

The Normalization of Barbarism

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Abstract: The circumstances of the pandemic, as well as the responses it provokes, are an opportunity to take up again an analysis of the so-called neoliberalism in the terms of the materialistic theory of ideology; which implies its consideration from the point of view of social reproduction; that is, from the question of the duration of an order of relations in the framework of a complex conception of historical temporality. On this theoretical basis, this article proposes to think about the melancholic, totalitarian and segregationist aspects of the neo-liberal regime of temporality, identified as "presentism", as an overdetermined effect of the agonising crisis of the regime of imperialist accumulation and its humanist ideological tendencies. From this point of view, one of the risks of the present crisis is the consolidation of a tendency towards the normalisation of barbarism.

Keywords: Pandemic, Imperialism, Segregationism, Ideology, Plural Temporality, Presentism.

I. Three scenes for a long lasting dystopia

"Anyone can see the future, it's like a serpent's egg" - the obscure Dr. Vergerus said to Abel, in the final minutes of Bergman's famous film, which portrays like no other the experience of impending horror. Dedicated to the German situation in the 1920s, "The Serpent's Egg" offered a painting and even the scent of the varied - but equally desperate - ways in which the Germans witnessed the gestation of Nazism.

In a film entitled "Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb", Stanley Kubric portrays, in a different but nevertheless eloquent manner, the experience of another impending disaster at the height of the Cold War, that of the atomic bomb. The horror is then elaborated in a different way, less dramatic but equally tragic. It no longer seems to be a question of discovering the origins of the evil but of accepting the nonsense of a chain of misunderstandings, vanities and suspicions that can end up in the explosion of the world. Leaving aside all ethical questions, the film leaves the causes of destruction on the side of imbecility and frivolity. But it also offers another singular detail that masterfully portrays the sensitivity that marks the opening of our era: instead of portraying the experience of inexorable danger in the form of a more or less expected assault, the film portrays the resignation to its already occurred temporality, the Bomb is no longer a threat, somehow the film assumes from the beginning that the "red button" has already been pressed.

Just two years ago, the Spanish newspaper El País headlined with the suggestive phrase "Fear is my fuel", an interview with Steven Spielberg about "Ready Player One: the game begins", dedicated to offering us a new dystopia about the effects of virtual alienation and

the compulsive use of networks. The film's trailer puts it on the table: "There's nowhere to go", resigns the protagonist who presents himself as part of a generation of "disappeared" (virtual) people. The world that was dreamt of as unlimited for the adventure of human progress has become a total space, closed in on itself, condemned to permanent recycling.

Since the imperialist wars of the early 20th century, the fact that "Humanity" is capable of annihilating itself has been a central feature of our mass culture, as much as of art, politics, science and philosophy.

Great narratives have been forged within this framework in which it is the imminence of its self-annihilation that makes Humanity exist as an illusory or desired global community. Multilateral credit institutions are as much a product of these paradoxes as are Human Rights. The 20th century witnessed the most violent modulations of this contradiction, which connects the ferocious and impiety expansion of the regime of imperialist accumulation with the various humanist ideological modulations. If this alliance finds its limits today, this does not seem to translate into any creative or transformative outburst but rather into an agonising and unlimited civilisational crisis that places us at the crossroads of a false option for conservationism -of "the human", "culture", "nature", as we conceived them- or the threat of a "future" that is paradoxically reactionary and ultraconservative.

The new dystopian narratives seem to symptomize a specific transformation in the ideological experience of historical time. The post-apocalyptic tone has been proliferating in the culture industry for years. But the crucial fact is that increasingly, their clichés go beyond the specific genre of science fiction and permeate the various public discourses, as a testimony of the reconfiguration of the social interpretations of the present, the imaginations of the common future and the passions (the fears and desires) with respect to them.

Science fiction has contributed in other moments to a social reflection, to a cultural and political criticism. It is enough to remember wonderful texts like those of Aldous Huxley or George Orwell, but the pessimistic story does not seem to work in the same way anymore, it does not offer any strangeness in the complex of discursive processes, the dystopia is equally exercised by commercial publicity as by political discourses and liturgies of vigorous religiosities. Paradoxically, for our age so disbelieving, so relativistic and distrustful, this one certainty has become practically a dogma: "the future has arrived" therefore, "there is nowhere to go". In all cases the images of the apocalypse coincide with oppressive and circular scenarios, not only geographically, but especially closed to the future. Today's science fiction is the narrative of a world without a future, a massively consolidated discourse of resignation.

The various themes and the post-apocalyptic tone that proliferate in the cultural industry coexist in solidarity with the phantasmatic projection of absolute, all-powerful and quasi-transcendent knowledge

such as Big Data and with a series of practical doctrines of resignation and the administration of passions (fundamentally of fears). These elements reveal a certain tendency that dominates the ideological and discursive formations of our conjuncture.

And it is at this conjuncture that the COVID-19 pandemic "occurs ". If we say that the new dystopian narratives seem to symptomize a specific transformation in the ideological experience of historical time, this is because it is not a question here of understanding ideological formations in terms of a few 'cultural contents', but in the strict materialistic terms of practices and rituals organized into apparatuses or material devices in which the organization of the experience of time is encoded in its dominant but contradictory tendencies.

Thus conceived, "dominant ideology" is the name of a regime of temporality that massively organizes the experience of the conjuncture, ordering-denying its heterogeneous and contradictory thickness of temporalities. In the dominant ideology the conjuncture finds the delimitation and the rhythms that homogenize its temporal plurality, the richness of its memories and its future. For this reason, the first task -and the permanent effort- of a critical interrogation of our present is precisely that of not subscribing to the melancholic and post-apocalyptic nature with which our present manifests itself to us, not surrendering to the evidence of the desperate emergence or to the withdrawn and contemplative waiting, but rather interrogating the material fabric in which the forms of the present sink their roots.

Considering the question in this way, it is not a great surprise to find those roots in the dominant form of the time supportive of humanist idealism, that made possible the consolidation of imperialist geopolitics on the old colonial traces.¹ We could say that in ideological terms, neoliberalism is the process of transformation of humanist idealism, its extreme deployment or its ominous reverse, exposed in the framework of the agonising crisis of the regime of imperialist accumulation in which it took its dominant tendency on a global scale.

...we have a natural tendency to *identify* imperialism with 'colonial' or 'neo-colonialist' conquest and aggression, with the pillaging and exploitation of the Third World. (...) But are we aware that imperialism operates first and foremost in the metropolitan countries, at metropolitan workers' expense? (...) When Lenin says that imperialism is the last stage of capitalism and that afterwards it's all over, we must realize: 1. that this last stage can last a long time; and; 2. that afterwards we will find ourselves facing an alternative; afterwards it is '*either socialism or barbarism*'. (...) What is barbarism? Regression while remaining in place, stagnation

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¹ Cf. Wallerstein, 2011; Quijano, 1988; Mariátegui, 1928; Federici, 2004

while remaining in place, of a kind of which human history offers examples by the hundreds. Yes, our 'civilization' can perish in place, not only without rising to a higher 'stage' or sinking to a lower stage that has already existed, but in accumulating all the suffering of a childbirth that will not end, of a stillbirth that is not a delivery.²

Neoliberalism is the name of this barbarization of imperialist capitalism. That contemporaneity that dissolves real historical differences (and the contradictions that their coexistence entails) in a single, homogeneous time - to whose critique both Marx and Freud devoted themselves - constitutes the key to the ideological experience of humanist capitalism and acquires specific modulations in the various moments of the history of humanism. If until the beginning of the 20th century the dominant temporal modulation of social and subjective life subscribed to the progressive and teleological metaphor of the train, at this juncture that we can recognise as "neo-liberal" this allegory has become frayed, causing consequences that we have not yet been able to measure in its magnitude.

The particularities that we register today with respect to the specific social interpretations of the present, the weakening of the marks that sift history from the conflict of collective memories, or their capacities to elaborate the imaginations of the common future, account for a singular torsion in the very experience of time, which Fukuyama's famous ideogeme about the End of History, eloquently symptomizes. It is a torsion, we could say, in the regime of temporality that gave consistency to the Modern experience and support to its Subject. Within the framework of this inflection we are witnessing, we can only expect strong consequences in the various orders of subjective life and historical experience, which will shape the contradictions of the coming years and allow us to understand some of the sacrificial, authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies that can be read in the current scene as traces of a hesitation of our civilizing coordinates. Because this contradictory history of humanism is also the history of science and of the conflictive process of popular-democratic subjectivation in public space, and is the history of a competition between knowledge and thought, for leading the struggle of interpretations against superstition:

Superstition is not simply a false religion or a mistaken belief of things, but a political device, a machine of domination that separates men from what they can, that inhibits their political power and captures their imagination in sadness and melancholy - which is extreme anti-political passion; a totalitarian passion that affects the whole body. It is possible that what we today call "apathy" to

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2 Althusser 2018, pp.49-50

refer to a certain withdrawal from the public and a certain civil passivity would be thought by Spinoza to be a social melancholy.³

If the post-apocalyptic tone of the neoliberal "presentism" is, in this sense, nothing more than the suffocating ideological effect of the successful global homogenization of capital and the humanitarian disaster of its own humanist ideology, then it is time to think whether the belief in an inexorable disaster, which awaits us around the corner, is not a new form of superstition, with painful consequences for individual and collective life. It is also time to open up the questions regarding the historical conditions in which apocalyptic narratives have taken shape, in order to question ourselves more clearly about their consequences.

II. The lost time

In *Left-wing Melancholia* (2017), Enzo Traverso calls on E. Bloch to mark the differences of our present with respect to that time of the conjunction between theoretical thought and political imagination that we usually called "Marxism". The dialectical tension between the chimerical and promethean events that - according to Bloch - haunted the imagination of a society historically incapable of realizing them, and the anticipatory hopes that inspired a revolutionary transformation of the present, have been weakened. Today we observe, according to Traverso, the fading of the former and the metamorphosis of the latter: the various forms of science fiction, ecological studies and the dystopias of a future nightmare made up of environmental catastrophes, replaced the dream of a liberated humanity and confined the social imagination to the narrow limits of the present. Meanwhile, the concrete utopias of collective emancipation became increasingly individualized drives for the endless consumption of commodities.⁴

But the challenge presented to us by this transformation does not consist so much in discussing the political validity of the idea or image of the Revolution, rather in thinking about the modulations of the regime of historical temporality. Traverso defines it as "presentism" and characterizes it as a cyclical and expansive experience, which threatens to dissolve the contradictory temporal density of dialectics. The present as an impoverished time, is the result of a dialectic that has been suspended and replaced by the immediate demolition carried out by Capital against everything that resists its extended reproduction.⁵

The thought of that process makes its way through the midst of melancholy and faces the challenge of bringing about a mourning work

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3Tatián 2014, p.17, my translation

4Traverso 2017.

5 Ibid.

that will allow a rethinking of socialism in a time when its memory is lost. As Butler says, the experience of loss itself touches the common ground of damage: "Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all. And if we have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and love, that we have struggle to find the conditions of our desire."⁶

But grief work also raises a question that Derrida formulated in rather disturbing terms: "How can one be late to the end of history? A question for today. It is serious because it obliges one to reflect again, as we have been doing since Hegel, on what happens and deserves the name of event, after history; it obliges one to wonder if the end of history is but the end of a certain concept of history."⁷

What can critical theory be in that circular time in which the experience of history is subtracted from the event? This question has been a feature of the theoretical debate on left wing thought since the 1980s, and has received countless contributions since then.⁸

The concept that, from the field of materialism, was forged to enunciate the problem of the operation of capture and impoverishment of the disadjusted plurality of historical time, in the blind and circular temporality of Capital, is the Marxist concept of ideology, especially in its Althusserian formulation, within the framework of a theory of the duration of a historical formation, that is, from the point of view of social reproduction.⁹

Althusser understands that the development of the materialist concept of history that Marxist theory opens, demands a critique of the teleological conception in which historical time is the projection, in the continuity of time, of the inner essence of the social totality, of which it is the existence. The problem is not only the evolutionist positivism that has been abundantly criticized by theorists such as Adorno or Benjamin, among others, but also the expressive causality that an idealistic conception of time implies. This is understood as a homogeneous continuity that is based on contemporaneity, which supposes a relationship of immediate coexistence without gaps between the elements of the historical totality.¹⁰ This temporality supposes that the relational complexity of social practices is redirected to an immediate existence in a contemporary present. The social totality is a spiritual totality; that is, a whole whose complexity is immediately organised around an inner principle that disregards the effectiveness

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6 Butler 2004, p.20

7 Derrida 1994, p.17

8 Derrida, 1994; Blanchot, 1990; Badiou, 1998; Traverso, 2017

9 Althusser 1970/2013

10 Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 94

of the differences between its parts. That is why the continuity and contemporaneity of time is possible as a phenomenon of the continuity of the presence of the Idea in its positive determinations.¹¹

This homogeneous and contemporary temporality concerns the idealistic conception of politics since it is, for Althusser, the foundation of the Hegelian formula, according to which 'no one can jump over his time'.¹² The present constitutes the absolute horizon, "since all knowledge is nothing but the existence in knowledge of the inner principle of the whole."¹³ This metaphysics of the present forbids all knowledge that leads to the future and therefore makes political action unthinkable - says Althusser.¹⁴

Against what is usually thought, and even against many of Althusser's own formulations, his position does not result from a full rejection of Hegelian dialectics, but from the affirmation of an internal distance in its fabric, through the critique of the denial of the complex temporality subsumed in the idealistic temporality of the Absolute Present. The materialist position, understood as a belligerent intervention in the philosophical field, consists in an exercise of permanent restitution of the real differential plurality of temporalities, whose idealistic denial produces as an imaginary effect, the contemporaneity of historical time; that is, the impoverishment of the experience of the disadjusted, contradictory and heterogeneous condition of its unequal and combined development.

In this sense it can be said that the materialistic reading of Marx points to a *décalage*: Capital "exactly measures a distance and an internal dislocation (*décalage*) in the real, inscribed in its *structure*, a distance and a dislocation such as to make their own effects themselves illegible, and the illusion of an immediate reading of them the ultimate apex of their effects: *fetishism* (...) the truth of history cannot be read in its manifest discourse, because the text of history is not a text in which a voice (the Logos) speaks, but the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures."¹⁵ This "discovery" would not have been possible without a theory of reading which Althusser finds in Freud.¹⁶

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11 Ibid., p.95

12 "It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an individual could leap out of his time or jump over Rhodes" This well-known phrase from de the Preface of The Philosophy of History (Cf. Hegel, 1820) received kilometers of interpretations, many of them focused in the bond between individual and the whole, but the question that Althusser poses facing it is about the very possibility of a kind of political thought different from philosophy ¿Is it possible to confer to politics the status of a thought with its own logic without subsuming it in philosophy? That is the proper materialist question.

13 Althusser 1970 [1965], p.95

14 Ibid., p.96

15 Ibid., p.17

16 Idem., p.16

We have known, since Freud, that the time of the unconscious cannot be confused with the time of biography. On the contrary, *the concept of the time of the unconscious must be constructed* in order to obtain an understanding of certain biographical traits. In exactly the same way, it is essential to construct the concepts of the different historical times which are never given in the ideological obviousness of the continuity of time but must be constructed out of the differential nature and differential articulation of their objects in the structure of the whole.¹⁷

At this point resides the singularity of the Althusserian reading of Capital -usually occluded by hasty interpretations that directly assumed its belonging to Levi-Straussian structuralism or to a post-structuralism considered to be non-Marxist - in the search for a materialism capable of conceiving the social whole as a complex assembly of relations and as a hierarchical and unequal structured process, unified in its diversification by the type of articulation, displacement and torsion that harmonizes different and contradictory times with each other

I should say that we cannot restrict ourselves to reflecting the existence of *visible* and measurable times in this way; we must, of absolute necessity, pose the question of the mode of existence of *invisible* times, of the invisible rhythms and punctuations concealed beneath the surface of each visible time. Merely reading *Capital* shows that Marx was highly sensitive to this requirement. It shows, for example, that the time of economic production is a specific time (differing according to the mode of production), but also that, as a specific time, it is a complex and non-linear time -- a time of times, a complex time that cannot be *read* in the continuity of the time of life or clocks, but has to be *constructed* out of the peculiar structures of production.¹⁸

On the basis of this plural and contradictory conception of historical time, Althusser will develop a few years later his theory of social reproduction which puts the question of duration, that is to say the way in which the structure exists as a given conjuncture, on the scene. Speaking of a formation as a *conjuncture* in Louis Althusser's terms —this means, as a contradictory unity, at once a process and a result— demands avoiding a reductive diagnosis of the complexity of the situation through every possible mean and, especially, of its temporal, structurally contradictory condition. The possibility of a political reading that points precisely

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17 Althusser 1970 [1965]: 103

18 Ibid., p.101

toward this contradictory consistency depends on the intellection of these contradictions; that is to say, to the spots of maximal saturation which are precisely those of greater structural weakness—as the freudian category of *overdetermination* enables to understand them, which Althusser resorts to in his enterprise of problematizing the idealist notion of a teleological time contemporary to itself.

This scheme poses the question of the determined processes of reproduction in the terms of the concrete forms of existence of the economic exploitation, *which is abstract with regards to them*.

With a certain gravitation toward spinozist materialism, Althusser affirms the identity between duration and existence, which allows us to hold at the same time the “two ends of a chain”: On one side, the postulate on the primacy of the relations of production based on the economic exploitation of the productive forces and the methodical caution to assume that the concrete history of a social formation is the history (i. e. the complex articulation of temporalities) of *the reproduction of its relations of production*.

This allows us to affirm that, considering a determined conjuncture, one must first assume that there is a primacy of the relations of production upon the productive forces and that there is not only one single mode of production within a given social formation, but a tendentially dominant one over other modes of production, being the relations between them a contradictory articulation of different temporalities —such as many Latin-American Marxist have shown when thinking Imperialism.¹⁹ And secondly, that this —complex and contradictory— unity is determinant of a social formation. And that, at the same time, the capitalist relation of production (dispossession and separation of the workforce from the means of production) is abstract with regards to the concrete and contradictory complex of relations of production and the superstructural formations in which its reproduction is given.²⁰

These thesis lead us to think about ideology in the key of class struggle as an overdetermined complex of contradictory processes and not only as a failed universalizing operation of a single interpellation. On the contrary, the operation of ideological totalization consists of surrogating that complexity, the efficacy index of its differential articulation, immanent to the material complex of ideological apparatuses. This scheme may not

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19 Cf. Mariategui, 1928; Quijano, 1988

20 “...both ideologues of neo-capitalism and neoanarchists are sweeping exploitation under the rug, the former by way of a defence of the notion that the capitalist economy no longer exists, that we have a ‘service economy’, the latter by declaring that the essence of exploitation is repression, we need to recall this truth that Marx brought to light. Everything that happens in a capitalist social formation, including the forms of state repression that accompany it (we shall see which forms and why), is rooted in the material base of capitalist relations of production, which are relations of capitalist exploitation, and in a system of production in which production is itself subordinated to exploitation and thus to the production of capital on an extended scale.”, Althusser, 2014, p. 33

be subsumed within the scheme of a single vector accommodating Subject and State, conceiving both as homogenous metaphysical unities in any of their declinations, but it also prevents us from resting on the image of the real subsumption of subjects within the logic of capital through technics. The current risks that debilitate leftist thinking are related to the impoverishment or weakening of the overdeterminate dialectic. The harassment of the dominant ideology reinstates a neo-idealism, no longer in the shape of a faith in humanity's progress, but of a resignation facing the ineluctable in the domination instrumented by an algorithmic superpower. It is indispensable to point out that the theoretical and political consequences of this scheme conflow darkly with those of the neoliberal ideology of the "End of history" and its fetichistic fascination with technology.

The reading that Louis Althusser undertakes of Marx cannot be understood if it is not conceived as an intervention in an abysmal conjunction, the process of a torsion that connects and separates the conjuncture of the sixties and the one that takes shape in the eighties. It is within this framework that his proposal places the struggle with idealism - and especially with its concrete formations: humanist and historicist - at the heart of materialist critique.

The eighties decreed the surpassing of the problem of ideology.²¹ In a few years, a sort of hermeneutic hiatus was to leave this constellation of thoughts, which we could call the Althusserian problematic, in a silence full of vociferousness. This brutal suspensive movement, which turned one of the most vibrant pages in the history of 20th century ideas with ferocious efficiency, was produced at the price of the silencing of some of its representatives, even though, paradoxically, the "theoretical novelties" in the field of critical thought of the following decades were deeply tributary to them. It was Balibar who, with the greatest mastery, managed to grasp this circumstance: Wiping out the role of Althusser in this period is a typical aspect of a more general censorship, which has a very precise meaning: it means denying that Marxism in the post-war period (and especially in the 60s and 70s) was not a simple repetition of dogmas drawn from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin (or even Mao), denying therefore that changes and events took place in its realm, bearing an objective relationship to the social and political issues of the period. It seems important now to deny that there was intellectual activity—therefore productivity—within Marxism, not only illusions. Marxist intellectuals, and especially communist intellectuals, must be portrayed as either passive victims or impostors, the mere instruments of a gigantic conspiracy. They should not have been able to think by themselves, just as Marxism and communism should not have had any real history, except the history of a catastrophic imposture.²²

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21 cf. Butler, 1997; Laclau, 2001, among others

22 Balibar 1993, p.2

The weakening of theoretical Marxism took shape within the framework of an abandonment of the relevance of the question of historical causality and with it, the opportunity for the conjunction of a just diagnosis of the conjuncture and a politically powerful thought of its transformation. It is necessary, and even urgent, to open up the operation of closure and silencing that marked the weakening of critical thought and the reduction of its scope to a permanent adjustment of descriptive instruments to the detriment of a question about the relationship between theory, ethics and politics. It is not only a question of exercising a fairer and more deprived reading of the dominant ideological tendencies of the eighties and nineties, but of doing so in order to reveal, in the light of what that operation silenced. Because that silencing continues to produce effects on the current limits of the critical intellectual field. That silence is today the political impotence of our analyses.

III. The last humanist utopia: totalitarian ideological apparatus and hatred of castration

The last utopia of the 20th century was called the "Information Society". Its consecration was celebrated as the "End of History" and was fantasized as the achievement of a planetary harmony with which, thanks to the full incorporation of goods and signs into the common market, cultural barriers would be eliminated and a kind of "humanitarian" tolerance would be achieved, beyond material inequalities and historical differences. We cannot claim that financial and telecommunications expansion has not achieved its goal, yet borders, barriers and walls, both material and symbolic, are being raised to the order of the day with redoubled care, and sometimes even prompted by claims formulated by desperate masses.

What has happened?

When the world seems to have reached the humanist utopia of maximum enlightenment, the proliferation of communicational flows and the consecration on a planetary scale of the so-called "Information Society", a paradoxical era of renewed obscurantism, segregationist tendencies and the intensification of violence threatens life and impoverishes democratic forms of coexistence. The "success" of globalization thus contradictorily coincides with the signs of its failure and the dream of an unlimited world has become a kind of nightmare of claustrophobia. The promise of the "world without frontiers" becomes a kind of timeless nightmare that consecrates the stage of those post-apocalyptic fantasies, where the catastrophe has already happened and time closes in on itself in an eternal repetition of the present. A totalized (and totalitarian) experience of the present time coincides with the dehistoricization of social experience and immerses us in an atmosphere where the insignificance of politics produces the disappearance of the future itself.

The COVID-19 pandemic "happens" to this world shaped by presentism.

Returning to a counterpoint between intellectuals - Maurice Blanchot (1964) to Jaspers (1958) - concerning nothing less than the images of the "End of History" mobilized by the threat of the atomic bomb in the middle of the 20th century, Alenka Zupančič offers an idea that opens up a way of questioning the "event" condition of the COVID 19 pandemic and the degree of "exceptionality" of the measures taken on a global scale in its name. Written in 2018, Zupančič's text has nothing "premonitory" about it, but outlines a question which, although it seems too abstract and philosophical, is the question of our time.

It is not possible to understand the forms of our daily thinking, the languages with which we formulate the categories to think about the world we belong to, if we do not take the time to think about this question: is an event possible if the "red button" has already been pressed? Or, to put it another way, what is new in this "new" novelty? What is the event character of this event that we keep talking

Well then, the problem of the demarcation of an event as such is not purely a matter of philosophical lucubration, but mobilises the common senses, the forces to configure "themes", and recognize "milestones" in common history, and of course, it raises the question of the technologies of social space, those that shape our experience of time and space, of the "here" and the "now".

The delimitation of the event as such concerns, according to Derrida (2002), public space, hence a political present transformed at every moment, in its structure and content, by the tele-technology of what is so confusingly called information or communication. The techno-informational processing of the public word and of everyday relationships offers a specific modalisation of temporality that we can call an artefact of acontecimentality, in the sense of its capacity to organise the perception of that which deserves to be recognised as a significant scansion of time. We could say that the socially dominant experience of time takes shape in the framework of a complex assembly of ideological apparatuses. As Michel Pêcheux develops, it is in ideological materiality; that is, the network of discursive formations that exist in the architecture of ritualized practices in apparatuses²³ that "the ideological conditions of the reproduction/transformation of the relations of production"²⁴ are given. This means that these contradictory conditions are constituted, at a given historical moment by the complex set of ideological apparatuses " I say complex set, i .e., a set with relations of cob.) It is to be expected that in the framework of the exponential globalization of markets based

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23 cf. Althusser 2014

24 Pêcheux 1982, p.99

on the equivalent valorization of cultural, informational, cognitive goods, these contradictions would include, in a fundamental place, those resulting from national spaces and the global market. In this framework, the very "state" nature of the ideological apparatuses enters into a strong contradiction. In this contradiction, our regime of historicity modulated as a totalized time, uprooted from community experiences, collective memories and cultural differences is experienced by communities and subjects with violent consequences.

The homogenized and immediate temporality of algorithmic calculation restricts real social richness and diversity to an image that is based on the structural obtention of the conflict sedimented in words and of the relationship between politics and disagreement.

The info-communicational artefact is, we could say, the dominant ideological apparatus of our time, in the sense that it organizes practices and rituals into discursive formations with a specific regime whose temporality tends to be *totalitarian*. It is not only that, as is often said, the "new technologies" reconfigure the grammars of political discursiveness by postponing, under the primacy of a temporality of chatter and relativism of opinions, the properly political moment of decision.²⁵ Rather, these are practical and ritualized procedures that produce their regressive effects on the functioning of the humanist myth of the social pact, tensioning the very forms of the humanist subjective interpellation device and the scheme of the "illusion of the self" that are consubstantial with social life as we know it and its usual political forms.

The effect of informational artefactuality is not so much the negation of social conflict, but the contraction of the imaginary scene of sociality that was supposed to shape it into a social form; a scene that had as its framework the delimitation of a national community, plotted in a national language, a series of customs and institutions whose specificities resulted from a determined history. Among other issues, the political efficacy of the complex of apparatuses that constituted the specific materiality of that scene, was given by its capacity to deny the constitutive aggressiveness of the imaginary identification among the members of that community, by means of processing it into a complex of disciplinary institutions and devices of identification and affective transference that enabled a certain dialectic game between order and freedom, with emphasis sometimes more individualistic, sometimes more communitarian.

According to Etienne Balibar, the current weakening of the egalitarian imagination, on which the ideological efficacy of the state's "illusory community" was based, tends to coincide with the expansion of experiences of extreme defencelessness and the threat of subjective disintegration, in the disproportionate invigoration of de-

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25 cf. Badiou, 2005

democratisation tendencies that stretch the very mechanism of political representation to the limit and, far from reducing the conflict, intensify it over areas that are sacrificial for not being exploitable of human life -individual and social- and administer it by deactivating its collective processing as a political power.²⁶

The political-informational artefact of "consensus" administered as a mode of sociability embodies the contradiction between the global scene sustained by info-communicational devices and the national scene, sustained by a balance of more classical disciplinary apparatuses and control devices. New ideological formations regarding "democracy" are taking shape; they are based on images that combine full visibility and zero affectation with paranoid forms of totalitarian violence, insofar as they admit a conception of what is common that can fantasize about abolishing all contamination coming from encounters with others, to the point of eliminating the very entity of the other. These are forms of pluralism without otherness –correlative to a historicity with no event-which, by denying any symbolic difference, any historically configured cultural mark, inhibits the collective inscription of any singularity.

The neoliberal artifact of the public space modulates the reproduction of the social order as an uneventing event (understood in the strong sense of a political, temporal and symbolic scansion) and operates by systematically diluting the desire for social and life ties with others (which always appear too real to be translated into codified information), while transmuting them into terror and threats of harassment. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate to characterize contemporary artefactuality as a kind of "dissolution of public space" by virtue of an inflation of the universe of the ultra-individual private sphere, but rather, its reconfiguration in the terms of a contradictory globalized space, that is to say - expansive and undifferentiated. Within that space, everyone has a place and is tolerated as long as they are not affected - or allowed to be affected by others - and, thus, to the extent that they do not bear marks, traces of encounter and otherness; that is, they do not become properly political subjects in that space. The info-communicational device thus becomes a technology for the management of the affectivity of the community that reconfigures what the democracies of the 20th century called "masses"; in the words of Žižek, it models *paranoid multitudes*.²⁷

These masses constitute a form of totalitarian identity that is identical to itself and to the social universe, without any fissures, is constituted as an absolute presence. This identity symptomises and denies the marks of the conflict of memories and of the irreducible singularity of the rooted communities of the subjects, by virtue of which

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26 Balibar 2012

27 Žižek 2008

they trace differences in the present, trace temporalisations, recognise social and subjective history in terms of a complex historicity.

The mechanism of abstraction that produces this temporality of the pure present and the expanded identity that consists of it, does not need to remain hidden because it does not operate by hiding either; on the contrary, its effectiveness lies in the placement of its artificial condition in the centre of the public scene, as the absolute knowledge about society and about its future actions. In this sense, the ideological feature of the "Information Society" neoliberalism is not that of a virtuality that makes invisible the "reality" of the material and symbolic inequalities that constitute the condition of possibility of its configuration, but a virtuality that shows too much and literally configures society as a society of information: that is, whose components are not subjects of desire but they are already information and remain as information, pure communicability of bites, particles, genetic data or pulsional energy.

In this scene, the problem of democracy is reduced to the question of the immediate co-presence of opinions, opinions that concur in the public space governed by the logic of competition for equal-visibility, but with respect to which, the subjects in their singularity, are purely abstract. Thus, the ideological efficacy of this configuration does not seem to lie in the illusion of a "coexistence without conflicts" - a fantasy of a society reconciled with itself - but in a ferocious material obturation and in the ideological suppression of the necessary distance in which a subject consists as a fold of a relational plexus and as a *decalage*.

In a certain sense, the ideological efficiency of the info-communication apparatus and the complex of discourses that sustain its dominance, resides in the forms of negation of the event and of the singularity of the desiring subject that constitutes its immanent exteriority; that is, its cause. The articulated discursive complex of more or less systematized theories that cross and sustain the informational ideological apparatus - from neurosciences, biotechnology and cybernetics to psychologies of self-help and the management of emotions - does not configure a distortion of reality, but rather tends to contract, in its imaginary configuration, the temporal loop through which a subject takes shape as a subject of desire. Both in psychoanalytical terms and in the Spinozist tradition the desiring activity supposes the constitutive otherness of the subject. Thus conceived, one could not properly say that there is a "capitalist desire" as Fisher argues.²⁸ Rather one should think of capitalism as a non-desiring way of modulating affect; in this respect one could call, for example, the Lacanian category of *jouissance* that connects non-articulable residual drives with the symbolic, an indistinct order of

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28 Fisher 2016

"the same", not susceptible to being marked by a difference.²⁹We will return to this.

For now we emphasise that the simple denunciation of the artificial condition of the information apparatus can only replace the simulacrum, repeat it, by aspiring to a naturalness of 'real' social life, as non-existent as it is abstract. This mode of criticism is trapped in the very labyrinth of humanism, swinging between its vitalist and technocratic or economist tendencies.

This new naturalistic illusion underlying any denunciation of the artificial condition of the technological apparatus constitutes a new form of economicism. Against this tendency to subsume the problem of reproduction under the primacy of the development of the productive forces over the social relations of production, the materialist theory of ideology calls for an approach to the technological question, from the point of view of social reproduction attentive to its contradictory and unadjusted consistency. It is not a question then of reformulating the theory of alienation in a renewed way by invoking dispersed fragments of Marx on the real subsumption, but of understanding the problem of the reproduction of the overdetermined unity of relations of production and development of the productive forces - including its technical dimension - under the understanding of the singular temporal modulations of that 'time of times' which is the time of Capital, understood as a social relation based on the regulation of time. This Marxist thesis has been recently recovered by feminist Social Reproduction Theory.³⁰

Thus understood the so-called "algorithmic governmentality" loses its fetishistic inexorability. As Derrida warns, however artificial and manipulative it may be, it cannot be expected that the artefact will not surrender or bend to the coming of what is coming, to the event that transports it. And of which it will bear witness, even if only in self-defence.³¹The politics of the event can only be read within the framework of a certain critical work on our experience of time, or better, within it: this

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29 Lacan 1991, 2006 ; 2011, among others.

30 As Arruza (2015) says, recalling Tombazos (1994), Tomba (2012) and Bensaid (2002): "What differentiates one mode of production from another, then, is - among other factors - precisely the historically specific way in which time is organised. In capitalism, as stressed, among others, by Stavros Tombazos, Daniel Bensaid and Massimiliano Tomba, time is both a social relation and the measure of social relations. In this economy of time, different temporalities are intertwined - that of production analysed in *Capital* Volume I, of circulation in Volume II and of reproduction as a whole in Volume III" "For Marx, abstract labour time is the indifferent, homogenous time measured by the clock and crystallised in constant capital, commodities and money, in contrast with the individual, concrete labour time, filled with a specific content. This abstract, linear, calculable time, measured through clocks and chronometers, and that in turn measures labour, expands its kingdom well beyond the walls of workplaces, and increasingly regulates also leisure time, through the mediation of commodities." cf. Arruza, 2015, pp. 28-52

31 Derrida 2002.

exercise demands a consideration of the present as a conjuncture. That is to say, as a contradictory and unequal relationship of forces. Only if we are capable of persevering in the disruption of the ideological present can we recognise there the actuality of the future, and the memory of what remains to be done.

But whether we are able to do this does not depend on our theories but on class struggle within the various dimensions of historical life including class struggle in ideology, which is also carried out in our theoretical field. There is no "consciousness-raising" program capable of reversing this ideological process which is historical and not pedagogical. The problem must be thought in terms of ideological class struggle. Because as Pêcheux says:

Ideology does not reproduce itself in the general form of a *Zeitgeist* (i. e., the spirit of the age, the 'mentality' of an epoch, 'habits of thought', etc.) imposed in an even and homogeneous way on 'society' as a kind of space pre-existing class struggle: 'The ideological state apparatuses are not the realization of ideology in general . . . '(2) ' . . . nor even the conflict-free realization of the ideology of the ruling class', which means that it is impossible to attribute to each class its own ideology, as if each existed 'before the class struggle' in its own camp, with its own conditions of existence and its specific institutions, such that the ideological class struggle would be the meeting point of two distinct and pre-existing worlds (...) the ideological state apparatuses are not pure instruments of the ruling class, ideological machines simply reproducing the existing relations of production (...) which means that the ideological state apparatuses constitute simultaneously and contradictorily the site and the ideological conditions of the transformation of the relations of production.³²

Long before the current pandemic broke out, we have known that the so-called "new technologies" are tied to forms of data expropriation that violate all known forms of the right to information and privacy; we know that the economic world that makes them possible exists only as a destructive process of financialization of economies, flexibilization of all labour rights, hyper-exploitation and precarization, and we are so "conscious " of this that we even have films that "reveal the secret" available on the best known platforms. But even knowing this, we have decided to suspend this collectively acquired knowledge in order to accept the virtualization of all areas of our personal and collective life. It seems that sustaining that "normality" of the here-and-now is much more urgent and achievable, rather than imagining a discontinuation

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32 Pêcheux 1982, pp.98-99

or a cut in the present. Imagining the future within the framework of an uneventful presence is the dominant ideological effect of our conjuncture, sustained by countless practices, rituals, apparatuses and discursive formations. The timing of the pandemic has exposed the effectiveness of the dominant ideology in action, fully and before our eyes.

And this allows us to understand the "paradox" that in our conjuncture it is the supreme and ultraconservative discourses that adopt combative vanguard rhetoric against "the system" or "the world order". However anomalous these may seem, they are only the "ideological vanguard" of the negation of the event-with their calls to ignore the danger and maintain the wheel of the global economy-that constitutes the temporary regime of the dominant ideology. And that is why they are particularly dangerous because they find a generalized affective disposition to make their discourses "catch on", even in sectors whose interests are not represented at all by segregationist slogans. In ideological terms, that is, in our practices and rituals and beyond our political vocations and good intentions, we all practice the denial of the future. The rituals that in a practical way support the implementation of technological resources, both in private relations and in public matters, consolidate a massive renunciation of the event and produce, whether we like it or not, a firm disposition not to even imagine it. The symptom of them is our hidden desires to "return" to normality; paradoxically, the most progressive thing today seems to be to yearn for the past. We tell ourselves that we owe the "exceptionality" of the pandemic, but this practical refusal to imagine the future is no different from that which makes it possible for poor people, like the one I come from, to accept unpayable and damning debts, a hundred years. The symptom of them is our hidden desires to "return" to normality; paradoxically, the most progressive thing today seems to be to yearn for the past. We tell ourselves that it is because of the "exceptionality" of the pandemic, but this practical refusal to imagine the future is no different from that which makes it possible for poor nations, like the one I come from, to accept unpayable and damning debts for over a hundred years.

The bad news is that the "exceptionality" of the pandemic is too normal and finds the responses less exceptional. It is the consequence of a way of life that has made the crisis its criterion of normality.

The collective setting up of what is an "event" and its distinction from what is not is today disrupted, just as the very principles of normality are disrupted. The identification parameters, the discursive frameworks that embody the metalinguistic function, are subject to the contradictions inherent in the national-global complex of ideological apparatuses and with it, the concrete discursive formations that sustain the material consistency of any symbolic order. If this disruption is a symptom, it is precisely because, although there is nothing new about it, the "exceptionality" of the "health crisis" and the seriousness of the

"economic crisis" associated with it cannot be named or conceptualized. We have lost sight of the theories that would have allowed us to connect these ideological and political experiences with historical causality, and to inscribe their conjunctural modulations in the framework of the global process of agony of the regime of imperialist accumulation. It is this agony that explains the logic of the "irrational" moment of the financial powers³³ and the fact that the very terms of normality have been written for several decades, in the language of the exception.

What we call neoliberalism, which is only the agonizing form of imperialist humanism, has reconfigured the borders between normality and exception, by making the crisis a new form of normalization.³⁴ The instrumentation of war and the strategy of economic and financial shock have installed, decades ago, an economy of crisis. The dictatorial experiences that made Latin America a neoliberal laboratory at the end of the 1970s, exposed from the beginning the authoritarian fabric of the neoliberal turn of imperialist capitalism, despite the fact that its face took until 2008 to be presented before the eyes of the central countries.³⁵ But also in these countries, as Althusser or Poulantzas³⁶ argued, the technocratic forms of European social democracies since the end of the 1970s carried with them technocratic, therefore, undemocratic and authoritarian tendencies.

The growing irrationality of public and private financial debt policies and the entrepreneurial narratives that call for "making an opportunity of every crisis", converge in a background in respect of which it is practically impossible to identify the "exceptionality of an event".

If there is anything new to be expected in this context, it is the disappointing and non-epical normalization of the apocalypse.

It is against this new modulation of the "end of history" ideology that we must beware, because it is no longer a pamphletary discourse like that of Fukuyama, nor is it based on the hope of a reconciled and harmonious world. Power no longer finds a dominant ideological narrative capable of strategically regulating the fantasies that sustain a renewed utopia. It is its impotence, the disengagement of its strategic springs and the cohesion of its hegemonic bloc that explains both the proliferation of apocalyptic discourses and the rituals of desperate inertia. The most curious thing is that it is this impotence to give itself a hegemonic strategy that produces the practical modulations on which our unconscious affective experience is based with the greatest efficiency. The agonising crisis of the historical block of financial capital produces

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33 Cf. Davies 2016

34 cf. Collazo 2020

35 cf. Davies 2016

36 Althusser 2018, Poulantzas 2019

the ideological efficacy for its reproduction. It is not a project to capture our unconscious life, it is a historical hesitation of the complex of discourses and institutions that offered symbolic and imaginary support to that ominous thing that inhabits every modern man.

This leads us to think that apocalyptic images, with all their scenographic interruptions, speak of a dominant social fantasy under which we go through the unbearability of lives tied to the agonising decline of the imperialist regime of accumulation, in its neoliberal forms. The famous image coined by the anti-imperialist left at the beginning of the century, which promised 'Socialism or Barbarism', becomes part of this catastrophic fantasy with which we endure - and reproduce - the normality and insignificance of barbarization. Critical thinking and political imagination (not only that of the left, but more generally that of all popular-democratic aspirations) is facing one of the most difficult crossroads.

The articulated discursive complex of more or less systematized theories that cross and sustain the informational ideological apparatus - from neurosciences, biotechnology and cybernetics to psychologies of self-help and management of emotions - does not configure a distorted or veiled objectivity, but rather tends to contract, in its imaginary reconfiguration, the temporal loop through which a subject takes shape as a subject of desire. This is the key to our predominant agonic melancholy as a subjective affection. Every ideology is supported by unconscious springs.

As we have said, presentism, as a regime of temporality, creates an ideology of pluralism that behaves like a fantasy of the elimination of democracy -and, in short, of the other. Relativism and cynicism are the reverse side of these regressive impulses, because the illusion of erasing differences demands a kind of forced forgetfulness, and then it also destroys the very possibility of a common intelligibility, which sustains and makes viable the shared life.

It is no surprise that this scenario is becoming a breeding ground for the resurgence of authoritarianism. When these are characterized as "hate speeches"³⁷, attributing the ideological question to a kind of transmission by pure repetition; or when this "hate" is directly attributed to a class project, as if an affection could be injected by means of planning, we do not succeed in permeating the surface of the phenomenon. But more seriously, we fail to see the overdetermined causality that brings together the affective, even unconscious, dispositions with the complex ensemble of relationships that consists in our conjuncture, in its multiple practical, discursive, technical, and institutional mediations. We do not manage to think this complexity because we have got rid of the theory that tried to think it: the Marxist

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37 Cf. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040731>

theory of ideology. Understood in the terms of the theory of ideology, the phenomenon of 'hatred' is not of some supposed 'others', not even of some other class. Hate is always of the One. That is to say, it is the result of the processes of unification of history into a global narrative, it is the real effect on the affective and unconscious dimension of the failed attempt to homogenize the unique ways of life, that is, the ways of desiring and enjoying. We do not manage to think this complexity because we have got rid of the theory that tried to think it: the Marxist theory of ideology. Understood in the terms of the theory of ideology, the phenomenon of 'hatred' is not of some supposed 'others', not even of some other class. Hate is always of the One. That is to say, it is the result of the processes of unification of history into a global narrative, it is the effect on the affective and unconscious dimension of the failed attempt to homogenize the unique ways of life, that is, the modes of desire and *jouissance*. This tendency makes the historical contradiction between the national and the global scenes of imperialist capitalism explode. And if the most violent thing in this stage of history started with the brutal dictatorships of Pinochet and Videla, it is because these contradictions were always brutal in the peripheral areas of the imperialist geopolitics. In Latin America, nationalisms were in most cases racist processes based on the discipline of the labour force in imperialist and at the same time semi-slavery modes of labour. Monopolistic capital and slave labour are realities that have been known for a long time in these lands, where the tanathic forms of Capital are longstanding and practically coextensive with the modern idea of Man.

In his correspondence with Einstein regarding war, Freud (1932) explained:

So far I have set out what seems to me the kernel of the matter: the suppression of brute force by the transfer of power to a larger combination, founded on the community of sentiments linking up its members (...) We have even committed the heresy of explaining the origin of human conscience by some such "turning inward" of the aggressive impulse. Obviously when this internal tendency operates on too large a scale, it is no trivial matter; rather, a positively morbid state of things (...). If the propensity for war be due to the destructive instinct, we have always its counter-agent, Eros, to our hand. All that produces ties of sentiment between man and man must serve us as war's antidote. These ties are of two kinds. First, such relations as those toward a beloved object, void though they be of sexual intent. The psychoanalyst need feel no compunction in mentioning "love" in this connection; religion uses the same language: Love thy neighbor as thyself. A pious injunction, easy to enounce, but hard to carry out! The other bond of sentiment is by way of identification. All that brings out the

significant resemblances between men calls into play this feeling of community, identification, whereon is founded, in large measure, the whole edifice of human society.³⁸

Religions as well as the institutions that took their place, taking over many of the reproductive functions of the social order, fulfilled in moments of "normality" in an always unstable but relatively effective way this function of regulating the irreducible aggressiveness of social life. According to J-A Miller, in 1967, Lacan anticipated that our future of common markets will be balanced by the increasingly harsh extension of the processes of segregation.³⁹ Contemporary processes of segregation constitute an inherent tendency in the historical process of cultural uniformisation that implied the contemporary commitment to the so-called 'global village' and whose universalist ambition entails a claim to maximize the pretensions of symbolic homogenization that produce a singular inflection in classical modern humanism.

In this sense, the current processes of segregation manifested in singular forms of racism, macho violence, classism, etc., can be thought of as exposing the failure of the social utopias of the 19th century that dreamed of universalization that depended on the active validity of a symbolic order organized around the notions of "race" and "gender" and the legitimization of material inequalities. This is a paradoxical failure resulting from the tendency of the project to capture everything that resists assimilation by the logic of Capital.

We are then witnessing the experience of the absence of limits to this universalization, in the form of a paradox in which the formalizing and equivalent tendency of the discourse of science transmutes into the promotion of renewed and perhaps much more severe segregations; as well as in the paradoxical solidarity between new technocratic utopias and the restoration of neo-religious and traditionalist discourses that result from a reactive movement proper to the experience of the modern subject "especially lost in its *jouissance*, since what could frame it from traditional wisdom, was gnawed away, subtracted."⁴⁰

What Miller puts forward is that the crisis of the rooted communities and of the discursive formations that embodied the symbolic function that conferred certain particularities on their cultural worlds - national languages, systems of customs, etc. -, in the framework of the global expansion of capital flows, is translated into experiences of subjective disintegration. In this way, the imaginary unity of one's own

38 Cf. "The Einstein-Freud Correspondence (1931-1932)" available: <https://www.public.asu.edu/~jmlynch/273/documents/FreudEinstein.pdf>

39 Miller, 1985, p.50

40 Miller, 2010 [1985], p. 53, my translation

ego is endangered. In the subject's experience, this threat is caused by an imaginary other or by the abstract law that imposes limits on its *jouissance*. The encounter with anything of the other that might offer some frustrating obstacle to the effort of mutual understanding becomes a threat of dissolution for the subject himself. In this way, those commands that in the context of a culture impoverished in its historical differences, call us to recognize the other in the Other - a globalized, dehistoricized, pasteurized neighbor - produce as a paradoxical effect the indistinction of two experiences of the limit: the limit that conciliates the anthropological tolerance of the differences and that of the post-metaphysical acceptance of the inexistence of meta-language. The very existence of the others confronts the subject with an experience of castration for which he no longer has any political, ethical or religious narratives.

The national borders that embodied the cultural differences between particular historical communities reinscribed-in their internal contradictions and conflicts-the complexity of historical time as an immanent exteriority of cyclical and equivalent global capital time.

In the current dominance of the globalised culture of hyperproductivity and limitless consumption, these borders have been disrupted. The paradoxical result shows the ominous reverse of the humanist promise: the other is perceived as an unbearable obstacle to the expansion of one's narcissistic *jouissance* and this experience provokes the most real experiences of threat. Thus, the circumstances of life with others, including those of an order of coexistence, or the generic confrontation with the principles of authority, confront the subjects with some kind of limit that they cannot tolerate.

When these experiences are multiplied within the framework of cultural settings which do not offer symbolic frameworks capable of giving them any meaning, but on the contrary multiply labour or economic failures, the various manifestations of the precarization or fragility of survival, the imminence of death or crisis, etc., all forms of otherness become an unbearable threat. Any reminiscence of castration brought about by our mortal condition itself is lived out in an imaginary mode that is reactive, intolerant, as a hatred of castration, in its double valence: "cruel optimism"⁴¹ - in the desperate attempt to pursue unlimited *jouissance*, an expansive, hyper-consumerist or exitist narcissism - and "hedonist-nihilist" - as frustration, unbearable anguish, forms of medicalisation, self-inflicted violence, etc. In both cases, it becomes clear that to the extent that the problem of castration is the problem of the subject himself, because the Other supposes a space of extimacy, then hatred of the Other is hatred of oneself.

41 cf. Berlant 2011

IV. To conclude or to recommence. Towards a primitive future

Why do the libertarian narratives of the neoconservative factors work? Why do the right-wing assume anti-system positions and call for a revolt against the power apparatuses that for decades guaranteed the reproduction of inequalities? It is not enough to think of the question in terms of a "class project" to dismantle the benefits of the social state of the mid-twentieth century.⁴² And it is not enough, not because this is not true, but because it does not explain either the popular adhesions that this project arouses or the paradox that its success increases while any possible scheme that tries to identify a strategic centre of global power is blurred.

To understand this situation, which is not so new but already typical of neoliberalism, it is necessary to abandon the order/freedom dichotomy that has organised political discussions around the question of State power. It is necessary, first of all, to understand that the democratic condition of the modern public space is not in the immediate or spontaneous manifestation of popular demands, but in the laborious collective elaboration of its mediations, in the forms of thought, in the representations and arguments that allow us to imagine, through their contradictions, the social destiny. In other words, the mystery of democracy as a paradoxical combination of order, conflict and freedom, is hidden less in the contingent force of the outbreaks of social unrest than in the collective craftsmanship of its interpretation.

Popular sovereignty does not live in a state of permanent rebellion, nor in the fleeting nature of a thunderbolt, but in the capacity to make a continuous struggle in a permanent process of expansion out of its potency. Popular sovereignty is the movement for the democratisation of the common intellect and of life with others. This public elaboration of the intelligence is a "philosophical" task (because questions about justice, freedom, equality are philosophical, regardless of who thinks them), as well as a political one (insofar as the answers are always concrete taking sides in a given history), but they are given on the basis of the cultural and ideological elements available, driven by the sensibilities and affections of the common people and modulated by the political forces and technical artifices that shape the public space.⁴³

Thus thought out, we could say that the modern history of democracy is the history of the controversial work of thought (philosophy, science, art) and of politics against superstition that constitutes a part of the common affections.

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42 Harvey 2005

43 Caletti, 2006

Our history is one of totalitarian melancholy because, as Zupančič⁴⁴ says, it is without object. So attached to the affection of loss, we cannot put a name to what we have already lost, we cannot desire again.

Between the disaster of the concentration camps to come, portrayed by Bergman, the threat of total annihilation represented by the atomic bomb, in Kubric's film and our current post-apocalyptic narratives, a transformation is taking place in the modes of experiencing historical and subjective time that impact on the possibility of giving (or not giving) ourselves a political imagination. If the disaster is no longer "imminent", because it has already happened, then there is no "time" to create the Humanity that we would have lost. If we are the inhabitants of an apocalypse that lasts too long, there is only room for the normalisation of the destruction. What else do the speeches of figures like Trump or Bolsonaro invite us to do, rather than a cynical resignation, a melancholic and superstitious apathy that can only persevere in the permanent crisis, under the not at all unlikely rule of "save yourself"?

Against the efficacy of impotence, the great political challenge for the left demands the abandonment of the false dialectic of hope and hopelessness that underpins the regime of Present Day temporality, in which contemporary forms of superstition are watered down, in order to ask itself the question of real historical alternatives. In order to do this, it is important not to forget that the "transformation" we are witnessing is a transformation without event: a transformation in the ideological aspect of the dominant humanist ideology in solidarity with the creation of the global scene that we are looking upon with horror today. Perhaps then we will understand that the challenge lies in abandoning hope in Humanity, in order to end up losing what we never had.

To lose with it the poor scheme that affirms or denies the State in an abstract way, making use of the image of a pure naturalistic exteriority, a longed-for return to the most authentic whose theological genealogy duplicates humanism in new postcards of paradise.

The challenge must be forged on the basis of the only really existing historical pillars: the contradictory immanence of popular sovereignty in the restricted forms of today's post-dictatorial and techno-authoritarian democracies and the immanence of the historical transformation (the reality of the event) in the very fabric of the agony of the imperialist regime of accumulation.

Because, perhaps, by urging in the archive we will find that the tools are closer than we think and we will succeed in confronting the "save yourselves" with a "women and children first". Perhaps it is a matter of knowing how to listen to what is burning in the humanist light; to find again the fragile, the weak, the vulnerable... in short, the last ones, in order to put them first. The blacks first, the Indians first. Perhaps it is a

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44 Zupančič 2018

question of recovering the multi-temporalism capable of breaking the centre-periphery inequality that sustains the unique contemporary time of global humanism. Knowing how to read in the primitives of imperialist humanism, the immanence of the desire for the future. Any other alleged option of "externality" or "future" only speculates about the closed world of our superstitions.

This is a material operation in the experience of historical time, capable of re-inscribing the current heterogeneity in the opaque present, to reinvent the Leninist metaphor of the "weakest link" in a new reading capable of assuming the opportunity of the event in the most densely knotted conjuncture. The future of humanity does not belong to the white man; it will be woman, precarized worker, beast, queer, Indian, black, monster, or it will not be.

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