

## REVOLUTION IN THE VIROCENE NEAR (OR NEARING) THE END OF TIME

Pandemic Paper, no 1

2020

*“The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm...”*

*Walter Benjamin, “Theses (VIII) on the Philosophy of History” (1940)*

### Foreclosing the Political

COVID-19 and the emergent virocene has made insurgency explicit in the real State of emergency. We have been awakened from our collective ahistorical and apolitical slumbers. In an instant, the mantra of *there is no alternative* has been replaced by *whatever happens, nothing will ever be the same*. The ideology that says radical transformation is unrealistic has been irrevocably discredited. The bonds and rituals of everyday life have been loosened, fragmented and disjointed. What seemed inevitable and iron clad now feels flimsy as nation states globally scramble to find solutions that don't exist. This opens up a space for thinking, and for politics. This new situation underscores a critical need for both practical intervention and an attempt at building a convergent philosophy that anticipates the praxis of the future.

We have endured over 40 years of the foreclosure of the political and suffered its failures to the limit in which the State and its functioning doesn't seem to exist except as an appendage of the needs and welfare of the Global corporations. We inhabit a transnational garrison state, inside the automated logic of a newly formed atomistic, disoriented, disembodied populace, a multitude of chaotic flux without political direction or organization. As we have painfully learned from history, this kind of situation is capital for right-wing populism with its accompanying authoritarian personalities and, on the other side, at best a mild form of ambiguous socialist desire. Our enemies act quickly and often with unified fronts.

The foreclosure of the political in this conjuncture finds its roots in the TINA (There Is No Alternative) syndrome, which is prefigured when the gold standard was discarded in 1971, the increased economic and strategic potency of OPEC in 1973 and the official offspring of speculative capital, the modern derivative, launched at the Chicago Board of Options Trading floor that same

year as futures trading on equities. Suddenly, the ideology of economic determinism became dominant and increasingly so, to the point of a clichéd redundancy. Parallel to these “innovative” moves in the financialization of everyday life was the beginning of austerity budgets, the dismantling of public education as a cultural and political force and the establishment of a new economy in which technocracy became and continues to become increasingly dominant. These developments have left political agency in the lurch while simultaneously maintaining the illusion of social order and the right to vote as agents of change.

The most salient aspect in the conjuncture, and perhaps, a greater illusion wrought by this political foreclosure concerns the denial of class and the disavowal of class politics. The pandemic has explicitly laid bare that the class divide is greater than ever. Not only have class lines been identified, but we are now witnessing open class war from Portland to New York city. To go back to work, to return to normal, is to go back to people living in the streets, inescapable debt, perpetual imperialistic wars, the destruction of the environment, et al. To voluntarily ‘go back to normal’ is a monstrous prospect. Although the notion of contract can imply a measure of enslavement, it at least offers a certain kind of protection. This is a contagion for a new generation without *even a minimum* of a social contract for the generation of the futureless future.

To begin, we should situate ourselves methodologically within the epoch we inhabit. This requires a step back, a regressive–progressive moment in order to ground ourselves amidst incessant chaotic flux.

### ***An Arrested Dialectic***

*“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”*

***Karl Marx, 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1851***

Benjamin’s well-known description of Klee’s “Angelus Novus” and the concept of progress it destroys finally faces little inimical resistance even from those living in imperializing nations. The internalized dogmas of ‘American exceptionalism’ and neoliberal ‘technological disruption’ have repeatedly proved their absurd inadequacy to deliver even a modicum of what they promise over the institutions that preceded them. Amidst the pandemic, the fantasies offered by the aforementioned political ideals have asphyxiated, been placed on a ventilator, and the wreckage they have created placed at our feet. As a result, the biopolitical projections of Foucault or the indifferent, Kafkaesque bureaucratic forms anticipated by Weber are now laid bare under the vast totalizing and perpetual violence of the reciprocity between state terror and capitalist hyper-industrialism. This has resulted in an ever increasing indebtedness incurred

from the precise mechanization and commodification of the minutiae of everyday life, and the leveraged exploitation of the successive once-in-a-hundred-year pandemics, storms, wars, and depressions that all but guarantee that we will be left for dead, poorer and worse off than those immediately before us. Yet, like Benjamin's figure of history, we remain fixedly contemplating while the storm itself determines our direction.

To this end, Sartre was right to point to the tendency that we Marxists make "use of an arrested dialectic." So dominated by the 'time' of capitalism (of production, of monetary circulation, of the redistribution of property, etc.) what has been displaced is the dialectical temporality that Marxism had "once caught a glimpse of." The pandemic has once again made this incipient revolutionary time clear in its own powerful, temporal displacement of the normalcy of capitalism. It has laid bare that our activities are not in time, "but that time, as a concrete quality of history," is made by human kind. To engage this temporal displacement brought on by the pandemic is to pose a temporality that situates past and future in terms distinctly apart from infinite divisibility; it is to produce a temporality in which the structural limits imposed on praxis are thought to be something akin to an 'interpretive horizon', rather than a true impossibility—leaving the possibility of action in history open.

What resonates powerfully in this moment is the conviction that although the structures of society "define for each man an objective situation as a starting point [...] this truth defines him just insofar as he constantly goes beyond it in his practical activity." The material conditions of this moment circumscribe for us our possibilities, yet as Sartre emphasizes, our current situation is also 'doubly determined' by a future that depends on the temporality of revolution—a future that is an 'always open possibility' as an 'immediate action on the present.'

When workers are suddenly deemed essential during a pandemic, it signals to us that despite the enormity of the conditions that overdetermine our lives, we still possess a tremendous tool of leverage over our oppressors, which is the mass refusal of labor. While it initially appears dangerous to refuse our labor in this 'unprecedented moment', it would be as dangerous, or perhaps more dangerous to return to a society so violently against us without our own explicit demand for a 'new normal'. Politics is now the continuation of war of all against all. It is this Hobbesian universe which needs to be interrupted and overturned.

### ***The Real Exception***

In his *Eighth Thesis on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin states the identity of the exception and the rule. To say that the exception has become the rule, the norm, is antithetical to the classical Schmittian doctrine about the exception. Benjamin's exception is that of *normalized catastrophe*. However, he stresses "it

is our task to bring about a real state of exception” (*des wirklichen Ausnahmezustand*). Within this real state is the crisis of Power as well as the crisis of temporality. We see our suspension in the now-time between the no-longer of the past and the not-yet of the future. And yet, this suspension seems indefinite, and the passage from the past to the future is stalled in this abysmal plane, in which the catastrophic exception becomes (or it has already become) the norm and the rule. Although this sounds apocalyptic, it is a possible description of the virocene, and all that comes (or goes) with it.

The task ahead presents a three-layered schema and a threefold semantics of the exception in the virocene. This exception, becoming the norm, is not the exception decided by Power (and the police today). This dimension of the exception, this value or meaning, is still included in the present schema. We know from recent history that Power’s exception is, more often than not, a mere fabrication and the decision on the exception is a totally arbitrary decision. An excellent example of this arbitrariness was in 2003 the continuous and non-continuous war against Iraq, one still unfinished with the ironic statement made by George W. Bush, “mission accomplished”—perversely repeated by Trump: the virus will disappear. But this exception (pace all conspiracy theory) seems to have arisen by itself, though obviously exacerbated and worsened by the rule of neo-liberal capitalism with its madness in productivist ideology. This has become a terminus for now – perhaps, not the end of capitalism, but certainly the end of something? It could be “a general illumination,” or “an essential difference” as Marx conceptualizes in the *Grundrisse*. It must necessarily be, or it can be, in the convergence of necessity and contingency, the beginning of something new that is an essential difference. In this we find a threefold, interrelated exception: 1) an exception arising by itself, 2) the sovereign exception still desperately trying to reassert itself with various degrees of violence globally, and 3) the real exception, which is our task to initiate. As Marx writes in the *18th Brumaire*,

*“Society seems now to have retreated to behind its starting point; in truth, it has first to create for itself the revolutionary point of departure – the situation, the relations, the conditions under which alone modern revolution becomes serious.”*

We are not demanding anything per se. Rather, we are beginning the process (or trial) of working out a revolutionary program so that we can **take everything back**. We are readying an exit plan—new lines of flight—so that we can build something different and new. A philosophical arsenal is now necessitated in order to deactivate and displace, dismantle and destroy the odious machinery of capital and repressive Power. We are passing the threshold and moving toward the newly empowered other.

In this context of developing the emerging empowered other, capable of bringing about the real exception, an ontology of unrest (Greek concept of  $\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$

[*pélein*]), makes for the ground of a new polis and a new ethos. *Pélein* signifies to be in motion, indicates the tempestuousness of pélagos, the open sea. It is also the place of a constant threshold in which the pole of the polis is found, or rather founded—a constituent process that is never completed. The process is not as much dialectical as it is transductive in the sense that it is simultaneously a tension and an amplification in a never ending individuating process. Despite its lack of temporal limits, it constantly produces new singularities and as a constituent process never ends, it constantly makes possible and produces new instances of the common. If potentiality is higher than actuality, then the ontology of *pélein*, that of constant motion, agitation, and unrest—the ontological force that is vertiginous explodes the suspended now. Hurling it toward the *Not-yet*, a veritable revolver for the future.

## Convergence Philosophy is an Orientation

**We are proposing a convergence philosophy—one which retains philosophy as a rigorous science of making distinctions, but one in which the intersection of concepts is taken seriously.** A convergent philosophy is one that respects the fidelity to the phenomena in the sense of both faithfulness to the earth and as a rigorous science that attends to what appears.

Convergence philosophy is an intersection ontology. This requires being-along-side, on the way to a parallel materiality of language, language/praxis, without sacrificing force, relevance and signification. It invents concepts, locates and overcomes the concatenation of arguments in their historicity, and is acutely attuned to the socialization of ideas, without yielding to a false synthesis or empty signification.

In this context, the **Relations** of theory and practice, each conditioning each other are crucial. The dichotomy that currently exists between thinking and acting, the **Relations** between poesis and praxis (making and doing) must be overcome and thought differently. How the passing over takes place is not in the realm of either/or thinking, but in the combination of the both/and, as well as in the classical Hegelian relations of the two (neither/nor). Its *maieutics* is a double birth, a risk of the die cast into the non-existent or futureless future and the militant action of **taking back** what belongs to us, the freedom to make and to **live fully**.

## Systemic Failures and Contagion

The current crisis has been predicated on many systemic failures. On the ideological front, the “religiosity of the many” has produced a new fundamentalism that has destroyed the crucial distinction advanced in the Enlightenment between Knowledge/Scientific inquiry and faith. This new fundamentalism actually thinks faith is knowledge.

Secondly, on the material front, a massive enrichment of the Capitalist class, a result of 40 years of a corporate welfare state which has only substantially benefited a very small percentage, if any, of the working classes, and the ‘middle classes’. This enrichment employed a new financial architecture based on what could be considered a new circuit of capital, the practice and new culture of the derivative that is more complex than Marx envisioned as “fictitious capital”. The billionaire class has enriched itself by hundreds of billions during the six-month lockdown.

Despite its “good” intentions, the nominal Left has demonstrated meager force in electoral politics and the Right has proven that it is much more adept at mobilizing the mass(es), particularly in the limited sphere of electoral politics. Similarly, a critical mass on the Left has failed to materialize into a revolutionary force, despite the recent Black Lives Matter rebellions, which have yet to complete their revolutionary aspirations.

The petite bourgeoisie has been unable to see their disappearance and potential extinction in class warfare terms. The “little guy” is now replaced by the proliferation of a culture of start-ups, and the entrepreneurial spirit becomes a new symptom and one consistently bound to fail even as it’s anchored by a faithful devotion to the ideology of success.

Systemic failures have now led to new practices (1930s forward) of eugenic engineering, which replaces a post-WW II policy of social engineering and its reinforcement in the teaching and surveys from the social sciences.

There is now almost a full denial of the advances of Psychoanalysis as a social practice of liberation and is now replaced fully by incessant behavioral psychology with variegated links to “political correctness,” identity politics and an insistence on acting civil in so-called civil society. These become stand-ins for concrete political practice. Meanwhile, the practice of the other dominant form of contemporary psychological practice, cognitive psychology, is aimed at adaptation and coping with the increasing stress(es) of everyday life without critiquing the sources of these stresses. Being managed externally through the temporality and practice of technics is a daily reality for most. Self-reflection and self-exploration are now relics of the past.

### ***Beyond Cop Consciousness***

*“Its [police] power is formless, like its nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states; ... [that] bears witness to the greatest conceivable degeneration of violence.”*

Walter Benjamin, On Violence

The abandonment of psychoanalysis as a liberatory project has left a massive blind spot on the left. Some prime examples of this absence of discussion is the lack of analysis of the deeply sexual sadism shown in George Floyd's murder. More recently, the sadistic suffocation of Daniel Prude is indicative of the fact that the horrors of Abu Ghraib plague the streets and suburbs of the United States of America. Clearly, we cannot afford to overlook libidinal investments and projections if we are to destroy what decades of professionalization and financialization have wrought: a virtual pandemic of cop consciousness.

When a system has to say outright that mass casualties are the price of business as usual, it needs an unusual amount of policing in order to secure assent. Because the enforcers of work discipline and other useless routines of everyday life under capitalism are not only cops in riot gear but exist also and everywhere in the grotesque deformation of consciousness that identifies with the cop. The cop enforces the discipline of the boss: *Move it along, get to work, what's your business here?*

The cop has a lot of help. Capital depends ideologically on its ability to hail and thus generate the punitive boss inside the workers' head, ready to discipline what subverts the subject's subjection. This cop consciousness and practice has not only disfigured the worker's body and soul but has transfixed and penetrated the everyday life of the professional class, the service class and the shops of the petit bourgeoisie. Its removal must be our project.

The roots of this punitive cop consciousness run as deep in the American psyche as does the Puritan work ethic and its never ending struggle to repress the desire for freedom in everyday life. What we are calling cop consciousness is what keeps those who would otherwise fight for their freedom, focused instead on punishing those who do.

In order to have material force, cop consciousness requires fantasies of the savage – racialized images of laziness and wildness, and non-obedience to authority. To defund the police first demands a shift in this racialized and controlling consciousness that dominates the institutions of law and order.

The viral conjuncture is an opportunity but only if we understand why it has produced not only an anti-police uprising but also a strengthening of fascism's shrill hysteria. As both Reich and Ellen Willis have pointed out, a little bit of freedom in a repressive system can cause a mass regression to a fascist cry for law and order. Let things go a little and the weak and the boring run for cover in authoritarianism.

In the face of rigid border bound, territorial identities, fueled by aggression and repression, fuel for racist policing and all it clears ground for, the revolu-

tionary imagination counters with a cultural politics of solidarity, connection, of the illegitimate, of deterritorialized flows, lines of flight leaking out of and away from the cop on the outside and on the inside. Where the cop defends the border and demands papers, punishes, keeping everything in its proper place, revolutionary movements do the opposite. Where cop consciousness terrorizes, orders, demands identities based in territory and legitimacy, the free consciousness flows, moves, and deterritorializes.

The sadomasochistic hell of police repression and its dependence on racial reaction in the US can never be destroyed by its replacement with new forms of sadomasochism, such as bourgeois rituals of guilt and purification. These dynamics are catastrophic for an uprising that starts by opposing the racial divide and conquer strategy that capital always takes to the bank. Racist exploitation in this country should be fought with interracial solidarity, generated in the common desire for freedom and the good life, and made real in side-by-side struggles for common interests. In order to bring about the real overcoming of the capitalist strategy of racial divide and conquer, we must reclaim a call for unified struggle that is actually capable of bringing about the state of exception, which can suspend the identities Power has assigned us.

What was most profoundly missed during the lockdown has been precisely what is counter to those working class divisions: public life, public goods, commonly shared resources. Today's rebellion enacts a recuperation of them: joyful taking of the streets for art and pro-social destruction, an ethos of mutual aid, and even the tamest demands of the rebellion insisting on the funding of public goods at the expense of the repressive and violent protection of private property and racist division.

### ***Aimé Césaire's Two Ways to Lose Oneself***

*"Provincialism? Not at all. I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose yourself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the "universal." My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars."*

Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez"

Although we affirm "inter-racial" solidarity against the depredations of racial capitalism (the problematic of coalition), we must ask from what position of structural maneuverability and shared strength is this achieved? Let us remember a political slogan, "Turn the Intifada into the Class Struggle!" This is good for sloganeering but why not also let the Intifada be the Intifada. Attunement to the steps (contingent, open, and becoming) matters. The philosophical and

political itinerary of Black liberation and Pan-Africanist self-determination struggles have had and still have much to say about this. Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton's *Black Power* is a penetrating study on the matter. We cannot afford to side-step engaging in the theory-praxis nexus of Black radical thought and certainly not in obligation to some principle of inclusivity; but rather, out of a **Desire to Win**.

We can never forget that the United States equivalent to the *Paris or Shanghai Commune*, the closest this country came to a transitional "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" was the arming of folk who would go on to constitute the first Black Reconstruction governments, which were ultimately defeated by state-sanctioned terrorism. Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois's terminological and conceptual creativity in his 1935 *Black Reconstruction in America* becomes a key point of departure for any project to revolutionize where we live.

A proper dialectical account of particularity and universality remains crucial for a radical agenda. One of the hallmarks of a materialist and a dialectical method is that class is relational. It is not the positivism of a high-school civics class or bourgeois sociology seminar. It is imperative to transcend a discourse whereas so-called race and class (or for that matter class and gender) are treated as voluntarist selections akin to shopping (How American!). An accusatory version of such false choices are parodied and called out by the consummate revolutionary mind of George Jackson's *Blood in My Eye*: "the tactic 'white left-wing causes' to protect their bosses' 'white right-wing cause.'" It is even more egregious to use a watered down appeal to Marxism and class-struggle to chastise radical Black Nation building. A caricature of Marxist analysis is mobilized to deflate a caricature of Black Nationalist thought and all that is proffered is lack of clarity.

In the actuality of its historical becoming, Revolutionary Black Nationalist movements in the American hemisphere and African continent have had as much an acute class consciousness as nominally or authentically mobilized Communist and Socialist parties. Insurgent testaments of Black Radical Thought are saturated with the language of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradiction, base and superstructure, unity and struggle, theory and practice, forces and relations of production. To pretend to not know this functions as a key detriment to not just imagining but actualizing a beyond both of imperialism and finance capital. Black radical particularity houses its own universality—to think otherwise short-circuits and treats the most radical movement in America's history comparable to Fanon's critique of Sartre in his account of Négritude in his 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks*.

This political revolutionary stance (Brecht's *haltung*) is present in Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire evocation of Hegelian dialectics: "There are two notions that one must bear in mind. I know this can appear contradictory, but

once I found a formula and I showed it to [Leopold] Senghor. Hegel says: 'One should not oppose universal to particular. It is not by negating the particular that one reaches the universal, but by exploration and clear recognition of the particular.' So we told ourselves: the blacker we are going to be, the more universal we'll become. I don't think in terms of antagonism. I am myself wherever men stand and struggle. Hence my way of relating (this is paradoxical) to this land, the tiniest township in the universe, this speck of an island that is, for me, *the world*."

Césaire concludes his October 1956 resignation letter from the French Communist Party (of which he was a founding member) with the formulation that "there are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the "universal".

We declare our wall-fatigue and seek the resources to tear them down, without diluting our collective force.

## **The Letter Always Reaches Its Destination**

*"In this union of thought and of dreams it is always the thought that is twisted and defeated."*

*Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire*

Lacan's dictum seems to become more true every year. Indeed, in the age of social media, and their algorithms, it has become the case that many can choose to only, quite literally, see the news and opinions that they desire. Even more troubling than how easy it is to avoid coming across information or opinions that differ from our expectation is how easy it is to avoid the full trauma and reality of the contemporary situation by retreating into fantasy. The contemporary examples of this are too numerous to list and certainly include the idea that Trumpism is the product of some external, Russian, plot to destroy the United States (as if authoritarianism, racism, and chauvinism would have to be imported) as well as the fantasy that Black Lives Matter and Antifa are creations of George Soros, who wants to take away your guns and get rid of cash currency (a double castration). However, the most amazingly stark example of this flourishing of dreams and fantasy over the trauma of the real, as well as thought, is QAnon. The QAnon 'community', reportedly over 3 million in the United States and quickly spreading, seems to not only accept the recycled ideology that the global, unrooted, elites drink the blood of children (a repeat of the fantasy that Jews, cosmopolitan and rootless, drink the blood of Christian babies) but that there is a 'deep state', populated by pedophiles, that controls the government and with whom Donald Trump, an incarnation of goodness and morality, is struggling with and trying to defeat. The Manichean and cartoonish storylines, the absurdity of the fantasy, is certainly part of the attraction and how quickly it has spread and how deeply it is

accepted speaks to how difficult it is to engage in emancipatory politics today and how necessary the struggle over abstractions and ideas is.

The readings of the pandemic have also underscored the truth that fantasies are rarely undone by facts and data. One of the common points being made regarding the ongoing crisis is that, at long last, the failures of contemporary capitalism are transparent for all to see. From Robert Reich to Noam Chomsky and everyone in between, many on the left declare that neo-liberal capitalism has reached a dead end, that a new turn toward a more embedded, egalitarian, and socially responsible capitalism is in the cards. On the other side, Donald Trump, his supporters, and many mainstream Democrats alike see the necessity of more nationalism, more stringent border controls, the dangers of globalization and dependence on foreign manufacturing. Perhaps most importantly, they see the folly of being so interdependent with the greatest threat to U.S. hegemony, a bat-eating China that has imperial aspirations and which, through the ‘Chinese virus’, has invaded their country and brought so much suffering and chaos. Many more still, left and right, from Giorgio Agamben to Ammon Bundy, see the virus as an excuse for another, very large, step in an ongoing erosion of our freedom and our subjection to state power, our reduction to ‘bare life’, animals to be herded, milked, and controlled by the state.

A core contradiction in the current crisis is the choice between life and the economy. Biological life and property, the two great values which liberalism sacrifices all else for, are now at odds. The many dilemmas of this choice, however, are not the greatest threat to liberal hegemony. The key threat to liberalism is just how meaningless the choice is. When the Lieutenant Governor of Texas declares that parents and grandparents will be happy to sacrifice their lives (but, of course, not happy to forgive student loans or to pay young workers a living wage) for the economic benefit of their children and grandchildren, the whole poverty of the liberal ethos is made all too overt. What is the purpose of life, to pay rent and bills? What good is biological life if, to a large extent, it simply exists for the sake of economic activity and what good is dedicating so much of our lives to economic activity if it simply exists to maintain biological life? Freed from the inertia of capitalist repetition, the great danger to liberalism today is that people face an existential crisis where they begin to face the prospects of death by virus vs death by boredom and endless work.

**The absurdity of the assertion that heavy handed state measures in response to the pandemic are furthering the reduction of human life to bare life is that what people are being kept from (working, shopping, commuting) are hardly great cultural, political, or intellectual endeavors.** As we have already been reduced to our animal substructures by capitalism (as Agamben himself has noted many times), why would there be any need for the state to impose it? Similarly, for those who read the ongoing events as a way for the state to further

regulate and control our lives, why would the state regulate the population so as to shrink the economy as opposed to increase it? Given the amazing levels of servility in most all contemporary societies, why would the state desire to keep people locked up at home? It's not as if we had been in the middle of a popular uprising and there needed to be a way to get people off the streets. **In opposition to all these formulaic and overly deterministic readings of the current moment, it is important to keep in mind the role of luck, as Machiavelli understood very well.** Rather than the pandemic being some conspiracy to undo an imagined population that was disobedient and opposed to liberal animality, we need to see the ways that this moment opens up multiple political possibilities.

The greatest indication of this new range of possibility that is opened up by the viral crisis is the ongoing upheavals and a renewed Black Lives Matter movement. It is obviously not a coincidence that there is an explosion of activism and anti-racist fervor at this point of time. The lack of employment for many, the closure of the schools and the venues of consumption, and the suspension of most all everyday routines, have given many more people than usual the time to think and to engage in prolonged political activity. The partial liberation of students from capitalist schooling and the pause of the autopilot of daily repetition and the plethora of demands upon our time have made a new political movement much more possible than in the recent past.

### *Carpe Diem*

#### **Yes, I am a communist.**

*"My decision to join the communist party emanated from my belief that the only true path of liberation for Black people is the one that leads towards a complete and total overthrow of the capitalist class in this country and all its manifold institutional appendages which insure its ability to exploit the masses and enslave the black people [...]"*

*Angela Davis*

*"This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution."*

*Marx, Paris Manuscripts*

The initial moments of the pandemic vividly exposed the structural racism implicit in capitalist ideology; it gave no exemption to predominantly non-white 'essential workers' and forced them to camp-like labor amid a global pandemic. The murder of George Floyd and so many others by the police laid bare the

brutality of the capitalist state's repressive apparatus, which answered calls for its reform with even greater and widespread brutality towards its subjects.

The recent protests and revolts have oriented yet another generation towards the emancipation of society from the brutal forms of racialized-capitalism that have so deeply enfeebled the 'full development of human potentiality', and while the question of political foreclosure appears to have been negated by the mass mobilization of protesters, the Marxist polemic between reform and revolution returns this moment to a question of its objective structural limits. This question is also indicative of the project of communism insofar as its answer re-affirms the ultimate presupposition that the communist revolution can only be a total and worldwide process (cf. "the revolutionary process so that we can *take everything back*") and that local or regional revolutions necessarily become blocked, inverted or inevitably fall prey to more encompassing structures. This is not to suggest, however, the priority of economic over racial or sexual/gender oppression, but rather to call attention to the ways that challenges to those forms of alienation call for the complete, radical transformation of all the modes of production that facilitate their structural existence. Thus, the task of cultural, social and political analysis in our present moment should first be to orient and historically situate the conjuncture in an effort to overcome its regional limits by expanding the horizon of its objectives beyond the reform of institutions of the practico-inert and secondly, to pose what is at stake when these structures are challenged, but not overcome.

If we do not fight explicitly for power, and if we are not able to retain it after it is won, we risk a regress to the very same forms and institutions that will crush mass movements for years to come. Here, Marcuse's warning in "Repressive Tolerance" must be heard: if the forces of repressive tolerance suppress the revolutionary moment, yet permit the organization of reactionary violence, then the fascism that has accompanied the social transition to our hyper-industrial present (a consequence of a social transition without a revolution) will further perpetuate the prolonged and painful regressions of a collapsing empire. What Marcuse, Marx and others recognized is that there is no revolutionary middle ground: when a revolution is interrupted, it can only regress and reconstitute an aristocracy of owners-reactionary or liberal—who use the state to defend their own interests. Thus, we must also affirm what Huey Newton calls 'revolutionary suicide' or rather, that we ask the question "But before we die, how shall we live?" and realize that "If you stop struggling, then you stop life." In order to render a revolution irreversible, we must give it greater depth—it must also provoke a social revolution.

In this regard, Nietzsche's distinction of 'history for life' can be taken to be a feature convergent with Marxism insofar as it is in the critical mode of history in the service of life that man possesses and employs the 'strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past'.

As Nietzsche writes of critical history, “The best we can do is confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away.” (*Untimely Meditations*, “Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” pg. 76)

It is in this sense that there is something interesting afoot as protesters take to smash the hallmarks and monuments of the colonial neo-nostalgia, the losers of history. In a step towards ‘taking a knife to its roots’, the toppling of these monuments creates a space necessary for what Marx refers to as the *poetry from the future* and is what enables philosophy and poetry to give to History what historiography cannot—that is, to engage with what might happen or what can possibly happen. Here, again, is a reaffirmation of communism insofar as the poetry from the future—that of revolution—is a repetition of past; yet not a simple mechanical reproduction of previous historical moments, but a taking up of those forms necessary to produce a different future. For as Marx writes, “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”

### ***Contours of the Present Moment: Socialized Cybernetics as a New Process of Instrumentality and Domination***

*“That which creates things in their own way is not a thing”*

*Chuang Tzu*

The ever-present domination of our lives by technical means has become all the more clear in the present dynamic of the pandemic. With a limited and restricted physical presence in the world, even the most basic modes of daily reproduction have become mediated by technological logistics. Of course these systems were already present in our lives before the pandemic, but they existed alongside various other modes of existence oriented towards psychic ends outside of the rational and the calculative; these modes have become all the more short-circuited or limited insofar as physical presence is necessary for community. The relentless immobility of society that has developed as a consequence of cybernetic socialization is now plainly reflected in the fixity imposed on our physical movement by the pandemic. In more ways than one, Sartre’s No Exit has begun to seem all too realistic—always on, always awake, without the necessary break of revolution.

In this respect, our present epoch of the incessant interpretation of ‘big-data’ and logic of algorithmic rationality has conjured once again a fundamental philosophical question that has been reflected on perennially in the history of philosophy—and finally exploded by Marx—that is, the question of human agency in the face of complex and interlinked systems of overdetermination. Thought along the lines of Heidegger and against the tendency of pessimistic mechanical determinism, the question of technology becomes the question of the meaning of technology *for us*. This, of course, is anything but a technological question—it is a political question that concerns the ideology of a society and what is taken to be universal despite its glaring, implicit contradictions. However, Marx’s conception of the proletarian dissolution of bourgeois/civil society (as a product of the contradiction that the values implicit to the proletariat are necessarily at odds with the principles of society) must be fundamentally questioned in our present moment. So ravaged by the addictogenic satisfaction of the ‘infinite scroll’ or the dopamine rush of a ‘like’ or an ‘add to cart’—much less the exteriorization of memory into the untrustworthy cloud of private, capitalist multinationals—the maturity that Kant speaks of seems like an ethic from another planet. Within this absolute breakdown of capitalist efficiency, we are experiencing a generalized lack of meaning which has generated and fostered new forms of hopelessness that range from phantasmagorical conspiracy theories to the generalized stupidity displayed by right-wing “protesters” demanding their “liberties”. At a moment of heightened political tension/crisis, it becomes apparent that entire societies are left in a condition of helplessness, derived from a lack of knowing and doing.

How is such mediocrity and helplessness produced and maintained? The interrogation of this concept becomes not only a key analytic of our current conjuncture (of which many fine pages have been written), but negatively produces the possibility of a radical re-orientation of technology, which is our present concern.

An inroad into this re-orientation can be thought first according to Marx and again, with Heidegger. In a careful short-circuiting of the philosophical question of ‘species being’, Marx shows in *The German Ideology* that it is production—the ensemble of social relations that guides any human activity—that shapes man’s being. Consequently, what appears as an autonomous structure of production is, in fact, a product of ideology—an apparatus of consciousness that man opposes to his being (his collective and individual activity). Thus, technology should first be situated within the sphere of human relations (ontological potency), and as such, remains entirely amenable in a revolutionary transformation of production. Can we venture to say that the relations of production are no longer only determined by the forces of production? And, can the relations of production change the forces of production and their use?

In this sense, Heidegger’s radical re-orientation of technology beyond its mere instrumentality (an undue privileging of the efficient cause) further informs

Marx's proposition. Insofar as Heidegger redirects our thinking about technology towards its originary inscription as "presencing" [*An-wesen*] and "bringing-forth" [*hervorbringen*], only a categorical shift of this magnitude enables the possibility of technology to be guided by a principle of thinking—a principle of *otium*—rather than a *gestell* of ratio and extraction. If human life will continue to exist on this planet, the germ of limitless extraction that lies at the root of both environmental destruction and the ideology of the dominant class that directs technological development exclusively towards war and commercial interests must be totally and completely overcome. A radical rethinking of the *technological gestell*—that is, beyond means and ends—necessitates a fundamental and total transformation of society, and as such, the constitution of new types of power, production, education, and communication and the other processes that must also accompany it.

### ***Present Concerns Regarding Communication***

We are living through the era dominated not by thinking, but by communication. It is a strange kind of communication—it is always one sided, and it results in a constant barrage of information.

We should recognize that *we are communication*, not in the instrumental sense, but more in the sense of communication as being-with. What is lost in cybernetic or digital communication is meaning as the singular sharing of the common. On the contrary, we have the mere externality of bursts of information that morph from individuals to 'dividuals' and "the mass becomes samples, data, markets or banks" as Deleuze reminds us. This shows the hegemony of the society of control, within which the human subject becomes an object of information, no longer a subject of communication, as Michel Foucault notes in his analysis of Bentham's Panopticon. This control extends beyond the prison, and the other more obviously strong (and total) institutions, to those institutions that may seem to be weaker only because they are more widespread and diffused throughout the whole fabric of society. This includes telecommunication (where there is no communication whatsoever because the "with" of communication and meaning is broken), television in particular, and, today, the internet and the illusion of the immediacy and spontaneity of social networking. Indeed, as Guy Debord advises, the problem is that of finding "a new common language" and establishing "the community of dialogue". This must be a language which is not "in the form of unilaterally arrived-at conclusions", but rather one in which the convergence of poiesis and praxis grounds the *making common and sharing*, not of data and bits of information, but of that which opens for us an infinite conversation, and the ability, as Friedrich Hölderlin says, "to hear from one another."

## Eternal Recurrence of the Same (as it Ever Was)

*“The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.”*

*Karl Marx, 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

It is crucial to note that we are in terms of the content being beyond the phrase living through a **historical repetition**, albeit a rather diminished and pale reflection of this. Let us remember that the Spanish flu (originating in Kansas and moving eastward) and the Bolshevik revolution (October 1917) are part of a historical convergence in Bergsonian simultaneity. The most obvious suggestive links to our time could be a renewed fear of the wind from the East—after all, the Chinese brought us the new virus—and this new danger includes the ever increasing influence of the Chinese manufacturing sector and increasing competitive functioning and instrumentality. The new Red scare is ironically the fear of State Authoritarian Capitalism and its ever expanding influence. This serves to shore up a new nationalist spirit, a futile attempt at reterritorialization, giving capital an illusory new life as a nationalistic project, rather than a global one. This is, of course, coded as fear of socialism and in a deeper way of the communist project—emancipation and equality. This mediatic propagandizing bastardizes the meaning of these terms and practices with all its nuances and differences in History. Is it that we are entering the end of or are nearing the end of History?

### ***The screen New Deal***

Will we begin to live in a continual virtuality of suspended animation in which insurgency becomes spectatorial rather than an everyday practice? This becomes a central problem which the leftists of our time must confront in order to avoid the mistakes of past struggles. We are well aware of the potency of social movements of the last decade and are impressed by the depth of the understanding concerning all levels of the crises we face in the virocline. With this respect and support of these movements, there remains the necessity of mature thinking and critical approaches to the manifest activism we are witnessing. In this context, we must remain **hyper-vigilant** (*neither maniacal nor paranoiac*) and relentlessly interrogate the possibilities of new forms of police repression such as those measures authorized by the Homeland Security Act of 2002. This vigilance requires a super consciousness of **Historical facticity** and a critical thrust on guard against the repetition of the same. For our sanity, we must understand that this is a never-ending struggle and to main-

tain coherence and anti-fascist thinking, our thinking must be grounded in a cheerful praxis, one which does not depress but overcomes with new processes of individuation—and the open singular—and is oriented towards a critique and overturning of the dominant socialization of ideas. ***Cheerful destruction*** (such as the parodic and descriptive black humor of Marx) and the Machiavellian-Nietzschean moment of a ***fearless taking of power***, the first step of taking back what is ours becomes the order of the day for radical praxis in the virocene.

### ***An organizational lesson, perhaps?***

Amidst government paralysis in the 1980s, activists from ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) took the last major global pandemic into their own hands. Through direct action, science, and policy working groups both the medical and political establishment were effectively confronted. Citizen activists had the audacity to not defer to the “experts” but demand direct participation and decision-making power. They disrupted corporate media broadcasts. They made demands and achieved them. ACT UP protesters took on Wall St to successfully challenge pharmaceutical profiteering on AIDS drugs and actually made material gains and transformed public health. This model of empowerment is a good historical example to draw on as we stoke our radical imagination for the fights and crises ahead.

## **Towards Transformation: Twenty-One Provocations**

Capitalism has made us so stupid that we only think in terms of the owe and the ought and never in the categories of what could and/or should be: We are now in the process of going beyond mere biological life.

### ***What is Pressing:***

1. The taking back of time – both psychically and collectively
2. The taking back of desire – Prosperity Marxism
3. Freedom as something more than the mere maintenance of bare life
4. Refusal of the horrors and vicissitudes of state terror – the new dilemma, your money or your life, your life or your livelihood.

### ***What is Essential:***

5. Thinking against serial thinking and the new ‘scientific’ positivism.
6. Thinking and Acting beyond Global Fracture and the unfinished Civil Wars – mark potential points for and of rupture
7. We call for a revolution to reclaim our creative human dimension

### ***What is There to Build:***

8. Force over Power – stressing potentially over the dominant reality principle
9. Reorientation of Science for the people
10. Quarantining the Market Economy (Force the logic of free market-capital into an unfree form / new revolutionary ethic)
11. A new political formation based on the abolition of work
12. New weapons: the point is no longer about critique, we must find new weapons with which to fight
13. New forms of mutual aid networks outside electoral politics and making revolutionary demands (guaranteed income, debt jubilee)
14. A complete overhaul of the health system- reconstruction / Economy of care and contribution (reevaluation of the associated producers)
15. Abolition of the Prison-Industrial Complex
16. Founding a Left Bank
17. Deconstruction of AI (Virtual wealth vs Real Economy)

18. A concerted positive destruction of the fossil fuel based carboniferous economy
19. A program of prosperity for all in the building of new infrastructure
20. Overcome Imposed Generalized Stupidity, deconstruct incoherence
21. Creating a new ethos of standing upright and a culture of *thinking otherwise*

### **On the eve of November 3rd, 2020:**

*“And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.”*

*Edgar Allan Poe, 1842*

This critical intervention is the result of a polyvocal and collective writing process, a group which was engaged in consistent and careful reflection on the aporia the pandemic has inflicted on us in all dimensions of our lives. Despite the aporia, time has afforded us the opportunity to exchange and propose a different approach to engaging the pandemic and to offer pointers in the direction of genuine and viable alternatives. We welcome constructive commentary on our findings and encourage the use-value of this text for critical research, insurrectionist and radical politics.

### **For the Situations collective,**

**Michael Pelias**

**Peter Bratsis**

**Bruno Gulli**

**Josh Kolbo**

**Kristin Lawler**

**Jeremy Glick**

**Arto Artinian**

**Tony Iantosca**

**Dominic Wetzel**