concentrating all power in the hands of the state; hereby 'the public power will lose its political character'. Thus, the dividing line will vanish as politics will end when the balance is reached.

Hannah Arendt also sees the division of the two spheres as given, they only connect from time to time; however, they resonate in the moment of a revolution. Similarly, Alain Badiou understands politics as a becoming, a becoming of a political truth whose generic subset like the French revolution must be answered with fidelity, otherwise it is missed, unbalanced.

Much like capitalism, however, the idea of communism, of being left, is something different than a mode a state operates in – and today more than ever. As we discussed before, being left is a moment of a self-imposed becoming, becoming part of a political will. It is an affirmation. Being left means to become ourselves, to be one and another, one and something else. It is being in the status of a subject-object.

³² Kantorowicz, E.H., *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton University Press 1997.

³³ Hobbes, T., *Leviathan*. Oxford University Press 2008

Capitalism in the age of the regime of productivity, on the other hand, can be described as fixing something in a place where it is doomed to produce as it is imposing the status of an object-subject by threatening it constantly with change and disruption. How to leave this status of being an object-subject?

Claude Lefort recently emphasized that totalitarianism is happening when the distinction between the non-political and the political is challenged, when we find ourselves 'in a regime where the force of power becomes unlocalizable', an observation that casts an interesting, and rather critical light on the depoliticization of today. Even though political truth and political interest must be thought apart from each other, what becomes obvious here is the following: a political sequence loses its power when the two spheres are disconnected, and the political truth and the political interest cannot resonate.

The revolution of today will happen, when we overcome the split to be a social project on one side, and a beautiful but isolated theoretical training ground on the other. These spheres need to resonate, they need to be balanced. In the past, this was done by a revolution of the people. For an autopoietic moment and move, there might be new and different ways. Go create.

(Stops and thinks. Then starts talking again.)

Okay. By now I have reached the point where my thinking needs to start. There is an essential moment missing here, a moment that was always present but has not been seen. This moment defines what Marxism always was about: technology.

I think we can say that the Communist Manifesto became the discursive document that backed up a movement, because it placed the political change on several pillars, whereby technology again and again was essential: industrialization, and industrialization is technology, gave birth to capitalism, but it simultaneously gave birth to the working class who will carry the revolution; also the new means of production – technology again – would firstly produce an unsustainable situation when freed to become the base of a communist society; same gesture. The social question, an effect of technology, is absolutely unsustainable, too, and will lead to the revolution; the party will be the head, the organisation that will wake up the people – and technology, trains for example, with Lenin on it, help the party. Then, of course, there is the funky automatism of history itself borrowed from Hegel, and so on. What a safety net!

(The destructive character obviously wants to say something.)

Wait a moment.

Marxism has survived that long due to its rich offers, and everything we did ever after was picking up one part and adapt it to the current situation. However, never again – 1968 might be an exception – was there a chance to combine so many moments to one force. David Harvey in his 'A Companion to Marx's Capital' notes correctly, a simple idea,

trenchant as it might be, will never have the full impact, albeit it always makes a difference. As I once said to Peter Hallward, I wish we had a theoretical vocabulary that positively describes the impact of a disturbed revolution, when there is a will but no way, as a will makes a difference; it simply makes a different difference than it wanted, according to Arendt a usual side effect of acting anyhow. However, we must think technology.

(The destructive character plants itself in front of the speaker, and starts to speak eagerly, becoming more and more obsessed about it. It takes a while. Then he triumphantly stops.)

Idiot. So it is me who is to blame, or what?

(Turns to the audience, while the destructive character walks angrily to the other side.)

As you just have seen yourself, the cheerful destructive character isn't really cheerful anymore. Au contraire. He said that I am right, this little lecture – let me quote – was 'uncomplex and generally flat'. He said that technology is right now in each and every moment effectively changing society. He said it is a major mistake not to see that digitalisation must be seen as a new subset of techné, not just as a new means of organisation. He said this must be taken into account.

Then he blamed me, said that it was my role as a technology person to bear that in mind. I was supposed to make use of this, upload this to our thinking. He accused me to be naïve in believing I can think revolution without digitalisation, or start a political will. Sometimes he behaves like a real louse. Of course, I know this, didn't I just say so?

(Turns toward the destructive character).

Sure, you have a point, but why don't you treat me with a bit more respect, less rude and – ah! - destructive manners.

(Stops and thinks.)

Unfortunately, he is right.

(Stops and thinks.)

Hating to be pathetic, by all means this needs to be avoided, I hereby officially end the preconditions and declare pathetically my full fidelity to it: in the age of digitalisation, the moment of techné must be thought anew; Marx would agree.

(Stops and thinks.)

The problem is that there is a missing link in my head. I can't connect the fragments.

(Tiredly sits down on a chair, and is driven off from it again by the destructive character who pushes speaker forward and talks insistently.)

Sure, I'll go. Yes, I'll try. I start collecting.

(Murmuring.) Spirits that I've cited..

(Exit to the left.)

Our dialogue was inspired and influenced by Claude Lefort, who passed away during our discussion (1924 - October 4, 2010).

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