

May '68 – A Past That Never Was and a Future That Has Already Been Missed

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Abstract: This paper situates itself in the aftermath of May '68; the morning after, as it were. What are its reverberations and what do we claim to have inherited? The analysis begins with the impotence of the present and the capture of the collective unconscious by the digital financial machine; capturing our desires, dreams, and the potential for the adventurous life, the very condition of possibility for love. We short-circuit through a brief look at the *Mouvement des travailleurs arabes (MTA)*, whose struggles were the last attempt to articulate what we call a politics of adventure. In the end, unions and sovereign power annihilated the collective desire for the possibility of a life well lived. What is left, when all that could have been has already been missed?

Keywords: Adventure – Acceleration – Data - Desire – Delirium – Capitalism – Catastrophe - Collective Unconscious - Language - Mouvement des travailleurs arabes

“And this is the secret of James’ novels, we can only live because we have already missed our lives.”¹

A Dead End Came Knocking

It is easy for us to imagine the apocalyptic scene of the endpoint, the moment when all that is, and all that was, will never have been. More difficult to conceptualize are those whom we permit to die in our place today and tomorrow. Forgetting which lands we deem to be worthy of safety, and which ones to be worthy of annihilation. Capitalism, concerned with its own survival and endless proliferation, struggles with a double-bind: it is obliged to deny the seriousness of the catastrophe ahead, lest it renders meaningless its operations. Subsequently, we are limited to managing the sacrifices to be made; the law in this sense is nothing more than a tool for rationing. As Jean-Pierre Dupuy explains,

Capitalism can avoid extinction only by persuading economic agents that an indefinitely long future stretches before them. If the future were to be closed off, a reverse domino effect would abolish all economic activity from the moment its end point became known. With the approach of the end, trust would be impossible since there would no longer be any time to come in which debts could be repaid.²

Infinite debts founded on the condition of eternal repayment whose

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¹ Agamben 2015, p. 133

² Dupuy 2014, p. 65

finitude coincides precisely with the destruction of the world. It is a rationality founded on delirium. For this reason, we are happy to tolerate legal changes that promise to reduce the total number of pollution-related deaths from 100,000 to 60,000 a year. We watch as vast areas on the African continent are sealed off for conservation, thereby evicting and criminalizing indigenous populations from their land. Nothing more than shameless management, and designation, of the scapegoat.³

For everyone else, it is a life of industrialized impotence. The conditions of social solidarity have been dissolved: togetherness, long-lasting collaboration in the workplace, scattered apart in the urban jungle.⁴ As Franco “Bifo” Berardi explains, the technological architecture upon which we are increasingly dependent shapes our perception of the world. During the Renaissance, people’s perception of the space of everyday life changed because of the innovation in the representational technique; so too has ours, thanks to acceleration.⁵ For Berardi, “prior to modernity, a regime of slow transmission characterized the info-sphere, and this slowness shaped lived time and cultural expectations.”⁶ The modern acceleration of the transmission of signs and the proliferation of sources of information has transformed the perception of time and meaning.

A problematic of a new kind confronts us. Whereas the place, or site, of action, used to be the body, today bodies are fixed in front of screens. The conditions for revolt exist: environmental catastrophe, forced precarity, techno-war, mental alienation. However, any form of action remains impossible, and any possibility for action seems increasingly diminished. Can any contemporary subject claim today to be ‘living well,’ as Aristotle had envisaged it for those in the *polis*?

What do we know? What makes information all powerful is its nullity or radical ineffectiveness.⁷ Information, in fact, plays on its ineffectiveness to establish its power, and its power is to be ineffective, making it all the more dangerous. Therefore, information is precisely a system of control. Deleuze showed that a piece of information is a grouping of order-words, such that:

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3 See Moore 2004, pp. 45-64

4 Berardi 2014, p. 167

5 Ibid., p. 34

6 Ibid.

7 Deleuze 1997, p. 269

when you are informed, you are told what you are supposed to believe. In other words to inform is to make circulate an order-word. Police declarations are said to be, rightly so, communications; we are communicated information, that is to say, we are told what we are supposed to be in a state to have to believe, what we are supposed to believe. Or not even to believe, but to act as if we believed. So that we are not asked to believe but to behave as if we believed.⁸

Our current predicament cannot be characterized as an epistemological problem. Where, for example, with a bit more information one could engender a kind of cognitive transformation of the social and radically alter the subjectification of bodies. Quite the contrary, in their book *Data Trash*, Kroker and Weinstein write that in the field of digital acceleration, a reduction of meaning necessarily accompanies greater information.⁹ That is to say that, in the sphere of the digital economy, ‘meaning’ as such is a hindrance. Meaning slows the accumulation of value and the speed at which information circulates. This is because meaning needs time to be produced, and understood. Therefore, confusions, and any reduction in meaning, necessarily accompanies the acceleration of flows of information. Under these conditions, it would appear that our environment is one of pure functionality without meaning, where language is captured by the digital-financial machine and in so doing has framed the field of the possible.¹⁰

The paradox is that in our “habit of wanting to understand things in a complete manner,”¹¹ we inadvertently tighten the noose to which we have long been tied. As Nathan Moore argues: “it is potentially dangerous because it can have the effect of discouraging us from action. [...] Complete knowledge necessarily cancels itself out. In this sense, life is fueled by ignorance.”¹² We only ever discover what we expect to find, so that “the crucial ignorance of critical action (i.e. limited thought) is experimentation.”¹³

Semantic interpretation is no longer possible because time is too short. The result is a restless stimulation of social attention, which in turn

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8 Deleuze 1987

9 Berardi 2012, p. 105

10 Ibid., p. 26

11 Moore 2004, p. 48

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

causes a contraction of the time available for emotional elaboration and affective experiences. The contraction of time permeates the collective unconscious, culture, and sensibility. The Google Inc. empire is built precisely on the capture of users' experience to increase its value. A Google subsidiary, YouTube, is a classic case in point. Take the example of 'Toy unboxing,' a phenomenon that has gripped the attention of millions of adults and children around the world. Every day, millions of people watch YouTube videos of toys being unwrapped or unboxed. The items range from hi-tech gadgets to kinder eggs. One successful YouTube channel, "FunToys Collector DisneyToys Review" has roughly 9.5 million subscribers and over 13 billion total views. The videos are almost exactly the same: no face is visible, just two hands slowly unboxing or un-wrapping chocolate covered eggs and unveiling the plastic object to viewers. The same voice is heard, gushing over Play-Doh and miniaturized Disney characters. The "Fun Toys" channel earns around £3 million a year.

We no longer need to experience the world. One can use or access already experienced data about an object, a reference to a pre-packaged world. In *Destruction of Experience*, Giorgio Agamben shows that today, experience occurs outside of the individual, through the lens of a camera for instance, or charts and numbers. So that:

When humankind is deprived of effective experience and becomes subjected to the imposition of a form of experience as controlled and manipulated as a laboratory maze for rats - in other words, when the only possible experience is horror or lies - then the rejection of experience can provisionally embody a legitimate defense.¹⁴

An unprecedented capture of individuals' experience is characteristic of our contemporary era, our free time seized upon and put to work. Boredom appears to be analogous to what justice was for Kafka, technically possible, but not for us.

We are thus confronted with two dilemmas:

1. The acceleration of informatic flows and the disappearance of meaning, resulting in a kind of automation of behaviors; of course, to varying degrees.
2. The problem of economic and financial abstraction, that, like an impressionist painting which seeks not to show the thing, but

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14 Agamben 2007, p. 16

merely its impression,¹⁵ presents the appearance of economic vitality in report after report, all the while ecological decay and human misery persist.

What is to be done? The image of thought in which we live is one that insists on the end of economic history. The image of thought functions as a mechanism and a means of putting an end to thought, of frustrating thought. Such that we believe that the financial dictatorship is here to stay, with all its subsidiary modes of reasoning: the maximization of profit and the near universal consensus of the value of mathematized abstraction for the governance of everyday life. We continually grapple with an image of thought that is simultaneously pre-supposed for thought to begin, which also functions to prevent thought itself. It is for this reason that we speak the language of abstraction, of data, and decisions are based on information, data, and statistics. A weighing up of risk, probability, in an attempt to stave off the future. Concern over the future, to ward off any potential threat: "this is the constant worry of the monarch, the military and murderers: the traitor, the ambush, the arrest."¹⁶ A future that has already arrived and is always-already missed.

Statistics, the Science of the State *par excellence*, emerged as the mirror of the state.¹⁷ Statistics, we are told, illustrates and renders concrete apparently crucial traits of the general population: health and death rates, ethnic and cultural differences, among other qualities. However, today, we look into a mirror of a different kind. Not a mirror concerned with the individual body and its characteristics (although these continue to be a concern), but instead, with capitalism's new tools, of big data and the digital financial machine, it has become possible to look into a mirror of the populations' very unconscious. Bringing to life a conceptual data double beyond its careful curation by the individual subject; that is, beyond what the individual presents of itself on digital platforms, towards the bulk storage of the unconscious stream of babble individuals throw up. For the first time, patterns of behavior, thoughts, and desires, are rendered visible and brought to life, amalgamated into an image of tendencies. As Byung-Chul Han formulates it: "digital psychopolitics is taking over the behavior of the masses by laying hold of, and steering, the unconscious logic that governs them."¹⁸ Whole swathes of subtle interventions have become possible and deployable, not merely into modes of individual behavior directed at bodies (as that which concretely

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15 Berardi 2012, p. 29

16 Moore 2004, p. 48

17 Desrosières 1998, p. 34

18 Han 2017, p. 80

takes place), but, and this is its particular cynicism, interventions into the human being's modes of possibility, it's very potential for activity, and of action.

It is in this vein that one can understand Mark Fisher's notion of Capitalist realism, as "a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action."¹⁹ A cynical takeover masked as the natural order of things; feeding off dreams, desires, and potentials, but also, any critique of itself. Structured on the premise of constant renewal and reactivation, the machine actively invites critique, solicits complaints, and carves out a space for disagreements; a veritably totalizing force. Here, "interpretation is always already a game, which has to be played on the despot's terms."²⁰ Axioms distributed for all, even for the language of dolphins.²¹

Oh Delirious Reason

"To kill an opponent will not change the world. It is not criticism. But to destroy your opponent's desire will change the world, and is then a critical operation."²²

More insidious is the presentation of insanity as rationality which today has taken a pathological form. As Deleuze would say, it is a form of true rationality, given that "the machine works, there can be no doubt."²³ The complexity, however, is that "there is no danger of it going insane, because through and through it is already insane, from the get-go, and that's where its rationality comes from."²⁴ It is essential therefore to recognize that the codes and axioms were not brought together or assembled by chance, but instead function according to a rationality, a particular logic is at work, and a series of machines are in operation to this end. In other words, for Deleuze, reason is always formed, as a segment, stemming from the irrational, and is therefore traversed by it and defined by a relation precisely to it. So that, "underneath all reason lies delirium, and drift. Everything about capitalism is rational, except

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19 Fisher 2009, p.16

20 Moore 2004, p. 48

21 Deleuze and Guattari 2015, p. 287

22 Moore 2014, p. 46

23 Deleuze 2004, p. 262

24 Ibid.

capital or capitalism."²⁵ A classic example is the stock market itself, one can understand how it works, yet "what a delirium, it's nuts."²⁶

Marx too was fascinated by capitalisms' mechanisms: how can it present itself as perfectly rational and delirious at the same time? Deleuze asks, "So then what is rational in a society? Once interests have been defined within the confines of a society, the rational is the way in which people pursue those interests and attempt to realize them."²⁷ In a sense, therefore, it is not enough to point to fictions (legal fictions, sovereign fictions, fictitious capital), but one ought to examine the desiring productions these fictions set in motion; the desire that emerges from the irrational rationality and delirious functioning mechanism itself. As Deleuze points out:

Underneath that, you find desires, investments of desire that are not to be confused with investments of interest, and on which interests depend for their determination and very distribution: an enormous flow, all kinds of libidinal-unconscious flows that constitute delirium of this society. In reality, history is the history of desire.²⁸

The digital financial machine captures the unconscious libidinal field, entangling us within a particular organization of possible fields. For Deleuze, capitalism has given rise to a new distribution of desire and reason, adding that we have certainly reached the stage of delirium to which there is only one equivalent in psychiatric terms: the terminal state.²⁹

Unlike other societies comprised of 'scandals and secrets' that are nevertheless part of the system, or of the code, in capitalism, everything is transparent and democratic, there is no code. Everything is at once public and inadmissible.³⁰ That capitalism is a formidable desiring machine is evident in its capacity to subsume any and all social desires "including the desires of repression and death."³¹ In this sense, capitalism's operation includes its own critiques of itself which it easily subsumes as part of its condition of possibility. A phantasmagorical

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 263

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 267

absorption of every flow, “flows of wealth, flows of labor, flows of language, flows of art, etc.”³² For this reason, Guattari insists on the importance of an alternative structure capable of fusing collective desires and potential revolutionary organizations, failure to do so would see us heading from one repression to the next, “toward a fascism that will make Hitler and Mussolini look like a joke.”³³

Before the wholesale digital capture of the collective unconscious, it was possible to act, albeit always within limits. Consider the example, events and activities of the *Mouvement des travailleurs arabes (MTA)*, who, uniquely in the history of class struggle, demanded the potential form of a politics where the question was not merely one of demanding particular rights as such, but rather the wholesale *transformation* of a form of living itself. An attempt at articulating the language of a form-of-life where being in action is presented as a possibility. Where the possibilities of one’s life are not limited or tied to inherited limits, or facts of life: poverty, lack of documents, etc. Unsurprisingly, the movement was obliterated by the French authorities with the help of the Maghrebi governments who organized separate social movements with similar concerns to subvert and undermine the MTA’s activities.³⁴

Politics of Adventure

The adventure, deriving from the classical and Christian Latin *adventus*, designates, as Agamben shows, “something mysterious that happens to a given man, which could be equally positive or negative.”³⁵ Crucially, the subject is intimately involved in her adventure, worthy of the adventure that happens to her. Moreover, the adventure is not something that ‘precedes’ a story as such, but rather, it is inseparable from it.³⁶ The adventure is its own happening in language and event, its own being said and its happening such as it is. This is unlike the contemporary understanding of the term, which instead recognizes the adventure as being decisively external to everyday or ordinary life.³⁷ As Agamben says :

For the individual to whom it happens (*a cui avviene*), adventure is in fact fully identified with life, not only because it affects and transfigures his whole existence, but also and above all because it

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32 Ibid., p. 267

33 Guattari, in Deleuze 2004, p. 269

34 This is further developed in Richards 2018.

35 Agamben 2018, p. 23

36 Ibid., p. 30

37 Ibid., p. 47

transforms the subject himself, regenerating him as a new creature [...] If Eros and adventure are here often intimately entwined, this is not because love gives meaning and legitimacy to adventure, but, on the contrary, because only a life that has the form of adventure can truly find love.³⁸

For a brief moment after May '68, life and adventure coincided for a collective movement that sought not merely to correct identity documents and demand legal rights. Instead, thought the latter was indeed demanded, there was equally a demand for respect and kindness in everyday life, whether in cafés or in the street. They demanded comfortable housing for themselves and others; a demand, a desire, to live a life of possibilities, where mere facts (a lack of housing or legal documentation) could not limit their possibilities. A demand to render possible the potential for a life well lived. Incommensurate with the biopolitical schema which characterizes our politics, these simple, though bold, claims, have been erased from the history of class struggle.

What Happened? The events of May '68 are known as the series of strikes and occupations that took place across universities in France and that also spread to the factories, where students and workers, therefore, joined forces demanding a form of justice. As Kristin Ross puts it:

May '68 was the largest mass movement in French history, the biggest strike in the history of the French workers' movement, and the only “general” insurrection the overdeveloped world has known since World War II. It was the first general strike that extended beyond the traditional centers of industrial production to include workers in the service industries, the communication and culture industries – *the whole sphere of social reproduction*. No professional sector, no category of worker was unaffected by the strike; no region, city, or village in France was untouched.³⁹

May '68 was made possible by a collective desire, a collective unconscious traversed by politics and the social. A ‘shared enemy’ of imperialist capitalism, “Vietnam is in our factories,” as they say, and a shared identification with the Algerian Revolution.⁴⁰ Additionally, the Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre remarked that the events of May '68 were partly precipitated as a result of the spatial organization of the University of Nanterre. Nanterre, established as an

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38 Ibid., p. 54

39 Ross 2002, p. 4. (Emphasis my own)

40 Ibid., p. 80-94

extension of the Sorbonne in the 1960s in the West of Paris, was built among some of the worst slums, or *bidonville*, in France. Nanterre was not easily accessible, lacking appropriate modes of transportation. Students would therefore have to walk through the slums to reach campus, and were, for the first time, forced to confront the realities of inequality.⁴¹ The university is today by its very own train station, conveniently bypassing any 'unpalatable' areas.

These slums, mostly inhabited by North African migrants, were established at least since 1951 and are scattered around Nanterre. Much like the Windrush generation in the UK, the migrants arrived as workers, and they aided in the reconstruction of post-war France. By 1968, there were nine slums in total, the largest of which is *La Folie*⁴² which housed at least 10,000 people. Those families were essentially living in self-built cabins made of wood and carton, with no electricity and just one access point for water. It was common for police to storm the slum to arrest individuals and destroy cabins. In 1961, between 100 and 150 people were killed by the police, and in one such offensive, some were drowned in the Seine.⁴³

On the 13th August 1970, the minister of education, Olivier Guichard, pushed for the demolition of those slums. It quickly became a government priority, since Guichard believed that the presence of the Nanterre *bidonvilles* encouraged "leftist agitation on campus."⁴⁴ By 1971 the slums were destroyed and the workers housed in barracks.

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41 Ibid., p. 85

42 'La Folie' can either mean 'madness,' or describe a chaotic situation, a 'madhouse.'

43 Vincendon, 2018

44 Ibid.



Still from a short documentary, '1967, Les bidonvilles de Nanterre.'⁴⁵
The inscription reads: "you are living in shit – REACT"

May '68 now seemed a distant memory, an event that happened where a form of justice appeared to have ensued.

These migrant workers, however, continued to be excluded from political life, they were not integrated within the structure of French political parties, including the Communist Party (unlike their European cousins). They were excluded from labor unions, and any right to vote, the Africans and Arabs were also exploited at work and faced discrimination and racism in daily life. Their presence was scattered throughout Paris, concentrated in the *bidonvilles de Nanterre*, as well as Paris' 18th arrondissement, near *Goutte d'Or* and *Rue de Barbès*.

Residents in the area grew hostile to the migrants and called for greater government control and security, many even taking to the streets asking French citizens to sign petitions for their expulsion. 27th October 1971 marked a turning point in this history when a young teenager of Algerian origin, Djellali Ben Ali, was brutally murdered. This galvanized public support for the migrant workers, and a committee Djellali was set up by local residents alongside Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and other notable figures.⁴⁶ Various struggles subsequently ensued, including mobilizations in support of both French and immigrant families on the issue of inadequate housing, where they would eventually occupy an

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45 Accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S8D-V7wyyM>

46 Hajjat 2008, p. 522

empty building on the boulevard de la Chappelle.

The *Mouvement des travailleurs arabes* (MTA), set up in June 1972, was the first group to consider the conditions of immigrant workers as such. The MTA assumed a pan-Arab, and Marxist consciousness, driven by the unequal position they found themselves in the social and economic order of things. Excluded from French workers' unions, the MTA sought to articulate a common struggle of migrant workers, who had "arrived in France for the necessities of industrial modes of production."⁴⁷ They sought to articulate a form of action directed at the "living and working conditions of immigrant workers" demanding, "the condemnation of racist crimes, the transformation of immigrant barracks (a military inheritance of the colonial era), access to decent housing, the obtainment of a stable juridical status that did not depend on the goodwill of the boss, the representation of working migrants in unions, etc."⁴⁸

Established workers' unions fiercely opposed this movement. In part because the MTA's activities rattled their traditional view of class struggle. Union chiefs believed the site of class struggle ought to be limited to the confines of the factory. For the MTA, the struggle extended to problems of inadequate housing and daily racism; oppression and exploitation was seen to be lived in the factory but also in cafés and on the street. In other words, politics, as such, traversed the whole social field of everyday life. Life and politics could not be said to be separate or distinct spheres.

In February 1972, and again in April 1973, the MTA mobilized a series of wildcat strikes at Renault-Bilancourt. As reported in the *New York Times* at the time: "when Renault sneezes, France has the flu."⁴⁹ Half of the 96,000 Renault workers were migrants. The article goes on to say that: "France no longer has colonies where she can send capital and employ cheap labor, so she is importing them from countries with mass unemployment."⁵⁰ The strikes caused great angst amongst official unions given that many workers joined in solidarity, culminating in the movement's general strike organized against racism.⁵¹

As aforementioned, the unions opposed the MTA. So did the French

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47 Hajjat 2006, p. 83

48 Ibid.

49 Robertson 1973

50 ibid

51 Hajjat 2006, p. 87

government who engaged in numerous attempts to expel and imprison leading activists. Additionally, the MTA faced resistance from organizations set up precisely to undermine them. The French State encouraged governments in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to keep a close eye on their nationals. These countries set up associations known as "*Amicales*" with the support of the French Minister of Interior.⁵² These were ideologically and politically opposed to the MTA and sought to undermine their activities especially given their connections to other anti-imperialist struggles, as well as their support for similar anti-capitalist struggles. In other words, the MTA's activities posed a direct threat not only to the local French order of things, but, equally, to the Maghreb's political order. In 1976, the MTA was finally dissolved: infiltrated by the police and security officials, denied funding from both state and non-state organizations, and excluded from the French workers' unions. The MTA have been denied a political existence in the history of political struggles. The (re)emergence of the immigrant workers onto the political scene, with the *Sans-Papiers* movement in the 90s for instance, supposedly took mainstream French society by surprise. Finally, it was said, immigrants have discovered their voice. The 90s movement took on a new form, an articulation contemporaneous with its time. The migrant workers' struggle had been absorbed and put to work through the mediatic-political apparatus. This resulted in the proliferation and production of a discourse strictly limited to the interplay between clandestine, criminal, and humanitarian. A liberal and Eurocentric designation of workers as pre-political 'others,' whose saving is a matter of common Western decency. A discourse which violently denies any relation to previous migrant struggles, or any relation to capitalism, and its various modes of operation.

Becoming Magicians

For Deleuze, politics traverses throughout social relations. There cannot be an isolated space where politics is supposed to take place. Our contemporary predicament today is one that is perhaps peculiar to our time. The place, or site, of action used to be the body, as the extraordinary efforts of those that came before us illustrate. But now, bodies are glued to screens. Just as in the past, the conditions for revolt exist in the present. Indeed, the forces of oppression are perhaps stronger today, though in different ways. As Agamben has recently said, our form of government has rendered any action impossible. We are trapped in an epistemological labyrinth: we explain, critique, and denounce, read commentaries and comments on commentaries. We witness revelations that don't reveal anything but revelation itself. The closed circuit of information has removed the signifier of language from

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52 Nicholls & Uitermark 2016, p. 60.

the body, the body as that which connects us to our voice and language. Language today, as communication, functions as an operating tool to generate this or that effect. Under our oppressive regime, fear of the present and mental alienation are common ailments. As others have put it, tomorrow has been canceled, and all that is left is the transformation of the present. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Modes of the possible exist in the present. What is the Coming Community⁵³ but a form of radical presentness, a realization that within the present lies the possibility of change and transformation. Potentialities that already exist.

Lyotard's interpretation of Socrates' speech on the birth of love, Eros, emphasizes precisely this. For Lyotard, it is clear that Eros is, by nature, double, neither God nor Man. Caught in the divinity of the father and mortality of the mother, Eros is both life and death. "Eros remains under the law of Death, of lack, incessantly trying to escape it, to reinvent his life, precisely because he carries death with him."⁵⁴ In this sense, whatever being, the 'how' of being, is lovable being, a mode of openness to the world and its irreparability.

We are made to work and feel tired, to feel encased or trapped in a particular set up, working through false problems without end, grappling with problems given from above. For we are led to believe that problems are given ready-made and that they disappear in the responses or solutions. However, as Deleuze explains, "this belief probably has the same origin as the other postulates of the dogmatic image: puerile examples taken out of context and arbitrarily erected into models. According to this infantile prejudice, the master sets a problem, our task is to solve it, and the result is accredited true or false by a powerful authority."⁵⁵ The politico-juridical sphere acts as an arbiter of solutions, deciding each time who must live and who must be left to die, managing sacrifice and capturing experience, sensibility, and affection.

All is not lost. As Berardi says, "in our times, the economy is the universal grammar traversing every level of human activity. The reduction of language to information (data) and the incorporation of techno-linguistic automatisms in the social circulation of language, are securing the subjection of language to financial economy."⁵⁶ However, language is also boundless. Poetry is the excess of language that can disentangle the signifier from the limits of the signified. And, "irony, the ethical form

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53 Agamben 2003

54 Lyotard 2012, pp. 27-27

55 Deleuze 2001, p. 158

56 Berardi 2014, p. 256

of the exceeding power of language, is the infinite game that words are playing to skip established signification, to shuffle meanings, and to create new semantic concatenations."⁵⁷ The nihilism of the present, along with its accompanying rationality can be undermined with a touch of irony, "irony as the independence of mind from knowledge" a kind of "excessive nature of the imagination."⁵⁸ Irony, in this sense, has the potential to render inoperative semantic commands, to test its limits, and at the same time opens the possibility for a re-appropriation of creativity that is today left to public relations marketers and executives. A strategic device, capable of re-appropriating language, gesture, and relationships, from the digital financial machine. A reinvented social sphere, a rediscovery of social solidarity disconnected from market exchange, can emerge in shared laughter and shared understanding. A short Arabic proverb provides an apt example:

One day, Juha calls at his neighbor's home and asks to borrow a large cooking pot. His neighbor obliges and lends him one. The following day Juha knocks on his neighbor's door and says: good news, the pot gave birth and now there are two pots for you. Somewhat bemused, the neighbor gladly accepts the two pots. Much later, Juha once again asks to borrow the large pot, and the neighbor agrees. A few weeks go by, and the neighbor has yet to receive his pot from Juha. Now growing very impatient, the neighbor visits Juha. Juha opens his front door and says:
- "I'm so sorry, but I have unfortunate news, the pot has died!"
- "but how can pots die? I do not believe it!" His neighbor replies with consternation.
Juha, looking at his neighbor, calmly responds:
- "If you could believe that a pot gave birth, then you must also accept that pots die."

Juha's gesture cannot be dismissed as a simple prank on his neighbor. Instead, Juha, the neighbor, and we - the audience - are obliged for a moment to enter into a space of collective thinking to (re)discover the connection between "*multitudo* and the potential of thought."⁵⁹ The *multitudo*, in this sense, designates the generic form of the existence of a potential that is properly human: that of thinking,⁶⁰ and the common power of thought as such. We know that fictions lie at the base or in the skies above, but know less about *how* they have come to function.

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57 Ibid., p. 256

58 Berardi 2015, p. 144

59 Agamben 2015, p. 212

60 Ibid., p. 212

How they lend themselves to the subjectification of bodies; penetrating our language and marking our possibilities. Here, Juha's neighbor happily accepts a transformation in the order of things, perhaps out of convenience, until Juha's gesture reverses the outcome of the new rules of the game, turning it on its head.

The neighbor, now the loser, is forced to reconcile himself with a new problematisation: the distinction between the Real and reality; which, only by rethinking their relation, and finding the one, in the other, can the extent of the catastrophe be discerned. Only then will it be possible to desire anew, to feel "the crisis of presence" and prepare to "compete with capitalism on the playing field of magic."⁶¹

Only in becoming magicians.

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