

The Double Heritage of Communism to Come. 1917-1968-2018

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Abstract: The idea of Communism does not remain the same throughout history. This essay compares the revolutionary waves of 1917 and 1968 and their concepts of Communism. Both revolutionary waves aim to change the relations between the public and the private, between anonymity and intimacy. Hence, gender relations lie at the heart of both revolutions. But the relation of 1968 to 1917 is one of repetition and difference: from the 1960s on the dominant line of emancipation was no longer *no gender*, but *many genders*. This change of paradigms is true in general. The reconstruction of the revolutionary constructions of 1917 and 1968 allows us to superimpose the two historical lines of flight of emancipation. The Communism of 1917 stood under the sign of equality and unity, that of 1968 under the sign of freedom and difference. A possible communism of 2018 would have to take solidarity and association to the centre stage.

Keywords: Communism. Queerpolitics. Gender relations. Revolutions. 1917. 1968. Solidarity

Communism does not exist in the singular. The common is no unity that would encompass everything by subordinating it to an idea, will, or central committee. The common is rather that which the many share with one another, as equals and free in solidarity.

At the same time, communism was repeatedly understood like this: a final sublation of social divisions into an overarching harmony. Thousands of communist parties and factions of the past dreamt in this way of the future: the troublesome dispute with enemies as well as with comrades would finally find an end when the whole world would see that just *this one, one's own* party program is the right one. To be signed by everyone. Even, and especially, the Communist Party of the Soviet-Union (Bolsheviks), for a long time the largest and most influential communist party, followed this dream. In a spiraling movement that begins even before 1917 and finds its climax in the Stalinism of the late 1930s, it combatted initially the monarchist and bourgeois parties, then the allied social-democratic, social-revolutionary and anarchist parties and ultimately, when all other parties were prohibited, the oppositions, factions, currents and platforms within itself. As it had, according to its own conviction, a privileged insight into the truth of the social, it believed itself able to represent the common in all its parts: the population was represented in the working class, the class in the party, the party in the central committee, the central committee in the general secretary. The party line that was issued by the latter would lead into the communist future, no matter however much zigzag it would entail. Whoever would *deviate* from this deviating course was guilty. The counter term to *identity* was thus not difference, but *opposition*. "Other" became synonymous with "inimical". Until its demise, the

Soviet leadership saw itself surrounded by inner enemies. Wherever social initiatives cropped up, it was safer to oppress them. This mistrust worked as self-fulfilling prophecy. Eventually, the protesting people did (preponderantly in fact) not want a more democratic, more humanist or more friendly socialism, as was still the case in the 1920s, 1950s and 1960s, but rather no socialism at all.

The unity failed. Manifestly, the Soviet-Union collapsed in 1991. But not in order to give way to an assembly of the many, to liberate the common from a constrained unity, but to leave behind smaller fragments that purported themselves as *individual unities*: nation states, family households, individuals.

The capitalism that now expands, unhindered even onto the last third of the globe, connects people only by separating them. Through its central social mechanism of commodity relation, its inhabitants are not connected by cooperation but by competition; the social constitutes itself by innumerable splits. *But the common lives as little in isolation as it does in a forced unity.*

Even under post-communist conditions, political groups attempted to espouse communism. Against isolation, they attempted to spark movements of assembly or to gather social movements around themselves. Even long before the end of the Soviet-Union was officially confirmed, in 1991 and even before it was officially founded in 1922, communists renounced it. This process already had begun in October 1917 with the critique of the military seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, experienced its first pinnacle in 1921 when the end of the civil war did not bring the hoped for democratization but rather the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion and the prohibition of inner-party opposition, continued in the 1930s when Stalinism perverted into its contrary the communist promise with the Great Terror, the show trials, the purges and the gulag, spread out further when in 1939 the Hitler-Stalin pact defrauded socialism even of anti-fascism, and became internationally more influential when in 1953, despite Stalin's death, no real de-Stalinisation was instated and the revolts in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were crushed with the help of the Red Army. With each disappointment, new groups and parties emerged that offered a new habitat-in-exile to communism. One "International" after the other claimed to incorporate the common and to represent the true intention of Trotsky, Lenin, Marx, or Bakunin against the historical betrayal. But in all these movements of disentanglement, the conditions of the political itself were also relocated. With the anti-colonial liberation movements and the Chinese Revolution in the midst of the twentieth century, the binary schema of politics that sought to identify left and right with the East and the West became more complicated. Everywhere new agents emerged: blacks, women, homosexuals. The communist learned, to her dismay, that no parties were able to represent the common. The party of the movement,

the citizens' initiative, the one-point-group supplanted the united party. For a second time in only one century, Communism became precarious [*prekarisiert*] - *once in its totality, then between the singularities.*

If Communism still waits for its realization, this waiting does not take place in an empty space, but rather in that of history – filled with experiences, hopeful attempts, bold experiments, and complex theoretical disputes. Communism has experienced defeats inflicted by overpowering and brutal enemies, but also and primarily a defeat from within. Time and again it has invaded *niches* in which it was able to hibernate, *but in which it could not unfold itself due to its universalist nature.*

1917...

The European nineteenth century had invented *progress*, the hope for a future in which the "the sun shines incessantly." Technological development was supposed to abolish hunger as well as labour and guarantee to everyone a life in peace and abundance. This hope nurtured phantasy, theory as well as art. It died in the fire trenches of the first European world-war. The productive forces had transformed into destructive forces, the poison of nationalism devoured the bourgeois democrats as well as the first socialist International. The modern barbarism that already rampaged cruelly in the colonies returned to the centres of self-declared civilization. In the midst of this mass mortality the twentieth century was born. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, one of the few intellectuals that was not infected with nationalist warmongering, demanded to transform the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war. He would not have to expressly make this proposal. "Peace!" was, beside "Bread!" and "Land!", the central demand with which the Russian Revolution entered the world, and mass desertion was the means of this entry. The peasant soldiers decided that the war between Germany and Russia was not their business and the bourgeois should carry out their feuds on their own. Everywhere at the front there were fraternizations [*Verschwisterungen*] between Russian and German soldiers: the war was interrupted, they drank together instead. Then the soldier peasants returned to the countryside to farm and – to dispossess it. The last hour of the big landowners had rung.

The Russian Revolution began in the fire trenches and in the countryside where eighty percent of the population lived. The revolution began before it was recognized as revolution. Almost none of the social-democratic, socialist, communist intellectuals foresaw it. Just one month before its actual outbreak Lenin predicted: "We elderly men perhaps will not live to see the coming revolution."¹ And Alexander Gavrilovich Shliapnikov, the leading Bolshevik of this time in Petrograd, lectured still on the 27th of February 1917, four days *after* its arrival: "There is no

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¹ Figes 1998, 349.

and there will be no revolution. We have to prepare for a long period of reaction.”²This view was shared also by the Menshevik Nicolai Sukhanov. He had indeed listened in on conversations between office workers who talked about an imminent revolution – but he had dismissed these rumours as gossip because of the female gender of those who disseminated them.³ Maybe Nadezhda Krupskaya presented one of the few exceptions to the rule of failed revolution-prophecies because she did not share completely this sexist perspective. On the 6th of February she requested to return to Russia to not miss “*the beginning*.”⁴

The long queues in which the workers responsible for reproduction – women – lined up for groceries became the public venue in which the news of imminent revolution was looming. Retrospectively, the outburst of the revolution which was so difficult to predict was dated by the majority of historians on the 23rd of February – the 8th of March, according to the western calendar, International Women’s Day.⁵ It was the sixth time that Women’s Day was solemnized, but by then always on different days. Only after 1917 did the 8th of March became the mandatory date of feminist protests – precisely because of the Russian Revolution which entered onto the world stage in Petrograd on this day. As the historians Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar write, the protesters behaved initially precisely in the “irrational” way which was traditionally expected from “women”: they rioted, destroyed tramways, looted shops.⁶ Not least because of this expected “indiscipline” and “spontaneity”, the bolshevist leadership demanded the protesters to not carry the protest too far.⁷ But the women’s protest, which initially demanded bread and equality, increased by many workers, marched to the city centre, demanded an end to the war, and finally the resignation of the Tsar.

A few days later, the Tsar abdicated. The women demanded the right to vote, and less than a year later, the right to abort. Soon after, they got a divorce, which only needed a handwritten letter. The Russian Revolution created the most progressive, wholly gender-neutral marriage and family rights that the modern world has ever seen. Homosexuality, whose promotion is a punishable offense in 2018, was legalized in Russia in 1918. Four years after, a Soviet court declared the marriage between a trans-man / a butch and a cis-woman to be legal, whether it was seen as a transsexual or a homosexual marriage, with the simple and obvious

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2 Ibid., 350.

3 Cf. McDermid / Hillyar 1999, 155.

4 Ibid., 3.

5 Ibid., 147.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 148ff.

argument that the marriage had been contracted mutually. The beginnings of the Russian Revolution were not only ahead of its time, but also of ours. Its dreams as well as its practices are not only *yet again actual* [*gegenwärtig*], rather they *are also still prospective* [*zukünftig*].

The revolution spurred phantasy as no other event did. It unleashed unimagined utopian desires by bringing their fulfillment from a distant dream into the scope of everyday life. The revolution made the future a part of the present. Soviet intellectuals, scientists, artists transgressed with fantastic courage as well as with logical rigour the borders between the times. Nikolai Fyodorov and the bio-cosmists confronted far-reaching implications of the thesis that socialism would sublimate all exploitation among human beings. They argued that if a socialist society could only be realized in the future, then all who fought for it in the past and present would not be able to enjoy it. Therefore, any socialism of the future would be based on an exploitation of the past, and would thus not be socialism. Instead of resigning, the bio-cosmists demanded the logically obvious: all those who fought for socialism and all those who were exploited must be resurrected when socialism is reached. By then, Earth would have become parochial, so space travel would have to be expanded and alternative possibilities of living developed. Hence, plans for the settlement on “red Mars” and furthermore to transform human bodies into machines, or even light, would become reasonable under the conditions of space.⁸ In light of such plans and already undertaken attempts to make the old young and the young wise with the help of blood transfusion, the social and biological overcoming of the sexes must have seemed like a childish task.

The tasks to be carried out in the early Soviet Union were not predominantly in the discursive or symbolic order, but the social-economic sphere of production and reproduction. The sexual division of labour was understood as the material foundation of sexual separation and hierarchization. To end patriarchal exploitation and to realize the equality between the genders, the production-unit of the family had to be dissolved. The capitalist development of productive forces had already extracted essential labour from the frame of the family: nourishment, clothing, and tools were no longer produced by the family but were only prepared and repaired in it. The socialist model of emancipation planned to bring this historical process to its logical end. The aim consisted of letting go of the already obsolete family, and re-organizing all tasks in its frame according to the model of male coded wage labour. “The saucepan is the enemy of the party cell” was thus a central party slogan.⁹ Nourishments should not be prepared in private kitchens but in cantinas,

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8 Cf. Hagemester / Groys 2005.

9 Cf. Sites 1978.

children and elderly should not be looked after by relatives but in public institutions, and apartments should not be cleaned individually but collectively. With this, the sexual division of labour and the separation of the sexes would be rendered moot. “Our task”, as Evgeni Preobrazhenskii formulated, “does not consist of striving for justice in the division of labour between the sexes. Our task is to free men and women from petty household labour.”¹⁰

The communism that appeared on the horizon of the Russian Revolution was the promise of a final journey to an all-encompassing equality. In the union of the socialist Soviet republics, for a long time the only confederation that did not entail any indication of territory, the separation of human beings according to religion, nation, class, and sex was supposed to be sublated. Yet, the movement towards equality implied a direction; *the universal was negated by a particular norm*. The common was determined by the universalization of one of its parts. Like agricultural labour, reproductive labour was to emulate the collectivization and mechanization of industrial labour. Peasants, as well as women, would thus tendentially disappear and assimilate the model of the factory worker. All men would be equal, all men would be brothers – male wage labourers. Ossip Mandelstam saw this era of the revolution as being shaped by an ideal of perfect manliness, and his colleague Andrej Platonov phrased succinctly that communism is essentially a society of men.¹¹

In fact, this “communism” was, despite attempts to extend patriarchal relations of power, *no society of men*, but a revolutionary *society of masculinization*. Only five years after the revolution, the health commissioner, Nikolai Semashko noted that masculinized “women” had become a mass phenomenon. In his description, they wore unkempt, often dirty hair, had cheap cigarettes between their teeth, intentionally displayed bad manners, and spoke with rough voices. They had lost, as he noted, all female attributes, and had entirely transformed into men, even if they still wore skirts and culottes.¹² These revolutionaries, next to which the punks of Pussy Riots look old-fashioned, worked en masse in heavy industry and party cells, fought in the army or secret police, wore short hair and pants, and left the traditional home. *The new man was a drag king*.

These new men accordingly ingested the literature of the time. Mikhail Bulgakov, no friend of the communist revolution, attempted to ridicule them but could not avoid them. In his novella “Heart of a Dog” he was forced to realize that for the new communists one could not detect a sex. The communist delegates of a housing committee who

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10 Cited from Goldman 1993, 6.

11 Cf. Borenstein 2000, Of.

12 Healey 2001, 61.

were introduced to a bourgeois professor refused the designation “Sirs” for themselves, not because it misrepresented the sexual reality, but because it was a bourgeois appellation. To the professor’s question “is the communist a man or a woman?”, they replied with the counter-question of “what difference does it make?”. Perforce, sexual difference is thus reduced to the professor’s demand that some must take off their cap.¹³ Sergey Tretjakov described in his theatre piece “I want a Baby” a communist who does not only look as if she were a man, but who also organizes her reproduction with male rationality – without any romance. To the question if she does not even love nature, mountains, waterfalls, or the jungle, she replies: “At the waterfall, I love the turbines. In the mountains, the pits, in the jungle, the lumber mill and systematic afforestation.”¹⁴ The same people also make up the heroines of Alexandra Kollontai’s stories. The first minister and first ambassador of the modern world created her literary figures after this model of reality. Kollontai transferred their emotional energy into politics, sexual desires she satisfied like thirst or hunger. Her relationship with men showed clearly gay signs and, with regard to abortions, she only found the forced loss of working hours bothersome.¹⁵

The world that the “workers of the hand, of the head and of the soul” – this is how one called writers – commenced to create together was a world of technological progress, of male rationality and limitless equality. This dream soon transformed into a nightmare. Already in the 30s abortion was again prohibited, homosexuality criminalized, and the nuclear family was reconstructed as the ideal of the state. Under the power of Stalinism, the utopia of equality perverted into the reality of uniformity. “The sexual counter-revolution” (Wilhelm Reich) did not interrupt all lines of emancipation, which entered the world in the revolution. Till the end of the Soviet Union, the female employment rate increased continually, and even in today’s Russia more women work for wages than in most countries of the world. But reproductive labour, which was not simply to be reformed but revolutionarily abolished, was till the decline of the Soviet Union conceded to the workers that were more social-economically and cultural-symbolically educated for it – so called women. A division of human beings into sexes and an institutional limitation of possibilities of sexual combination remained in existence for the time being. *In the rubble of Stalinist counter-revolution a departure was buried that awaits its continuation*.

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13 Bulgakov 1994, 30.

14 Tretjakov 1995.

15 (cf. Kollontai 1992).

... and 1968. Restaging.

When the dream was excavated, half a century had passed. The rubble straightened into an ordered paving. Under it, as the graffiti of May 1968 declared, was supposed to be the beach. The conditions for communism had changed, and with them communism itself. In the place of an imagined unity of communist forces that was in a fundamental and binary opposition to its capitalist adversary, there was a multiplication of lines and battles. The schema of a central contradiction of labour and capital, apparently geographically materialized in the East and the West, got more complicated. Similar to the revolutionary wave of 1917, the wave of 1968 began in the periphery, but this time the liberation movements unfolded in the presence of a nominally communist confederation – following and in distance to the Soviet Union. China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, who played an important role in 1968 were, to different extents, disengaged from the sphere of influence of Moscow. No doubt there was, apart from the first and the second world, at least a third one.

Both revolutionary waves, 1917 and 1968, exhibit a series of common presuppositions, parallel developments and analogue structures. Both combat cycles were international movements that began victoriously in the peripheries and expanded into imperialist centres where they suffered defeats. While the Russian Revolution emerged from World War I, the revolutionary wave of 1968 arose from a series of anti-colonial liberation wars whose origins reach back to World War II. When once this development was accompanied by Lenin’s slogan to transform the imperialist world war into a revolutionary civil war, now it was Che Guevara’s demand to “create two, three, many Vietnams”. While both revolutionary waves were in their central emancipatory direction anti-capitalist, fed with Marxist vocabulary and directed against the social split of the division of labour, the national formations both played an ambivalent, even counter revolutionary, role in the revolutionary movements.

The return of the spectre of 1917 in the revolts of 1968 can be traced up to the political styles and dress codes. While the dress code of male members of the Russian intelligentsia – uncombed long hair, beard and glasses – also returned in the academic milieus of 1968¹⁶, the militant Bolsheviks created with boots, black leather jacket, short haircut and caps, the role model for the spontis, autonomists, and Antifa. The dogmatic splinter groups that dressed up in the blueys of Maoism or – as did the German Communist Party – oriented themselves by the philistine proletarity of post-Stalinist GDR-culture borrowed from past epochs “names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene

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16 Figes 1998, 125.

in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.”¹⁷ Gyorgi Lukács, who should not have had any interest in a confrontation with his own Stalinist past, was baffled by the precise knowledge that Rudi Dutschke revealed in 1966 with regard to the internal discussion of the Communist Party of Hungary of the 1920s. When Dutschke “suggested to analyse Stalinism Lukács was not enthusiastic.... The false paths of the past should be forgotten.”¹⁸ Yet, and not least because they had been forgotten, these false paths of the past repeated themselves, even if with lower death rates in most of the regions of the world because the communist movements did not have state power. The polyphonic departure of the revolution that marked the beginnings of the Russian Revolution characterized the self-understanding of the 68 revolt, in particular where it did not emerge from the military confrontation of the guerrilla war. But, as in the 1920s, the anti-authoritarian departure of the 1970s resulted in a re-dogmatisation movement. In Western Europe, mainly Germany, it is characterized by the formation of Stalinist, Trotskyite, Maoist party organisations, each of which claiming to inherit the Bolshevik party’s unreserved hegemony.¹⁹ In their book “Obsolete Communism. The Left-Wing Alternative” Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit develop, already in autumn of 1968, a polemical critique of this representational phantasm. They share the critique of sectarianism undertaken by Lenin in his “Left-Wing Communism: an infantile disorder”, but at the same time apply it to Leninism itself. In France of the late sixties, as they describe it, thousands of militants appear who “either stubbornly resisted the arts of seduction of the bolshevist priests or – the peak of imprudence – moved from one revolutionary salvation army to the next and repeatedly deserted, without even knowing that there are five different wings to the Fourth International or that the PCMLF is in support of Mao Tse-Tung whereas the UJC(M-L) is in support of Mao TseTung. In this work of sabotage in the party or in the syndicates the mini-avant-gardes do not forget to distance themselves from one another, exclude one, and attack one another and to excommunicate the weak or the collaborators.”²⁰ In this description Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit articulate implicitly the principal problem of splitting particularisms, and how it could be formulated if not from the particular perspective: “There is, as is well-known, only one truth and it is, as the republic, indivisible: each group expresses what the gagged proletariat thinks.”²¹ With this they

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17 Marx 1852.

18 Dutschke 1996, 92f.

19 Müller 2006, 35.

20 Cohn-Bendit 1968, 78.

21 Translated from Cohn-Bendit 1968, 85.

advised the many left, Leninist, Trotskyist, Maoist splinter groups who each claim to represent the proletariat or at least its most progressive parts in its totality, to advertise in the newspapers with high-circulation the following: “Revolutionary leadership group is looking for exploited working class or related class.”²²

Socialist intellectuals reacted to the Maoist mass murders of the 70s in a similar way to how they in the 30s tried to deny or justify the Stalinist terror. Thomas Ebermann described in an autobiographical retrospect the motives which fed turnover in the SDS and dissolved the previous bond between culture and politics, everyday life and revolution. Because the state of the world was so serious, the continuation of “funky” politics is inappropriate, or “petit-bourgeois” respectively - instead one must rebuild a communist party and this means “to learn from the history of the German Communist Party and from Lenin.”²³

The recourse to the last wave of revolution also manifests in publications. Already measured in its absolute amount of publication, the debate of the Western left with the Soviet Union was never as intensive as in the years succeeding 1968 till the 80s.²⁴ The history was actualized so far that it received an immediate political relevance for the present. Depending on if someone located the defeat of the Russian Revolution in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927 or 1936 or 1953, one was able to read off “what he thought about any other political question on the world: the essence of the Soviet Union, China, the essence of the CPs in the world, the essence of social-democracy, the essence of trade unions, the unity front, the people’s front, national liberation movements, aesthetics and philosophy, the relationship of party and class, the significance of the soviets and the workers’ councils and if concerning imperialism Luxemburg or Bucharin was right.”²⁵

In these debates the relation of the sequence of 68 to the sequence of 17 does not prove to be one of repetition, re-establishment, of imitation and worshipping, but also as one of difference, displacement, delimitation, and critique. The 68 movement fed on the experience of the Russian Revolution as well as its defeats. It was not only a critique of the perpetuated domination by bureaucracy and capital, patriarchy and colonialism, but also a critique of the previous attempts of their abolishment. “In our time”, wrote the influential French Marxist Charles Bettelheim on the occasion of the Soviet invasion of Prague, “it is therefore vital that we understand the reasons why the first victorious

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22 Ibid.

23 Eberman 2013.

24 Van der Linden 2007, 254.

25 Goldner, 9f.

socialist revolution has ultimately produced the Soviet realities of today.”²⁶

The shock of the suppression of the Prague Spring effected a transformation and deepening of the western Marxist discussion of the Soviet Union. The thus far dominant approaches to its analysis and categorization (the theories of state capitalism, of the degenerated worker’s state and of bureaucratic collectivism) were increasingly put into question. The unilinear schema according to which history develops along the sequence of slave society – feudalism – capitalism – socialism was perforated, and the dogma of historical materialism, according to which history in the last instance hinges on the development of the productive forces, was overcome.²⁷

Repetition and Difference

The strike movement and the students’ protests in Berkeley, Warsaw, Belgrade and many other cities of the shared globe²⁸ developed in close relation to one another but autonomously: the anti-colonial liberation war in Algeria, the guerrilla war in Cuba, the black civil right movement in the USA, and the movement for gender and sexual emancipation. Under the changing historical conditions of the 60s, in which the struggles against colonialism in the Third World and apartheid in the USA produced new autonomous actors and in which the binary opposition of capitalism-socialism was complicated by the rupture of Yugoslavia and China with the USSR, theoreticians from the tricontinentals like Samir Amin or André Gunder Frank radically critiqued the Marxist theory of liberation and questioned its centring on Europe, the industrial proletariat and a predetermined historical development. With this, the universal norm that had underlain the traditional socialist promise of equality and had instructed the construction of the revolution of 1917 became contentious. The peripheralization of the revolution led to a decentering of emancipation. While the revolutionary wave of 1917 was driven by the belief in the progress in history, of the development of productive forces from slaveholder-society through feudalism and capitalism finally to communism, this uni-linearity of historical development had lost its credibility in the middle of the twentieth century. Just as the movement of homosexuals referred to the role model of Black Panther, the women’s movement referred to the anti-colonial liberation movement. Mariarosa Dalla Costa, a feminist Marxist from Italy, highlighted the connection

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26 Bettelheim 1976, 18. In Charles Bettelheim’s „Class Struggles in the USSR, Vol. I “one can witness how the libidinal energy is subtracted from one point – Stalinist Soviet union – and is immediately reinstated in another – Maoist China (ibid., 20f.). One could even ask if the disappointment 1968 did not inset too late – after the much greater crimes of the 1930s – because there is the possibility of a new love deception.

27 Cf. van der Linden 2007.

28 Cf. Roesler 2010, Gehrke / Horn 2007.

between economic and gender emancipation when she remarked that the Third World is offered “‘to develop’, which means to suffer not only through the present hell but also through industrial hell. Women in the metropolises are offered the same ‘help’.”²⁹ So Dalla Costa refused at once the emancipatory perspective of industrialization and employment.

The second wave of feminism allied itself to the first, but was soon inundated by it, and broke out as an autonomous movement from the revolutionary pool. It became possible to remark on the conspicuous borders of the previous discourse of gender liberation. For example, in the emancipatory texts of Alexandra Kollontai almost any criticism of masculinity is missing: masculinity was not identified as one-sided and authoritative but rather declared an ideal by which femininity, coming from a technologically less developed sphere of housework, was considered backward. In comparison, Mariarosa Dalla Costa insisted that the “slavery of the assembly line” is no “liberation of the slavery of the sink.”³⁰ German Marxists of the “Bielefeld school” went a step further. They developed a utopia that looks like a mirror image of traditional communism. While the latter wanted to merge the female coded home and farm work into male coded wage labour of the urban factory, the Bielefelders projected a use-value oriented subsistence economy as rural-feminine counter-model to patriarchal capitalism.³¹ The rural and household subsistence economy is on one side declared immediately capitalist against the romantic fantasy of a pre-capitalist, but at the same time it is considered to be the bearer of an emancipatory-utopian potential. Implicitly, housework is not supposed to be reorganized according to the model of factory labour, but rather public wage labour should be reorganized as rural and smallholder subsistence labour. In the place of liberation *through* growth there is the liberation *from* growth. Insofar as a “life producing” peasant subsistence economy is counter posed, not only as sustainable to an environmentally harmful industry, but also as pacifist to an economy of war, this perspective leads into the development of difference- and eco-feminism that works with essentializing models of gender-duality and female naturalness.³² The Bielefeld approach can be regarded as antipode to the socialist model of emancipation of the 1917 sequence because it counters the universal (industrial) masculinization with a universal (rural) feminisation. But its proposal of a universal feminisation will no longer be able to prevail because subsequently, the mode of liberation changes.

The second wave of feminism that set in with 1968 is followed by

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29 Dalla Costa 1976, 294.

30 Ibid., 277.

31 Werlhof 1978, Vennholdt-Thomsen 1981, Mies, 1983.

32 Critically: Notz 2011.

an increased entry of the private and the personal into the spheres of the male, rational, impersonally coded public and can be seen in the popular press, talk shows and women’s magazines. Sexualized and aestheticized mass-media spectacularizing expands beyond the female body. The media representation of health, care and especially aesthetics of the body gains a significance which was unimaginable in the first half of the twentieth century. The increase of public discourse about the private, one’s relationship-status, children, and childhood marks a softening of the borders between the gender-binary coded spheres. In this, the movement takes a direction opposite to that of 1917. This politico-cultural development is at the same time supported by an equiprimordial politico-economic movement. At that time, the development of productive forces reaches a crisis point of Fordism’s mode of production and of regulation. Under these new conditions, the disciplined, soldierly-male subjectivity with money-sock-mentality is no longer tenable and will be – catalysed by the struggles of 1968 – superseded by a hedonist mentality. Capitalism does not transform as an automatic subject but in reaction to the struggles that it integrates. In this historical process the (mass) consumption sphere reaches an unparalleled significance for market as well as state capitalism. But within the framework of hetero-sexist labour division which was not fractured even in real socialism the sphere of consumption is coded female.³³ Because the buyer is subjectivized as female, femininity appears increasingly on the representational surfaces of billboards, as message (object) as well as addressee (subject). Insofar as a femininely construed desire as a monetary one moves into capital’s field of interest. In an extended sale, with the supply of commodities also the image of the public transforms itself. The feminizing movement appears also in the terrain of fashion. The 30s to 50s are characterized, similar to the 90s, by a cementing reconstruction of the gender dualism which is enforced by state power. In the USA, anti-cross-dressing-laws demand that people who are cisnormatively imputed as female wear at least three female coded articles of clothing. As obscure as this law, as violent its enforcement.³⁴ In contrast, the 20s as well as the 60s to 80s are more characterized by androgyny. However, this androgyny has in one case an androcentric colour, gynocentric in the other. While “Garçon” and “lad” characterize the fashion of the 20s, the miniskirt is the characteristic garment of 68, which is then undercut a year later by the micro-skirt. Flared pants – as allegorical combination of pants and skirt – and wide blouses stand for feminine androgyny. The body sign characterizing the 60s and 70s is long hair – hair that already distinguished the Russian intellectuals of the turn of the century but were

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33 McRobbie 1999.

34 Feinberg 1993.

expelled by the male outfits of the Bolsheviks.

The transformation of critique as well as that of molar forms of socialization linked to difference capitalism also influenced the mode in which gender is processed. The transformed focus can be made comprehensible by grasping the social relations from which the revolution-wave of 1968 arose and against which it opposed; relations in which the failure and the integrative recuperation of the revolution-wave of 1917 are identifiable. They are relations characterized by bureaucratic organisation, Fordist production, cultural homogeneity and low social mobility. Adorno summarized them in the telling concept of the “administered world”. Against this world, in which the relation between the universal and the particular, of objective and subjective were statically organized in linear subordination, the onslaught of 1968 directed itself. It was directed against the social relations in which families, schools, psychiatries, prisons, nations and the gender, sexual and racist regimes related to them produced, selected and disciplined subjects to distribute them according to the social demand of labour forces. In these struggles, the norm of equality is superseded by a norm of difference. While it is still binarily interpreted in much of difference-feminist politics, the general pluralization of lifestyles will generate together with queer-feminism a multiplied re-orientation in the field of gender in opposition to the monist model of universality. Monique Wittig proclaimed, already in the 70s, that there are as many genders as people. The formation of the queer-feminist movement can thereby be interpreted as a late effect of 1968 insofar as the criticisms of the exclusions of white feminism acting like universalists by black feminists, as well as the transgender critique of the exclusions of the self-integrating homosexual movement, take up and radicalize the radical impulse of 1968ff.³⁵ In both revolution-waves, the attempt was to sublimate the split into private and public sphere, in production- and reproduction sphere, yet from opposite directions. The central demand of second-wave-feminism *to politicize the private* means less to expand public discourse of politics into the private, but rather to feed the contents, affects and logics of privacy into the political discourse of the public. In the universal discourse of emancipation, the perspective of care, educated in reproductive labour, was taken in as well as that of a rural agriculture gained subsistence. But under the new conditions of multiplication, no particular voice could inflate itself to the universal choir. In the place of the emancipation model of 1917 of a universal masculinization, there was, after 1968, *no universal feminization, but a differential one*. The drag-queen became an icon of the stonewall-riots of 1969, but not the allegory of a new humanity.

Still, and repeatedly, the radical movements of gender emancipation demand an abolishment of gender. But the illustration of this abolishment

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35 Cf. Adamczak / Laufenberg 2012.

have changed. If the third wave of feminism beginning in the 90s, queer-feminism, is understood as a prolongation or consolidation of the second wave, then it reveals a fundamental transformation of its basic premises. The dominant line of emancipation was no longer *no gender* because this still revealed itself to be one, but *many genders*.

Where 1917 emphasized the centrality of unity, 1968 enforced the dynamic of difference. In place of discipline, there was creativity, in place of the collective plan, the autonomy of self-management. In this process, the search for a solidary common cannot remain the same. The condition and shape of communism changes.

Double Image

The reconstruction of the revolutionary constructions of 1917 and 1968 allows us to superimpose the two historical lines of flight of emancipation. But one has to avoid the common mistake³⁶ of identifying the new with the better. The task does not consist in being state of the art but rather in retrieving the unfulfilled potentiality of history that awaits its appropriation in world-historical waves of revolution. There is no singular something the world has “long dreamt of possessing”³⁷, recurrent in the same images, concept and desires from the matriarchy through early Christianity, slave- and peasants-upheavals up to the industrial proletariat, new social movements and multitude. Rather, the technique of double exposure of two historical virtual communisms is supposed to show the image of a more encompassing communism. Over half a century after the departure of 1968, one can see that its demands of freedom and difference are as co-optable as the demands of equality and unity half a century before. While the invocation of *equality and unity* led the Stalinist and general Fordist bureaucracy into *totalization and homogenization*, the invocation of *freedom and difference* was turned neoliberally into individualization and commodified sub-culturization. The movement that began in 1968 and turned in neoliberalism to a new social differentiation which the catchword “postmodernity” tried to capture. It did not only make impossible the formulation of a unity, but also the production of a common. In this situation, the critical self-reflection of the new left that has already been introduced years ago³⁸ became necessary. Yet, these self-critiques often overstep the mark in their search for a pure position when they directly make “the left” (or optionally “the artists”, “the feminists”, “the queers”) responsible for the authoritative effects of the Stalinist reign or of the neoliberal regime of accumulation. This is only made possible by a twofold denial: *Stalinism is an expression of the failure*

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36 For example of Laclau / Mouffe 1985.

37 Marx 1843.

38 Boltanski / Chiapello 2005.

of the left, neoliberalism an expression of its defeat. Both are not copies, but historical caricatures of past attempts of emancipation.

From the historical glance at Stalinism and neoliberalism, one can bring the communisms of 1917 and 1968 into a relation of mutual criticism. One can then understand equality not as a foundation for unity, or even unification, but of the democratic common. Difference thereby does not appear as irreducible, but as materially reducible. It can, however, not be sublated into a unifying subject that would precisely make impossible the common.³⁹ If social equality that would equalize the life conditions is taken into the canon of utopia against the background of the postmodern experience, then the critical question is displaced. The equality of the Communism [*des Kommunistischen*] of 1917 had a norm inscribed which repeated the subordination of femininity under masculinity, agricultural work under industrial labour, the global south under the global north. This universal was indeed the generalization of the particular. But this was not the part of no-part the way Marx imagined it. The proletariat did constitute itself in distinction to the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, as well as to the peasants and the petit-bourgeoisie, and especially to the Lumpenproletariat, the slaves, the house workers, the leaseholders.⁴⁰

The Communism of 1917 stood under the sign of equality and unity, that of 1968 under the sign of freedom and difference. A possible communism of 2018 would have to take solidarity and association to the centre stage. 1917 focussed on the whole (of statist totality), 1968 on the singularity (of unfolded individuality), the future of the present should be concentrated on the in-between, on relation itself. The many-faced history of the Communism has left a paradoxical legacy to its present and future. We are looking for a model of society that is egalitarian without being homogenizing, that welcome *difference without promoting separatism. An ensemble of modes of relationship that undermines totality and exceeds atomization; that remains faithful to the promise of universalism without using it as a veil for a particular norm.* Social equality is the foundation of real democracy, but the path to this equality as the aim itself must be democratically formulated by different positions. Today the condition for communism is that of *dispersion*. This is already why its first word is *assembly*.

Translated by Frank Ruda

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39 Cf. Nancy 1991.

40 Cf. Roth / van der Linden 2015.

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