

The Hologram of Conflicting Universalities

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Abstract: This paper discusses the contemporary notion of universality. It argues that today, we do not live only in a world which is less universal than we think (since we are all caught in particular cultural universes) - we are simultaneously *more* universal than we think since we are all caught in trans-cultural global capitalism.

Keywords: universality, Marx, society, individuals, antagonisms.

Lately the notion of universality started enjoying a bad reputation – the predominant commonplace is that a position which presents itself as neutral-universal effectively privileges a certain (heterosexual, male, Christian...) culture: “universal human rights are effectively the rights of the white male private owners to exchange freely on the market, exploit workers and women, as well as exert political domination...” This, however, is only half of the story: today, we do not live only in a world which is less universal than we think (since we are all caught in particular cultural universes) – we are simultaneously *more* universal than we think since we are all caught in trans-cultural global capitalism.

The question to be asked here concerns the emergence of the very form of universality: how and in what specific historical conditions, does the abstract Universality itself become a “fact of (social) life”? In what conditions do individuals, for example, experience themselves as subjects of universal human rights? Therein resides the point of Marx’s analysis of “commodity fetishism”: in a society in which commodity exchange predominates, individuals themselves, in their daily lives, relate to themselves, as well as to the objects they encounter, as to contingent embodiments of abstract-universal notions. What I am, my concrete social or cultural background, is experienced as contingent, since what ultimately defines me is the “abstract” universal capacity to think and/or to work. The modern notion of “profession” implies that I experience myself as an individual who is not directly “born into” his social role - what I will become depends on the interplay between the contingent social circumstances and my free choice. In this sense, today’s individual has the profession of being an electrician or professor or waiter, while it is meaningless to claim that a medieval serf was a peasant by profession. In certain specific social condition (of commodity exchange and global market economy), “abstraction” becomes a direct feature of the actual social life, the way concrete individuals behave and relate to their fate and to their social surroundings. Universality becomes “for itself” only insofar as individuals no longer fully identify the kernel of their being with their particular social situation, only insofar as they experience themselves as forever “out of joint” with regard to this situation: the mode of appearance of an abstract Universality, its entering into actual existence, is thus an extremely violent move of disrupting the preceding texture of social life.

Universality-for-itself is thus to be opposed to any notion of organic totality, of a Whole in which every particular element has its allotted place: in a totality, its universality becomes for itself in one of its elements which cannot achieve full identity in it, which lacks a proper place in it, i.e., whose particular identity is thwarted, which cannot actualize itself in its particularity. For radical feminism, for example, women (not men) stand for universality insofar as they are prevented from fully becoming what they are (with regard to their immanent potentials). This brings us to the problem of Jewish identity. In his *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger characterized Jews as a failed nation, a rootless nation with no land, just prone to calculation and manipulation – however, what Heidegger ignored is that the very fact that Jews were “failed” as a nation was what made them great, a stand-in for universality.

So what happens when the traditional anti-Semitism which perceived Jews as deracinated/rootless people is rendered problematic since Zionists themselves begin to evoke the traditional anti-Semitic cliché of roots, or, as Alain Finkielkraut wrote in 2015 in a letter to *le Monde*: “The Jews, they have today chosen the path of rooting.”¹ It is easy to discern in this claim an echo of Heidegger who, in his *Spiegel* interview, posits that all essential and great things can only emerge from our having a homeland, from being rooted in a specific historical tradition. The irony is that in today’s Zionism we are dealing with a weird attempt to mobilize anti-Semitic clichés in order to legitimize Zionism: anti-Semitism reproaches the Jews for being rootless, and it is as if Zionism tries to correct this failure by belatedly providing Jews with roots... No wonder that many conservative anti-Semites ferociously support the expansion of the State of Israel. The problem is that now Jews act as if they can have a cake and eat it, too: they have a land and state, but they still maintain the claim to universality. This tension unfortunately makes Israel a failed state.

What we see these days (April 2024) in Haiti is the extreme case of a so-called failed state: illegal criminal gangs took over the public space and control 80% of the country. But are the West Bank settlers who threaten Palestinians there, physically attacking them, stealing their land and ruining their crops, plus who are doing this while the Israeli army and police is observing them, not yet another case of illegal gangs openly violating the law and as such not only tolerated but even supported by the (Israeli) forces of law? No wonder this is going on when Israeli minister of security commanding the police is Itamar Ben Gvir convicted by an Israeli court for anti-Palestinian terrorism... The sad lesson of such a role of criminal gangs is that today Western democracies are less and less fully applicable even in the developed West: if we measure a failed state by the cracks in the edifice of state power, as well as the heightened atmosphere of ideological civil war and the growing insecurity of public spaces, then Israel and even the United States are on a fast-track to become one.

Such a confused situation elicits a desperate search for some ideological form that would maintain social stability. The first obvious

candidate is, of course, religion. Marx's well-known characterization of religion as the "opium of the people" nonetheless remains all too naïve. It is true that radical Islam is an exemplary case of religion as the opium of the people: a false confrontation with capitalist modernity which allows the Muslims to dwell in their ideological dream while their countries are ravaged by the effects of global capitalism – and exactly the same holds for Christian fundamentalism. However, there are today, in our Western world, two other versions of the opium of the people: the opium and the people.

The reference to "people" functions today as a fuzzy populist dream destined to obfuscate our own antagonisms. And, last but not least, for many among us the opium of the people is opium itself, the escape into drugs. Chemistry (in its scientific version) is becoming part of us: large aspects of our lives are characterized by the management of our emotions by drugs, from everyday use of sleeping pills and anti-depressants to hard narcotics. We are not just controlled by impenetrable social powers, our very emotions are "outsourced" to chemical stimulation. The stakes of this chemical intervention are double and contradictory: we use drugs to keep external excitement (shocks, anxieties, etc.) under control, i.e., to de-sensitize us for them, and to generate artificial excitement if we are depressed and lack desire. Drugs thus react to the two opposed threats to our daily lives, over-excitement and depression, and it is crucial to notice how these two uses of drugs relate to the couple of private and public: in the developed Western countries, our public lives more and more lack collective excitement (exemplarily provided by a genuine political engagement), while drugs supplant this lack with private (or, rather, intimate) forms of excitement - drugs perform the euthanasia of public life and the artificial excitation of private life. The country whose daily life is most impregnated by this tension is South Korea, and here is Franco Berardi's report on his journey to Seoul:

Korea is the ground zero of the world, a blueprint for the future of the planet. /.../ In the emptied cultural space, the Korean experience is marked by an extreme degree of individualization and simultaneously it is headed towards the ultimate cabling of the collective mind. These lonely monad walks in the urban space in tender continuous interaction with the pictures, tweets, games coming out of their small screens, perfectly insulated and perfectly wired into the smooth interface of the flow. /.../ South Korea has the highest suicide rate in the world. Suicide is the most common cause of death for those under 40 in South Korea.

What Berardi's impressions on Seoul provide is the image of a place deprived of history, a worldless place (the term was introduced by Alain Badiou). Even Nazi anti-Semitism, however ghastly it was, opened up a world: it described its critical situation by positing an enemy which was a "Jewish conspiracy"; it named a goal and the means of achieving it.

Nazism disclosed reality in a way which allowed its subjects to acquire a global “cognitive mapping”, and opened up a space for their meaningful engagement.

Perhaps it is here that one should locate one of the main dangers of capitalism: although it is global and encompasses the whole world, it deprives the large majority of people of any meaningful cognitive mapping. Capitalism is the first socio-economic order which de-totalizes meaning: it is not global at the level of meaning. There is, after all, no global “capitalist world view,” no “capitalist civilization” proper: the fundamental lesson of globalization is precisely that capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu or Buddhist, from West to East. Capitalism’s global dimension can only be formulated at the level of truth-without-meaning, as the Real of the global market mechanism. No wonder millions are exposed to the unbearable superego pressure in its two aspects: the pressure to succeed professionally and the pressure to enjoy life fully in all its intensity.

This brings us to Alexandre Kojève, the great interpreter of Hegel from 1930s to 1950s who saw the moment of the “end of history,” the highest form of social order, first in Stalinist Russia and then in contemporary Japan. If Kojève were to be alive today, he would have chosen South Korea² – why? South Korea is arguably THE country of free choice – not in the political sense, but in the sense of daily life, especially among the younger depoliticized generation. The choice we are talking about is the indifferent choice of moderate daily pleasures, the choice among options which don’t really matter: what one listens to and reads, how one dresses, how one socializes and eats, to which foreign country one goes for a holiday... There is a recent movie that perfectly depicts the stance of such a post-political disengaged individual: *Perfect Days* (Wim Wenders 2023, a Japanese-German coproduction) in which Kōji Yakusho plays Hirayama who works as a toilet cleaner in Tokyo, fully content with his simple life. Following a ritualized daily rhythm, he repeats it daily from dawn, and dedicates his free time to his passion for music, in his van to and from work, and books, every night before bed. Japan comes closest to South Korea in this trend to depoliticized disengagement – even the immensely popular Japanese eco-Marxist Kohei Saito advocates the motto “slow down” (the title of his last book).

This new generation mostly doesn’t care about big issues like human rights and freedoms or the threat of war – while the world still notices the aggressive pronouncements of the North Korean regime accompanied by nuclear threats, the large majority in South Korea just ignores them. Since the standard of living of the large majority is relatively high, one comfortably lives in a bubble. North Korea is the opposite: permanent mobilization and emergency state, no free choices, life focused on how to confront the Enemy... To counter this indifference of the youth, which is spreading also in China, Xi Jinping recently lauded Chinese civilization for

its long and continuous history that stretches back to antiquity, saying that it has shaped the great Chinese nation. He emphasized that it is imperative to comprehensively improve the protection and utilization of cultural relics and better preserve and carry forward cultural heritage.³

This is why one should closely follow the writings of Wang Huning, a current member of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee and the director of Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization. Wang is correct in emphasizing the key role of culture, of the domain of symbolic fictions. The true materialist way to oppose the topic of the "fiction of reality" (subjectivist doubts in the style of "is what we perceive as reality not just another fiction?") is not to strictly distinguish between fiction and reality but to focus on the *reality of fictions*. Fictions are not outside reality, they are materialized in our social interactions, in our institutions and customs – as we can see in today's mess, if we destroy fictions on which our social interactions are based, our social reality itself begins to fall apart.

Wang designated himself as a neo-conservative – what does this mean? Wang sees his task in imposing a new common ethical substance, and we should not dismiss this as an excuse to impose the full control of the Communist Party over social life. Wang is replying to a real problem. 30 years ago, he wrote a book *America against America* where he perspicuously noted the antagonisms of the American way of life, including its darker sides: social disintegration, lack of solidarity and shared values, nihilist consumerism and individualism...⁴ Trump's populism is a false way out: it is the climax of social disintegration because it introduces obscenity into the public speech and thus deprives it of its dignity – something not only prohibited but totally unimaginable in China. We will definitely never see a Chinese high politician doing what Trump did publicly: talk about how large his penis is, imitating a woman's orgasmic sounds... Wang's fear was that the same disease may spread to China – which is now happening at the popular level of mass culture, and the ongoing reforms are a desperate attempt to put a stop to this trend.

It is easy to perceive in the ongoing Chinese campaign a tension between content and form: the content – the establishment of stable values that hold a society together – is enforced in the form of mobilization which is experienced as a kind of emergency state imposed by the state apparatus. Although the goal is the opposite of the Cultural Revolution, there are similarities in the way the campaign is done. The danger is that such tensions can produce cynical disbelief in the population. More generally, the ongoing campaign in China seems all too close to the standard conservative attempts to enjoy the benefits of the capitalist dynamism but to control its destructive aspects through a strong Nation State pushing forward patriotic values.

Here also enters the new populism – is the best metaphor to be used to designate our crisis not that of Huntington's disease? Its typical

first symptoms are jerky, random, and uncontrollable movements called chorea - chorea may be initially exhibited as general restlessness, small unintentional or uncompleted motions, lack of coordination... Does an explosion of brutal populism not look quite similar? It begins with what appears as random violent excesses against immigrants, outbursts, which lack coordination and just express a general unease and restlessness apropos "foreign intruders," but then it gradually grows into a well-coordinated and ideologically grounded movement – what the other Huntington (Samuel) called "the clash of civilizations." This lucky coincidence is tell-tale: what is usually referred to under this term is effectively the Huntington's disease of today's global capitalism. According to Huntington, after the end of the Cold War, the "iron curtain of ideology" has been replaced by the "velvet curtain of culture." Huntington's dark vision of the "clash of civilizations" may appear to be the very opposite of Francis Fukuyama's bright prospect of the End of History in the guise of a world-wide liberal democracy - what can be more different from Fukuyama's pseudo-Hegelian idea that the final formula of the best possible social order was found in capitalist liberal democracy, than a "clash of civilizations" as the main political struggle in the XXIst century? How, then, do the two fit together.

From today's experience, the answer is clear: *the "clash of civilizations" IS politics at "the end of history"*. The ethnic-religious conflicts are the form of struggle which fits global capitalism: in our age of "post-politics" when politics proper is progressively replaced by expert social administration, the only remaining legitimate source of conflicts are cultural (ethnic, religious) tensions. Today's rise of "irrational" violence is thus to be conceived as strictly correlative to the depoliticization of our societies, i.e., to the disappearance of the proper political dimension, its translation into different levels of "administration" of social affairs. If we accept this thesis of the "clash of civilizations," the only alternative to it is the peaceful coexistence of civilizations (or of "ways of life," a more popular term today): forced marriages and homophobia (or the idea that a woman going alone to a public place call for a rape) are OK, just that they are limited to another country which is otherwise fully included into the world market.

The New World Order that is emerging is thus no longer the Fukuyamaist New World Order of global liberal democracy but a New World Order of the peaceful co-existence of different politico-theological ways of life – co-existence, of course, against the background of the smooth functioning of global capitalism. The obscenity of this process is that it can present itself as a progress in anti-colonial struggle: the liberal West will no longer be allowed to impose standards on others, all ways of life will be treated as equal... The last moment of the "end of history" was Fukuyama's dream of global liberal-democratic capitalism, and with the September 11 attacks, that era came to an end.

Decades ago, Ayatollah Khomeini wrote: “We’re not afraid of sanctions. We’re not afraid of military invasion. What frightens us is the invasion of Western immorality.” The fact that Khomeini talks about fear, about what a Muslim should fear most in the West, should be taken literally: Muslim fundamentalists do not have any problems with the brutality of economic and military struggles, their true enemy is not the Western economic neocolonialism and military aggressiveness but its “immoral” culture. The same holds for Putin’s Russia where the conservative nationalists define their conflict with the West as cultural, in the last resort focused on sexual difference (Russia recently defined LGBT movement as a terrorist organization).

While the new populist Right advocates a clear vision (return to traditional values against LGBT+ demands, reassertion of ethnic identity against immigrant threats and multiculturalism in general, etc.), the moderate Left is more and more simply disappearing: unable to propose a vision that would mobilize people, it often takes refuge in Cancel Culture excesses. Our global situation should thus be read as a hologram: there is no longer one notion of progress dominating (even the economic development is losing this role), we live in an era of the superposition of different futures, of different universalities (universal visions of progress). So the main options today are: remnants of the Fukuyama dream, direct religious fundamentalism, and especially what I cannot but call a moderately-authoritarian soft Fascism: market capitalism combined with strong state mobilizing nationalist ideology to maintain social cohesion – think of Modi’s India.

My suspicion is that these options will not work against the threats we are facing today, and that a new form of Communism will have to be invented. The urgent task imposing itself is that of universal solidarity and cooperation among all human communities. There is no higher historical necessity that pushes us in this direction, history is not on our side, it tends towards our collective suicide. As Walter Benjamin wrote, our task today is not to push forward the train of historical progress but to pull the emergency break before we all end in post-capitalist barbarism. The ongoing crises which resonate with it and with each other in a complex interplay. This interplay is uncontrollable and full of dangers, and such a risky situation makes our moment an eminently political one.

Our present situation is the one described by Cixin Liu in his sci-fi masterpiece *The Three-Body Problem*⁵: a scientist is drawn into a Virtual-Reality game “Three Body” in which players find themselves on an alien planet Trisolaris whose three suns rise and set at strange and unpredictable intervals: sometimes too far away and horribly cold, sometimes far too close and destructively hot, and sometimes not seen for long periods of time. The players can somehow dehydrate themselves and the rest of the population to weather the worst seasons, but life is a constant struggle against apparently unpredictable elements, so

that although players try to find ways to build a civilization and attempt to predict the strange cycles of heat and cold, they are condemned to destruction.

Do the latest disturbances in our environment not demonstrate that our Earth itself is gradually turning into Trisolaris? Devastating hurricanes, droughts and floods, not to mention global warming, do they all not indicate that we are witnessing something the only appropriate name for which is “the end of nature”? “Nature” is to be understood here in the traditional sense of a regular rhythm of seasons, the reliable background of human history, something on which we can count that it will always be there. Now that God or Tradition can no longer play the role of the highest limit, nature takes over this role. But what kind of nature will this be? Even when we imagine global warming, we are aware that we are approaching a new world in which the signifier “England” will designate a barren dry country, while the “Death Valley” will designate a big lake in California. However, we still picture it as a new stability, with “regular and repeatable weather patterns”:

“once humanity reaches the limit of carbon output, Earth’s climate stabilizes at a new, higher average temperature. This higher temperature is overall bad for humans, because it still leads to higher sea levels and more extreme weather events. But at least it’s stable: The Anthropocene looks like previous climate ages, only warmer, and it will still have.”

However, recent researches find it more probable that “Earth’s climate leads to chaos. True, mathematical chaos. In a chaotic system, there is no equilibrium and no repeatable patterns. A chaotic climate would have seasons that change wildly from decade to decade (or even year to year). Some years would experience sudden flashes of extreme weather, while others would be completely quiet. Even the average Earth temperature may fluctuate wildly, swinging from cooler to hotter periods in relatively short periods of time. It would become utterly impossible to determine in what direction Earth’s climate is headed.” Such an outcome is not only catastrophic for our survival, it also runs against our (human) most basic notion of nature, that of repeatable pattern of seasons.

Although our planet has only one sun around which it circulates, our predicament could be called “a six-crises problem”: ecological crisis, economic imbalances, wars, chaotic migrations, the threat of AI, disintegration of society. Although the underlying cause of these crises is the dynamic of global capitalism, the interaction of crises leads to chaos which is no less unpredictable than the situation on Trisolaris. Do these crises strengthen each other or does their interaction offer some hope – say, a hope that the ecological crisis will compel us to move beyond capitalism and war to a social order of global solidarity? Although Cixin Liu imagines wonderful and/or terrifying new scientific and technological inventions, he is fully aware that the basic dimension of our crises is social, the coexistence of different civilizations as well as the antagonisms

within each civilization. So, the solution will also have to be social (a new social organization of our societies), not just technological.

The first thing to do today is therefore to act according to our predicament: to prepare for the forthcoming emergency state(s). The paradox is that acting like they will happen in all their dimensions (from ecological catastrophes to wars and digital breakdowns) is the only way to have even a chance to prevent them from really happening. In this sense, the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk recently said: “I know it sounds devastating, especially to people of the younger generation, but we have to mentally get used to the arrival of a new era. The prewar era.”⁶ He is right, although not unconditionally - the situation is still open, and what we should say is, to be more precise: “If a new world war will happen, it will be clear that it has begun back in 2022, and that its deployment was necessary.” Why this strange paradox of retroactivity? Maybe quantum mechanics offers a solution here.

In recent quantum mechanics, the notion of hologram plays an important role: the image of an object that catches not only its actual state but also its interference pattern with other options that were lost when the actual state imposed itself. While I am, of course, not qualified to pass a scientific judgment on these notions, I find it irresistible to apply them to human history. Perhaps the supreme example of holographic history is provided by none other than Marx. Marx is not an evolutionist, he writes history “top-down,” i.e., his starting point is the contemporary global capitalist order, and from this point, he reads the entire history as a gradual approximation to capitalism. This is not teleology: history is not guided by capitalism as its telos, but *once capitalism emerges*, it provides the key to the entire (pre)history – here enters Marx’s well-known story (in *Grundrisse*) of linear development from prehistorical societies through Asiatic despotism, Antique slavery, and feudalism to capitalism. But, again, there is no teleological necessity in this development, it results from a series of contingent collapses of superpositions.

Quantum waves describe “the world at some kind of preexistence level”⁷ since what exists in/as our reality are only the outcomes of the collapse of the quantum superpositions. At this preexistence-level, particles “follow all possible paths when they move from one point to another”⁸: in a double-slit experiment, “individual electrons follow not one but every possible path from the gun to the screen. One path takes the electron through the left slit, another through the right, back out through the left, into a U-turn, and through the right slit once more.”⁹ Could we not say the same also about how a subject’s sexual identity is formed? It (mostly) “collapses” into a particular form (gay, hetero man, lesbian...), but to understand how this form emerged we have to accept that the subject enacted all possible forms, and that these “superposed” forms continue to echo in the final form.¹⁰ Along these lines, Richard Feynman proposed the path integral formulation which replaces the classical notion of a single,

unique classical trajectory for a system with a sum, or functional integral, over an infinity of quantum-mechanically possible trajectories to compute a quantum amplitude. The path integral formulation thus suggests that “our reality is a sort of blending – a sum – of all imaginable possibilities”.¹¹

In a collapse of the wave function, other possible superpositions do not simply disappear, they leave their traces in the result (in / as the single reality that emerges in a collapse). Does something similar not hold for political struggles? When a peaceful negotiation wins over armed resistance, armed resistance is inscribed in the result. Our media like to mention as the two successful negotiated solutions the rise of ANC to power in South Africa and the peaceful protests led by Martin Luther King in the US - in both cases, it is obvious that the (relative) victory of the peaceful negotiations occurred because the establishment feared the violent resistance (from the more radical wing of ANC as well as of the American Blacks). In short, negotiations succeeded because they were accompanied by a superposed ominous threat of armed struggle.

What David Graeber and David Wengrow propose is to abandon capitalism as the “peak” from which we regress to the past that leads to it - the interest of works like *The Dawn of Everything*¹² is that they provide a kind of quantum superposition to the actual early development of civilization: a big well-organized state (Incas) which (for some time, at least) did not follow the line of neo-lithic centralization, state authority and class distinctions. The split of the Inca society into its “anarchist” version and authoritarian version thus captures the moment when through a kind of Darwinian struggle, two superposed social orders were fighting for predominance, and the authoritarian one won.

Along the same lines, we could read some Marxist historians pointed out that the explosion of capitalism in early modernity was conditioned by (the contingent interaction of) two not connected factors: the availability of surplus financial wealth (mainly gold from Latin America), and the rise of dispossessed “free” individuals through the privatization of commons – the surplus wealth was “invested,” used to employ and exploit dispossessed workers. But this combination was in no way predestined: history could have taken a different turn, with the dispossessed poor enslaved or mobilized as a threat to the existing order, with the surplus of gold just bringing about its devaluation, etc.

We can see here how right Jacques Lacan was when he pointed out that progressive evolution is a new form of teleology. The true break of teleology is only a top-down history which conceives the linear progress as a retroactive fact, as the outcome of a backwards-projection of our standpoint into the past. In a quantum-holographic history, this retroactivity is rendered visible, and all superpositions that were present in the past and were erased through their collapse are rendered visible again. In this sense one can even say that Walter Benjamin, in his *Theses on History*, proposes a holographic notion of history in contrast to the

predominant progressist-evolutionary version: a present revolution redeems the past, i.e., it re-actualizes past superpositions lost in their collapse towards a ruling ideology. Such a direct contact between the present and the past is timeless in the sense that it by-passes the temporal causal network connecting the past and the present:

“The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth.”¹³

How can we read this claim without committing ourselves to anthropocentric-teleological thinking? As we already mentioned, the answer was indicated by none other than Marx who, in his introduction to *Grundrisse*, wrote:

“Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known.”¹⁴

In short, to paraphrase Pierre Bayard,¹⁵ what Marx is saying here is that the anatomy of the ape, although it was formed earlier in time than the anatomy of man, nonetheless *plagiarizes by anticipation the anatomy of man*. There is no teleology here, the effect of teleology is strictly retroactive: *once capitalism is here* (having emerged in a wholly contingent way), it provides a universal key for all other formations. Teleology resides precisely in evolutionary progressivism where the key to the anatomy of man is the anatomy of ape.

Along these lines, one can also understand why Kant claims that, in some sense, the world was created so that we can fight our moral struggles in it. When we are caught into an intense struggle that means everything to us, we experience it as if the whole world will collapse if we fail. The same holds also when we fear the failure of an intense love affair. There is no direct teleology here: our love encounter is the result of a contingent encounter, so it could easily also not have happened. But once it does happen, it decides how we experience the whole of reality. When Benjamin wrote that a big revolutionary battle decides not only the fate of the present but also of all past failed struggles, he mobilizes the

same retroactive mechanism that reaches its climax in religious claims that, in a crucial battle, not only the fate of us but the fate of God himself is decided.

Holography thus implies that the whole is a part of its part, i.e., that a part is composed of all the (other) parts of its whole. Capitalism is only a part of history, a moment in the global development, but it imposed itself as the prism through which we see the entire development as steps gradually leading to it. True history is thus not a gradual development of parts, but a series of shifts in how its “whole” itself is structured. We don’t change the past facts, we just locate them into a different symbolic context, we change their meaning. So we do not have a Whole which comprises its parts: each part comprises multiple universalities between which we are forced to choose.

Our predicament confronts us with the deadlock of the contemporary “society of choice.” We pride ourselves for living in a society in which we freely decide things which matter. However, we find ourselves constantly in the position of having to decide matters that will fundamentally affect our lives, but without those decision having any proper foundation in knowledge. This is properly frustrating: although we know that it all depends on us, we cannot ever predict the consequences of our acts – *we are not impotent, but, quite on the contrary, omnipotent, without being able to determine the scope of our powers*. While we cannot gain full mastery over our biosphere, it is unfortunately in our power to derail it, to disturb its balance so that it will run amok, swiping us away in the process.

- 1 Finkelkraut 2015
- 2 I follow here the suggestion of my Korean friend Alex Taek-Gwang Lee
- 3 I follow here the suggestion of my Korean friend Alex Taek-Gwang Lee
- 4 Wang 1991
- 5 Liu 2015
- 6 Tusk 2024
- 7 Hertog 2023, p.88
- 8 Ibid., p.90
- 9 Ibid., p.91
- 10 I owe this thought to Jacqueline Rose.
- 11 Feynman 2023
- 12 Graeber and Wengrow 2021.
- 13 Benjamin 2005
- 14 Marx 1973.
- 15 Bayard 2009.

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