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Phenomenology of the Capitalist Eternisation

João Romeiro Hermeto

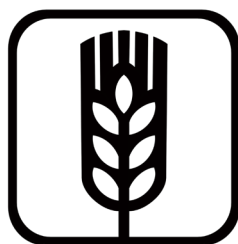


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FOREWORD

DURING MY STAY IN BERLIN as a Postdoc Candidate at the Freie Universität Berlin, my research supervisor asked me to write an essay in which I would establish the grounding for my research plan. Therefore, this essay was written within a very specific context. With the title *Critique of the Perpetual Present: The Shock of Irrationalism Through the Destruction of Cultural Memory and Reason*, my research project aimed to give critical representation to the contemporary incapacity to construct alternative venues beyond the existing ruling capitalist relations. In the project description, I wrote: “My thesis presents the *perpetual present* as a form of a *negative ontology of the social being*”; which I further explain: “While the ontology of the social being (a process ontology, not to be confused with a metaphysical ontology) reveals an incessant social process of transformation of nature and culture, where labour is revealed as its fundamental category, the *perpetual present* creates a rigidity of the social transformation and, accordingly, of social power relations.” This essay thus develops some of the arguments briefly presented in that project. It is not yet the concretisation of the research revealing the dialectical legalities¹ of the perpetual present. Instead, it represents an earlier step,

1 Legalities (*Gesetzlichkeiten*) concern the ever-changing real movements and tendencies that are intellectually apprehended as laws. Law is meant neither in the juridical sense nor in a deterministic way—often misapprehended by the so-called natural sciences. When one uncovers/discovers a “natural” law, it is only valid within certain boundaries of time and space. As soon as conditions change, such a law can become invalid. “Natural” laws describe tendencies that change ever so slightly or slowly that they often appear eternal. In organic nature, transformation attains much greater speed to the extent that, when one considers the social being (our human species in all its social relations), the changes in social and natural realities become much more palpable at a historical level due to human’s peculiar activity of production and reproduction of life, namely labour. It is with capitalism that this process has been catalysed to new heights. Social relations that have appeared eternal to someone’s grandparents can now appear completely anachronic. In this sense, both Hegel and Marx have understood social reality as processes of and in transformation; its apprehension can

revealing the utter incapacity of contemporary social theories to critically deal with capitalist control over social relations of knowledge production, such as ideology and knowledge.

Two quick notes. As of today, the research that should follow this essay has not yet been accomplished. As I signed a book contract with Palgrave Macmillan to publish a critique of the *Paradox of Intellectual Property in Capitalism*, I paused my research on the production of ideology and refocused on the ontological level of control of knowledge production by means of intellectual property. In addition, the section below called *Historical Boomerang* was first written for this book, but because it intersected with the published book on intellectual property, it was used there in the section concerning the power of big tech companies since, at the time, I did not intend to publish this book. Now that this writing gains the light of day in this book, the original content and format were transformed to avoid any constraints imposed by intellectual property rights.

Last but not least, I immensely thank Maria Rita Guedes, who played a crucial role in not only proofreading but improving this manuscript altogether.

JOÃO ROMEIRO HERMETO

Pavia, Italy

5 September 2025

never attain an eternal (transcendental) truth—think about Kantian philosophy—but rather are subjected to social practices that define its scope, reach, and existence. For this reason, Hegel considered the thing in-itself to be void—that is, he saw pure being and pure nothingness as one and the same thing. A thing in-itself attains actuality only when it becomes for-itself; that is, it is the process of actualisation that gives content to its form (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft Der Logik I, Werke in 20 Bänden, Band 5* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986]).

PROLEGOMENON

"The path to hell is paved with good intentions."

UNDERSTANDING CAPITALISM is analogous to understanding an ecosystem. To comprehend the body, one has to go beyond the singular perception of singular cells and organs and grasp the complexity of a specific biome; one must consider the cycles of water, seasons, temperature, altitude, vegetation, insects, fungi, as well as the more complex living beings and their interdependence. Focusing any analysis on one singular element can open up a vast and complex understanding of it; however, it simultaneously creates an opaqueness in relation to the whole, namely, its very conditions of existence. Analogously, irrespective of the most significant importance that the human brain, heart, lungs, etc., may have, they have neither real existence in isolation nor does the sum of their parts composes in-itself a totality; instead, it is first in a reciprocal incessant relationship to one another that their singularity appears to attain any relevance.

Addressing the phenomenon of capitalist eternisation is no different in that it presupposes establishing and revealing multidimensional relations among different but complementary, yet apparently isolated, phenomena. Nonetheless, this book does not yet envision or claim to be able to provide a vast explanation of the eternisation of capitalism beyond certain phenomena that are needed for such comprehension of the totality; instead, it unveils the one-sidedness contained in different theoretical apprehensions. Demolishing this one-dimensionality presented as a constant contemporary illusion of capitalism is thus a precondition to enable, in two subsequent moments, an analysis of both the general and particular forms of the dialectics of capitalist power in which everything must change to prevent anything from changing. This means that capitalist power over both subjective and objective conditions fosters a continuous *destruction of reason*, thus yielding *historical amnesia*, which becomes a necessary condition for the *transformation of the collective memory*, thus

enabling a total *cultural reshape*. As a result, social struggles and polarisations are subjected to conform to capitalist contradictions, thus enabling a capitalist “life extension”; in other words, this allows the capitalist elites to further cling to their power over society and nature. Insofar as many theoretical frameworks hitherto failed to present the complexity of capitalist relations not in an isolated fashion but as part of a capitalist ecosystem, one ought first to explain such shortcomings before attempting to describe such complex relations. This writing has thus, first, “merely” an introductory character and, as such, second, provides generalisations to create the awareness that there is a social “body” to be investigated, and not merely singular “organs.”

By taking refuge in bourgeois atomisation and rewriting history, social critique—in the forms of contemporary philosophy, critical theory, even some strains of Marxism, etc.—contributes to mystifying social relations. The very critique put forward in this book will probably not be accepted by most contemporary social critics because it—purposely—lacks the resemblance of form and the repetitive content that only allows a closer look at particular phenomena, driving any social critique away from the complexity of society. The discussion herein proposed hinges on a precise method of Marxist dialectical ontology, which, I must emphasise, is not based on metaphysics but rather on process. However obvious it should be that such a critique addresses tendencies, social processes, and historical movements, it is still going to be addressed by the external fetishised criteria of concepts and conceptualisation carrying existence in-themselves, thus, creating a methodological incoherence between *what* is proposed here and *how* such content is going to be interpreted. Interpretation gains, or rather seems to gain, in this sense, priority over content. Insofar as the reality of the matter lies in the interpretation, there is no need to address the essence¹ of the content.

1 The word “essence”—which I will use on multiple occasions in this book—is used here not in a metaphysical sense but rather to emphasise a specific movement or relation. The essence of a thing or a relation is not the thing or the relation in-itself but the movement it performs; in other words, it is not what it is (being in-itself) but the act of being (being in-and-for-itself). While a phenomenon as an appearance expresses a particular essence, a determined relation, a specific movement, the former is not contained in the latter, but rather its opposite, namely, the essence is contained in its underlying phenomena. For instance, property in general, *id est*, as an abstract concept, does not build the essence of capitalism; however, a specific form of proper-

On the other hand, the apparent infinite phenomena being handled by [contemporary] social critique do not entail an independent and explicit methodology; on the contrary, they contain a strange mixture of methodologies of singular schools of thought together with a profound disregard for reality, when the latter does not simply comply with and confirm the preconceived notions of the idea. Furthermore, capitalist power elites have, thus far over more than 100 years, been constantly changing the perception of our reality. Thus, their method of explaining reality is continuously mutating, and, instead of social critique exposing the rewriting of not only history but also its contemporary present—as a few have done thus far (e.g., Marx, Lenin, Lukács, Losurdo etc.)—social critique comfortably remains in a position where it passes criticism on some given phenomena without scratching the surface of the real relations of power, or as Debord would say, they merely perform a *spectacular critique*, the critique that criticises the appearance but not the essence; in other words, a critique that confirms and legitimates the object of the very critique.

As a consequence, it is not surprising that social science has hitherto neither grasped the essence of neoliberalism nor fascism (as we will see below in different sections). An in-depth discussion about methodology has no place in contemporary investigations. However, not because methodology has lost its importance but because social critique has become so atomised that it fails to grasp its own basis. For example, take a Marxist thinker such as György Lukács. His writings from the end 1910s and early 1920s are still celebrated to this day. In addition, although it

ty, a determined social property relation expresses a specific historical social moment, which expresses the essence of capitalism. Nonetheless, a category can simultaneously represent an essence and a phenomenon. For instance, labour in general expresses human essence, for labour is already a specific form of activity among animals. The general activity that produces and reproduces the human species is labour. On the other hand, as labour activity is not a genetic determination that enables the whole species to act homogeneously but a socio-historical construction, for each moment in space and time, specific forms of labour appear as new (particular) essences of historically determined social relations as well as the appearance of labour in general as a human activity. Labour always contains a general and a particular form simultaneously. The importance of this discussion cannot be underestimated as it builds one of, if not the single most fundamental difference between idealism and materialism; in other words, the struggle of the latter for concrete human emancipation in opposition to the illusory promises of the former.

was he himself who openly established the most brutal critique of these writings, very few scholars have paid attention to this, ignoring his subsequent, most significant writings, which render not only an unsparing capitalist critique but also investigate crucial elements of social reality such as the historical development of Western² *irrationalism*, the category of *aesthetics* from a different, Marxist approach, and, most importantly, presents a *non-essentialist ontological* investigation of the social-being, opening up the question of social action and change towards a more emancipated society. These last two works represented in-themselves not only two major and vast bodies of analysis but also built the methodological foundation for what Lukács envisioned as a Marxist *ethics*. Needless to say that the existence of thinkers who know these elements and engage with the problems revealed by Lukács does not constitute a relevant part of the trend within contemporary social critique. One merely needs to see how exponents of the Frankfurt School from its different generations, such as Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rahel Jaeggi, have hitherto not only completely ignored the development just described within the

2 The terms “West” and “Western” appear multiple times in this book. They represent not simply a geographical notion—although “for the most part [do] take the geographically specific form of an Atlantic ruling class”—but one expressing determined relations of capitalist power. It goes without saying that Japan, Australia, Colombia, and many other countries can be considered part of the West for politico-economical reasons; they pledge allegiance and form an alliance to secure Western capitalist interests. From the sociological study of William K. Carroll, one learns concretely that there is in fact a TCC—*Transnational Capitalist Class*—and both Europe and North America represent its geographical core. However, not only are the hegemonic institutions that guarantee such power transnational but also, that the character of dominant capital has become transnational, as sociologist William I. Robinson demonstrates. As a socio-political-economic concept, it is not static and different nations may change their allegiance and be sometimes either integrated into the Western world or excluded from it. Furthermore, as Peter Phillips highlights, transnational capitalist institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the World Trade Organization, the G7, the G20, etc., are not only part of what constitutes the West but are also controlled and used by the “Global Power Elite,” in other words, by the “Transnational Capitalist Class.” For reference, see William K. Carroll, *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the Twenty-First Century* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2010), 233; William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Peter Phillips, *Giants: The Global Power Elite* (New York, Oakland, London: Seven Stories Press, 2018).

thought of Lukács, who represents one of the most important exponents of Marxist thought in the 20th century, but, on the contrary, do give representation to the theoretical part of his thought, which Lukács himself had abominated.³ For if even a(n) (allegedly) crucial theoretical basis of the critical theory (namely, Marxism) is still distorted by the lack of methodological problematisation, it is therefore evident that analyses of elements of fascism and neoliberalism must remain disguised and inaccurate, and capitalism, as a complex form of social organisation, continues to be misrepresented by its particular *Erscheinungsformen* (“manifestations” or “phenomena,” for lack of better translations).

3 György Lukács, ‘Vorwort (1967),’ in *Georg Lukács Werke: Frühschriften II: Band 2* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2013).



MISTS OF AESTHETICS

THE AESTHETICAL EXPRESSION and, accordingly, the experience of arts can always reveal the substance of its own *Zeitgeist*, whether in a more propagandistic or critical way. The Western mythological figure of the hero expresses both a disenchantment with the present and an immanent hope for a different future. The disillusion by the feeling of being powerless and disenfranchised within a complex reality results in the sentiment that no different social arrangement can take place except through the hope of the hero, when change can finally emerge from his might, which in effect does not present any real change but rather a return to an idealised state of affairs, namely, the illusion of “when things were better.” The roles of the villain and the hero are intertwined in a Western binary perception of social reality that banishes the depth of nuances within the multitude of social relations. Thus, the aesthetic expression that presents this infinite reduction is not itself wrong or faulty, but rather expresses in-itself the Manicheism of Western aristocratic mentality and culture.

The few films that reveal to a certain extent capitalist pitfalls usually do not show a systemic problem but merely the phenomenon of pathologies, and often subjective ones, which are mostly centred within main characters, or the anti-hero subject. This anti-hero does not usually address his fight against capitalism; his actions appear rather as a reaction enacted by his personal behaviour of being a (mentally) sick person, e.g., *Joker*, *12 Monkeys*, or *Fight Club*. Alternatively, the endless list of movies presenting the recurrent, and henceforth, eternal fight between good versus evil also often contain religious and/or romanticised elements. In the *Star Wars* series of films, the good—represented by the Jedis—is also both physically and mentally ascetic, passions are not allowed to take over the figure of the Jedi, the fight for the so-called *good* also combines the abomination of being connected to its own humanity: the good is not only good in-itself but must also banish any human traces that could

“contaminate” a Jedi’s purity. On the other hand, the so-called ‘dark side’ represents the enactment of human relations, where feelings of passion, love, pain, hatred, etc., take over. While the evil-Jedi embraces his emotions, the good-Jedi is the bearer of ascetic values. Furthermore, *The Lord of the Rings* portrays the good in a more romantic and religious fashion. The world of joy, happiness, and being light-hearted belongs to the Hobbits, who are deeply connected to nature and preserve a quite primitive way of life; the Elves represent a transcendental reality, being mystical beings, powerful, pure, bearers of higher knowledge; finally, the world of men represents corruption, wealth with presentation of industrial developments, consequently, as the greatest form of evil, which ultimately promotes violence and destruction—both of nature and social-beings—men being touched but such evil become egoist, vicious, and destructive.

When portraying the everyday life of people, other movies apparently abandon healthy-pathological or good-evil binaries; they dwell on the pitfalls of a given reality and portray individual lives that cross paths with mundane problems. Although the environment, which constrains the main characters in these plots, is to a certain extent often “realistically” depicted, the individuals involved in such a web of problems and complex relations never try to aim their actions, anger, revolt, etc., at the source of their problems, they never attack a system that perpetuates not only their own misery but also collective misery. The fictional characters in these movies resemble the Heideggerian “*man*” (in German) and its impotence before being thrown into the world (“*Geworfenheit*”). The impotence and nothingness that Heidegger ahistorically postulates as ontology is mirrored by the individual capitulation towards social change. What remains is the individual action as the only possibility to act, the individual appears as the last stance of humanity. It does not matter if in *La vita davanti a sé* [*The Life Ahead*] starring Sophia Loren, or in *Biutiful* with Javier Bardem, or even in the very much celebrated *La vita è bella* [*Life is Beautiful*] from Roberto Benigni, the reactionary movement of interiorisation, of denial of reality by escaping into its own imagination, where the confrontation with the real appears only possible in thought, is that—following Primo Levi’s biographic narrative about his time in Auschwitz—such a romanticisation of the individual trying to survive is not only an illusion but a distortion that is very insulting to the victims of oppression.¹

1 Primo Levi, *Os Afogados e Os Sobreviventes: Os Delitos, Os Castigos, as Penas, as Impunidades* (São Paulo: Editora Paz, 2004). Published in English as *The Drowned*

Very rarely is one confronted with the artistic aesthetic experience beyond the binaries of good and evil, healthy and pathological relations and behaviours, or even individualistic problematisation of systemic social problems. The series *The Knick*—created by Jack Amiel and Michael Begler—intertwines the lives of physicians, nurses, magnates, business and hospital managers, drivers, police officers, prostitutes, gang members, drug dealers, workers, immigrants, etc., during the beginning of the 20th century, centred around a hospital called “The Knick” in New York (City)—former New Amsterdam. The social relations depicted express both an incredibly rich social dimension of economics, politics, morality, aesthetics, etc., as well as individuals (characters) with highly complex behaviours, which fit neither any binary expectation nor some pre-determined models of good or evil. Consciously or not, *The Knick* (as well as, for instance, *The Square*—directed by Ruben Östlund—or *Tropa de Elite* [*Elite Squad*]—directed by José Padilha) brilliantly displays the principles of everyday life and Western capitalist relations, unveiling both the multiple dimensions of its reality and the shortcomings of capitalist moral critiques.

This immanent difficulty in grasping capitalist relations is, however, very much embedded in contemporary capitalist society (especially those from the so-called developed world); it is not a pathology of the arts that makes it almost impossible for so many artistic aesthetical expressions to expose the guts of the (capitalist) system—not in an abstract, subjective sense, namely, the domination from within as in *The Matrix*, where the machines contain a vicious character in-themselves, ignoring the fact that every tool (or machine) acquires the character of determined practices and not one of the thing-in-itself—but a system of social relations, where the ontological dimension of the organic nature, which must be produced and reproduced to attain existence, is never properly regarded. Social relations lose their historical character and ontological dimension. This dimension of production and reproduction does not incorporate in-itself a hierarchical superiority over other social dimensions but represents an ontological priority, a necessity for the existence of any living being. Thus, when Fredric Jameson states, “[i]t seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in

and the Saved (London: Abacus, 2013).

our imaginations,”² he poses these crucial problems [of social production and reproduction] in an idealist fashion and reveals how much the *eternisation of capitalism* is embedded even in the minds of famous capitalist critics and social theoreticians. The structural social determinations of the mind, collective apprehension of reality, memory and history, all of them are posited as elements of a subjectification of reality rather than being grasped as part of a process of mutual determinations, where objective reality has an ontological priority over subjective reality—although with no hierarchical superiority. It is due to insisting on this limitation, to overlooking the importance of objective reality and the aspects of production and reproduction, that reality appears upside-down.

The villain and hero binary is in no fashion a constraint of our imagination but rather it expresses the social relations for centuries pursued by (Western) power elites and, with the development and maturation of monopolistic capitalism, culminated in the slogan, which opened the 21st century and has been defining Western political economy and moral values (of alienation), propelled by the US-American former president George W. Bush during his term in office: “you are either with us, or against us.” Such a perception of reality does not allow for any space for nuances, angles, reflections, differentiations, understandings, conversations, concessions, and most importantly, critique. Even if the hero presents flaws, even if he is not almighty, he still is a hero, the safeguard of what is good and true against what is bad and wrong. The atrocities constantly committed by the West are internalised, whilst actions of “the other” (“our enemies”) are evil *par excellence*. It is precisely in this binary that each and every historical apprehension acquires the imperative that *it must be banned* from collective memory. The Western aristocratic reality of the capitalist classes posits its own celebration as the quintessence of humankind. Thus, for capitalist power elites, reality “is what it is”; there is either good or evil; there can only be one rationality: the capitalist economic rationality.

The “genius of evil” Carl Schmitt has often clearly expressed the ethos of Western ruling classes, for he is certain that “sovereign is the

2 Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. xii.

one who decides on the state of exception.”³ To understand the gravity and consequences that derive from such a worldview, one needs simply to paraphrase it to uncover its potency: “sovereign is the one who decides on the *state of normality*.” Determining the state of normality simultaneously presupposes the determination of a method. If normality is a state that mutates according to circumstances, then so must the method that confers legitimacy to the underlying practices. Thus, within this very worldview of capitalist domination, it also seems correct Jaques Derrida’s allusion to what he calls “the Schmittian axiom,” which states that “the political itself, the being-political of political, arises in its possibility with the figure of the enemy”; in other words, the disappearance of the figure of the enemy would, consequently, represent the supersession of the “political as such.”⁴ The in-constant-movement method provides precisely the characterisation needed for this Western so-called “political itself” or “political as such”: it determines both the state of exception and normality.

The Jamesonian pledge of a so-called “weakness in our imagination” is, on the one hand, fundamentally different from the colonisation of our minds, but, on the other hand, is in-itself the expression of such colonisation. Such “weakness” misrepresents the fact that the elite’s method (and worldview as well) becomes internalised. This misconception portrays this movement not as a moment of exercising external power but as a demeaning of our imagination; however, this problem shows precisely that the very critique posed by Jameson both carries in-itself and, correspondingly, repeats the method of social domination. A crucial difference remains: in the sense that our imagination as such has not been affected by such colonisation, it is and remains a *δύναμις*.⁵ Nevertheless, the advance-

3 Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel Zur Lehre von Der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015), p. 13.

4 Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2020), p. 84.

5 *δύναμις* represents the Aristotelian concept of dynamis, which denotes the potentiality of an actuality. In simple terms, a thing or a relation in a state of possibility before it becomes actual. A mind can imagine possibilities of change, liberation, and emancipation; the contingency of what is imagined depends on concrete acts to determine if it can be concretised in practice. In this sense, it is not the imagination in-itself that is weak but the elite power to hamper it, by colonising it, that is great. This colonising power is, nonetheless, not eternal, not natural; it is contingent on socio-historical

ment of this so-called “weakness” represents in-itself the eternisation of capitalism, namely, the appropriation of the method of domination by the critique without even realising it is performing such interiorisation; in other words, it is constantly repeated as if it were part of the entrenches of a mass-production-circuit of an affirmative discourse, where its purpose lies on something outside of itself, thus causing the opacity of its practice and meanings.

THE HIKIKOMORI—AND SUICIDAL HERO

WITH THE ENGULFMENT OF THE SOCIAL BEING into isolated singular individuals due to the intensification of capitalist relations, the gap between the necessity of collective existence and individual displacement within capitalist societies widens so much that one sometimes decides for a mystical existence, immersing into the double illusion of a life independent from social bonds and an external fantastical ad hoc (pseudo) solution to the problems of individuals.

This phenomenon is obviously not a celebration of the self—like many other Western illusions—but it represents its opposite, namely, it expresses powerlessness towards difficulties presented by the “external” real world. The hero could be anyone, including oneself; he would not need to bring forth an ad hoc solution because he himself would be and represent one. However, the contemporary total social estrangement (“alienation”) and the destruction of social forces create an ever-greater pressure over the individual. In his attempt to survive, this individual—both on psychological and physical levels—must aspire never-ending greatness (expressed by wealth accumulation), ambition, social status, power, etc. The estrangement occurs because most dimensions of life have been transformed into commodities, because showing traces of humanity has become a sign of weakness, and because business and corporate (quasi?) sociopaths have become the role model to be looked up to. Although absurd, it is also not surprising when—in Japan alone—hundreds of thousands of individuals “have made the decision to sever all relations with the outside world, in order to live their lives from behind the locked door of their own room.”¹

Needless to say, the reference to this phenomenon—called *hikikomori*—precedes the ever-greater social disruption amid the advances of

1 Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (London, New York: Verso, 2015), p. 159.

the COVID-19 crisis (from 2020 onwards). It is important to understand that such an abrupt break in the relations between individuals and society is largely anchored in capitalist relations and not merely the by-product of the coronavirus pandemic. While the COVID-19 crisis has fostered new social arrangements, which kept people inside their homes, this phenomenon is very different from the *hikikomori*, as it does not represent a break in social relations but rather changes their qualitative relations, nor is it an individual choice of self-isolation but a social decision based on political power. The phenomenon of *hikikomori* is not merely part of a singular phenomenon of health crisis but is embedded in a larger cultural crisis derived from capitalist political-economic relations. Western capitalism faces two structural crises, one since the beginning of the 1970s and another since 2008, which is a further degradation of the previous one.²

Hikikomori thus represents a form of suicide, namely, social suicide, the suicide of the self as a social-being. In spite of that, the individual attains no existence outside society, the human being is a social being. The desocialised social-being, or the deindividualised individual, attains a paradoxical existence. Spending most of the time confined at home, avoiding social relations and situations, interfering directly with the individual's everyday life, living in this way for an extended period of time without having any other mental disorder, reveals the magnitude of the problem, as this form of struggle against capitalist reification ends up creating a second layer to the ongoing and underlying existing phenomena of social implosion. The contradiction becomes greater as the already imploded social tissue is completely disregarded and discarded.

Such a phenomenon represents neither a spectacular struggle nor a capitulation to the on-going powers and, accordingly, power structures. The retreat to the self is not merely idealistic; it does not represent the world as an individual's will and imagination, even this idealistic retreat is abandoned. It is a real attempt to evade concrete suffering and its effects

2 Here, I am considering two crises, because even though there is a connection between both, the financial crisis of 2008—which still persists during our present time—brought about the new qualitative character to the ongoing capitalist crisis, as most institutions—economic, political, mediatic, military, etc.—have been revealed as agents of social disruptions rather than the hitherto pledged representatives of social universal interests.

posed by capitalist relations on individuals.³ The tremendous effort it takes to break all social bonding and retreat from social life and inwards to the claustrophobic sphere of one's own room represents the last heroic act of an individual who commits suicide without committing it; in other words, social life is terminated without terminating biological existence. While the classic hero has died, namely, he, who by the power of his will could alone determine the outcome of historical events and change/subjugate nature and natural phenomena; the hero of monopolistic capitalism is the self at a more atomistic level; in other words, he controls neither nature nor the course of history but he is—in his own head—the master of his own fate, whilst being dominated and determined by capitalist social relations.

The neoliberal ethos confers the right to destroy and predate. The destruction of the “game” one is losing represents for himself a victory. Anchored in social Darwinism, capitalist ideology,⁴ expressed in neoliberal dogmas, postulates that the superior—the strong—has the right to win and to predate; within total competition among individuals the only criterion of superiority left, the only principle that determines who is the best, is victory—any other human measurement vanishes; if one sees that he cannot win, he either commits an act of revenge or tries to win even if only for just a second: the result is one and the same, *destruction*. Thus, the other side of the *hikikomori*-hero is the hero of mass murder and suicide. In the end, destruction represents the ultimate victory; if the “*εγώ*” [“I”] cannot win, then no one else will, and the *εγώ* is going to determine the outcome, it is going to be “my” way: destruction is the sublime expression of total victory.

Between Nietzsche's theoretical (and mystical) superman and the practical superman of Napoleon (and those alike), lie the multiple di-

3 Michael Zielenziger, *Shutting out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday Canada, 2007).

4 Although it may be redundant when considering my writings as a whole, I take this opportunity to emphasise once again that here the concept of ideology does not mean a false consciousness nor has per se a negative connotation; instead, it expresses a common fabric of social apprehension of reality, which enables individual and collective actions without a prior need to constantly scrutinise every single element of objective and subjective realities.

mensions of capitalist heroes, namely, those who exert their will, their power, their determination over and despite others. The sublimation of the hero is not only the expression of irrationalism but also the expression of the destruction of the social fabric, which disregards itself, its existence, as if the sum of singular individuals were the same as a society; after all, society does not exist—in Thatcher's words, *id est*, there is no such thing as society. Thatcher is not (alone) to be blamed for the destruction of the social fabric; her actions and beliefs were themselves the product of Western capitalist relations and contradictions. Idealism, irrationalism, and elitism. She denies society but is herself a social product of ruling class relations. Her public disdain for the government while being the head of the British government, her contempt for society while representing British society, etc., these Thatcherian elements were not anomalies but rather the perfect concrete expression of broad social relations. Capitalism's irrationalism and reactionarism become the reactionary irrationalism of the ruling elites.

In our contemporary time, one can see in Western societies the struggles between dying societies and Thatcherian societies-non-societies. Collective sports give way to individual sports (not as preparations but as end-in-themselves); synchronised dance performances to contemporary improvisation and expression of the disconnected self; collective learning to competition and privatisation of knowledge; collective politics through community building and coming together to the individualistic cycle of (vastly lobbied) ballots; collective cultural activities to online streaming; shared lived experiences to individualistic online-posting; common language to the privatisation of language (which ultimately means its death); the openness of discourse promoting debates of ideas to censorship and homogenisation of minds; each individual being a product of social determined historical conditions to the cult and subjectification of the self; etc. The qualitative specific character of society gives way to the real agglomeration of disconnected individuals. The last element connecting people in Western societies is their (blind) servitude to capitalist social relations, to the specific social relations of property that characterised capitalism, their faith that tomorrow ought to be like it is today. Even capitalist egoism is upside-down and handicapped. This is because the higher stage of egoism is not liberal egoism that resembles the egoism of the great apes. The highest stage of egoism is its dissolution

because the most advanced achievements that any individual can ever accomplish presupposes collective and collaborative actions.⁵

The contemporary heroic effort to find in the self, to find from within causes of and solutions for distresses appears as a vicious circle, ignoring the very conditions that give rise to such problems. Ronald E. Purser emphasises that *self-mastery* has become “a heroic journey of the individual”⁶; however, he highlights that Erich Fromm “pointed out that our distress and anxieties can never be fully understood nor alleviated if the social origins of suffering are ignored.”⁷ The same process of destruction of history (in the sense of historical perception), namely, *social-historical amnesia*, and of social bonds promoted the retreat of the individual into an ahistorical frame of the self, where the only thing that is left is the present moment. Purser concludes that this movement of interiorisation is often presented as something positive, the capacity to rise above the mayhem of reality; nonetheless, rising above means nothing more than succumbing to apathy, to the unwillingness to act.

Hannah Arendt seems to get to the heart of the matter when she differentiates between the notions of ancient and modern sophists, where the former “were satisfied with a passing victory of the argument at the expense of truth, whereas the moderns want a more lasting victory at the expense of reality”; thus, such manipulation of facts means that “history itself is destroyed.”⁸ As the contemporary capitalist ruling as the lat-

5 João Romeiro Hermeto, *The Paradox of Intellectual Property in Capitalism* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2024).

6 Ronald E. Purser, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality* (London: Repeater Books, 2019), p. 107.

7 Ibid., p. 109.

8 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), p. 11. Ironically, Arendt was herself captured by the dominant class cultural apparatus (Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and The World of Arts and Letters* (New York, London: The New Press, 2013)). This very same book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, one of her most celebrated works, provides exactly the rewriting of history she accuses modern sophists of doing. According to Domenico Losurdo: “In the years immediately following the defeat of the Third Reich, the prestige of the USSR was so great that it was perceived far beyond the communist movement. In 1945, far from bringing the country born out of the October Revolution closer to the Third Reich, as she would do in the following years, Hannah Arendt attributes the merit to the former the ‘entirely new and successful approach to nationality

est phase of Western political-economic domination after centuries of

conflicts, its new form of organizing different peoples on the basis of national equality'; it is something that 'every political and national movement in our times should give its utmost attention to'" (Domenico Losurdo, *Fuga Da História? A Revolução Russa e a Revolução Chinesa Vistas de Hoje* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 2004), p. 108; Hannah Arendt's original text can be found in: <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1105601336/>). Years later, the category she allegedly conceived to explain fascist practices, totalitarianism, is flipped over to provide a Western abomination of the Soviet Union equating it with fascist power. Her book reflects that stance. It was written in two different moments. First, a critique of Western imperialism, the actual basis of what she calls totalitarianism. As she takes part in the liberal side of the Cultural Cold War, she writes what became the third part of the book, a-critically equating fascism and communism. (Domenico Losurdo, 'Towards a Critique of the Category of Totalitarianism,' *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 2 (2004): 25–55.) This is a historical scandal because while Hitler's project was to enslave the Slavic people, the Soviet Union's project aimed to liberate colonised people and nations as well as to foster emancipation from the shackles of capitalism. While the Soviet Union was the main responsible for liberating the world from Nazi forces, it was the United States and the West that imposed the Cold War against the socialist block turning it into a foe. Furthermore, as Domenico Losurdo demonstrates, *Totalitarianism* is not a term coined by Arendt, instead it originates from *totalismo*, deriving from military discipline and its notions of *total war*, *total mobilisation*, *total politics*. If Arendt had taken it seriously, then Western "liberal democracies" would first and foremost have had to be equated with totalitarianism for their concrete political practices. And even if one does not consider the historical relations between Western countries and Nazism (and fascist countries too) before and after the Second World War – such as widespread hatred against Jews and Judaism and glorification of Zionism, purification (eugenics) and celebration of the so-called white race, the re-integration of Nazi German and Austrian scientists, "who were brought into the United States (U.S.) by U.S. Armed Forces after World War II for exploitation purposes relating to the national interest of the U.S." ('All Documents Regarding Operation Paperclip from the FBI' (Washington DC, 2020), <https://www.theblackvault.com/documentarchive/operation-paperclip/>), and even the worldwide protection and installation of fascistic governments –, then European colonial powers and the United States would still have had to be regarded as beckons of totalitarianism, "for an integral part of totalism or totalitarianism was the combination of terror from above with terror from below," to which the Italian philosopher and historian added, "the totalitarian logic of total war manifested itself in all the countries involved in the conflict" in different forms and degrees (Domenico Losurdo, *War and Revolution: Rethinking the 20th Century* (London, New York: Verso, 2015), 165.) However, while not free from problems and contradictions, socialist experiences and experiments have thus far empowered people, fought fascism, and liberated colonial peoples, whereas the term liberal democracies conceal its true practice, namely, totalitarian capitalist domination and exploitation of the masses (Torkil Lauesen, *The Long Transition Towards Socialism and the End of Capitalism* (US, England, Ireland: Iskra Books, 2024)).

worldwide conquering phases out, the loss of its hegemony requires the mythologisation of its history to guarantee a prolongation of its cultural domination.⁹ Destroying the history that unveils its grotesque massacres and its contradictory past and present, portraying its crusades as parts of a constant heroic path, Western elites carve out of themselves the figure of the hero; as Arendt states, it is no longer about annihilating truth but rather reality in wholesale. Similar to the process in which “[s]ecularization and assimilation of the Jewish intelligentsia had changed self-consciousness and self-interpretation in such a way that nothing was left of the old memories and hopes but awareness of belonging to the chosen people”¹⁰, both the Western working class and its representative intelligentsia interiorised and assimilated the symbols, values, and narrated history of the capitalist power elites. What remained was a notion of superiority over other peoples; they appeared as part of a higher civilisation that achieved truth and righteousness. The rhetoric of “democracy” and “freedom”—extensively put forward by capitalist power in the form of neoliberal policies—was enough to enable a change in perception of consciousness from those who once fought for human emancipation and against capitalism and imperialism. The political struggle gave way to a moral one; the once struggle between the owner of the means of production and the nonowner metamorphosed into a new consensus of a struggle between us—the good ones—against them—the evil ones.¹¹

9 A remarkable example of the horrors committed by England and the Western forgetfulness to recall and give voice to all the attempts that opposed the capitalist violence of domination, dispossession, expropriation, murder, assassination, enslavement, genocide, etc. is seen in *The Many-Headed Hydra*. In: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

10 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 94.

11 The Norwegian band Kings of Convenience, with their song *Rule My World*, places doubt and concern about this one-sided *Weltanschauung*: “Explain me one more time | When they kill it’s a crime | When you kill it is justice.” Furthermore, usually the so-called cultural struggles or identity struggles are so umbilically permeated within this moral scope that to be exploited or murdered by those considered minorities in the West could wash away the horrors and dehumanisation of those actions. For instance, despite Barack Obama having destroyed entire countries killing uncountable number of people and dispossessing many others, having waged a drone strike program in which 90% of the targets killed were civilians, having prosecuted Chelsea Manning for telling the truth about illegal war crimes, and many other horrors, was unapolo-

The hero is a mystic figure who, by definition, sublimates any historical grounding. The magnitude that the heroic figure attains in Western capitalist cultures does not pose the problem but rather unveils the Western contempt for historical apprehension, self-critique, changes, nuances, in other words, to face reality. The collective memory of Western capitalist societies reflects their total avoidance to confront their own history. This critique is not merely an assault on right-wing postulates, as the Western left, which became one of the most important tools of Western imperialism and exploitation as it provides its legitimacy, is as phobic to reality as the Western power elites and their courtiers and apologists. Each escapade from historical understanding represents the negation of social and collective development; the myth of the self is a-critically self-celebrated. The abandonment of the social being and its intrinsic historical dimensions represents the historical Western social suicide, and such social relinquishment appears as a *collective hikikomori*. Western capitalist societies spend most of the time confined in their own narrative outside the realms of history, avoiding relations with different modes of life that could directly interfere with their dogmas, for many decades imprisoned in their own narrative of superiority, eluding responsibility for the world they helped create and the infinite atrocities they committed.

getically awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and was then twice elected Man of the Year (rebranded Person of the Year).

PROCESS ONTOLOGY AND TIME

DOES TIME-PERCEPTION IN CAPITALISM, most strongly with neo-liberal strategy, succumb to the present, as if social consciousness were in a vegetative state? Does the *now* gain a social priority over other social time dimensions? Does the contemporary ahistorical apprehension of reality foster historical amnesia?

Although science as knowledge has typically been portrayed within an elitist, aristocratic frame, the emergence of mathematics and writing and most scientific discoveries in the history of humanity derives not from the brilliancy of singular minds but rather from the necessities and countermeasures to face such necessities by anonymous people, such as farmers, artisans, and (common) traders. However, history fades in the face of power, which is able to re-enact historical achievements and happenings through the lens of an individual exuberance of the elites. In this light, names such as Isaac Newton are regarded as geniuses who owe nothing to no one, except maybe to some patronage and themselves. There is a lack of understanding of division of labour of whole societies, which enables professional thinkers to exist because regular labourers generate and manage surpluses that sustain intellectual labour, and an even greater misunderstanding of science as an evolving process with a long history of concrete, objective practices, which is then translated into theory. The assumption of science as the product of pure thought falls immediately apart when we look at non-fetishised history.

With the historical advancement of the importance of the field of humanities, whose foundation laid on the critique (not to be confused with criticism) of social phenomena, the historical understanding of social relations acquired an even greater importance as capitalist expansion provided increasing integration of worldwide relations and simultaneously an accentuation of both the perceived and the real contradictions that came along with it. The answer was to foster the abstraction of cap-

alist enterprises. The method for such an endeavour was the mathematisation of all sciences. This resulted in a double negation: first, historical understanding, devoid of the possibility of being reduced to mere quantification, was announced as obsolete, inferior, worthy of a lower grade of knowledge; second, it led to the reduction of all social problems to such mathematical obsession, which prevents any non-fetishised account of history. Consequently, numbers and mythologisation dominate cultural perception.

However, this raises the question of where scientific perception arises from, and of how science relates to time. The answer to both is so intertwined that it almost appears to be the same historical phenomenon. The production and reproduction of humanity through labour created a double ontological possibility; on the one hand, it provided practical answers to concrete problems, to necessities emerging through the process of socialisation and its interaction with nature. On the other, it opened the possibilities to create new relations and perceive reality differently, thus creating new problems to be overcome as new necessities. The advent of technology was not derived from the singularity of brilliant minds but rather the opposite. Intelligence developed as working people performed activities related to crafting and use of tools, generating the practical means to enable labour and survival of the species. Science arises as knowledge about nature and, accordingly, knowledge-producing activities.¹ As such forms of knowledge were intrinsically related to the immediate production and reproduction of human life, it was imperative to understand the seasons, rhythms, and stages of nature. The development of spoken language enabled a superior division of labour, the creation of symbols for better organisation and preparation, its further development towards mathematical knowledge allowing a more profound understanding of natural cycles, management of inventories, tabling and accounting of trade, and the alphabet going beyond pictograms, ideograms, hieroglyphs, Chinese characters, etc., with its much simpler form created the possibility of a vaster, more “democratic” communication and documentation. The process of transferring social and cultural activities—many vital to human life as they were directly connected to labour activity—gained vaster possibilities and complexity. The time apprehension of

1 Clifford D. Conner, *A People's History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and 'Low Mechanics'* (New York: Nation Books, 2005).

natural phenomena started to transcend the merely natural spheres to appear in many cases as pure cultural creation and apprehensions. Thus, the temporal transfer of knowledge acquired in the past—which cannot be separated from the lessons of the past itself—has become imperative to the adaptation and transformation of societies to secure them a place in the future. However basic this might be, capitalist relations have eroded such understandings to such a degree that during the beginning of the 1990s there was the famous proclamation of the end of history, as capitalist relations were declared not only hegemonic during that time but beyond and thereafter.

While in the teleological act of labour humanity has the realisation of its temporal perception (as in planning or orientation by a goal, an objective, also in the understanding of natural cycles—even the most complex ones—as Clifford D. Conner emphasises in regards to the ancient “island-dwellers of the pacific”²), which also creates [social] needs (*Bedürfnisse*), I claim that capital destroys this temporal perception at a social level and reduces it to the *perpetual present*. With labour and the means of production, the human being invariably perceives time and creates an intertemporal relation between past (experience), present (*die Setzung*, *the setting/settlement*, *the positing*), and future (objective, purpose, *Ziel*, *Teleologie*). And here the question emerges: does the private means of production suppress the centrality of the ontological category of labour as a social force, reducing it to the mere private determination of a few?³ Does humankind stop writing their history?

2 Ibid., p. 41.

3 In the past few years, the discussion of inequality by an “enlightened” portion of the capitalist elite, which nevertheless avoids addressing the systemic problems of capitalism, has gained considerable space within the socio-political space of debates regarding social problems. The number of publications addressing the topic is very vast and lies far beyond academia, including not only institutions such as Oxfam but also financial capital such as Citibank, Credit Suisse, etc. This brings back a phenomenon to which Marx drew attention. As capitalism unfolded, the exploitation of proletarians was so brutal that it was hindering the (biological) reproduction of the labour force. As labour is the most vital element within the capitalist process, for it is the only commodity that produces value and surplus-value, its destruction would represent a setback for capitalist expansion. Likewise, an intellectual portion of the elite understood this problem. Hence, they imposed laws to limit the amount of working hours per day or to grant a survival wage in order to enable labour to remain productive. (Karl Marx, ‘*Das Kapital: Kritik Der Politischen Ökonomie: Erster Band*’ Buch I: Der Produktion-

This process can also be translated in a three-step process. Human perception enables the first step of apprehension of reality. Then, the process of theorisation takes place, which enriches the understanding of perceived reality. This corresponds to the teleological apprehension of reality. Finally, the third stage represents the return from theory to reality when theory is put to the test. This final stage is the setting, which is simultaneously a process of actualisation and incompleteness. It enables the altering of reality but also opens the gate to a new process of perception, learning, and theorisation before it can occur again in a new qualitative stage. As the accumulation rises to an unprecedented mass of capital—the monopolisation of capital—the act within the labour activity seems to lose its teleological character at a societal level; instead, it increasingly appears to become an external imposition because capital—as a social relation—is an end-in-itself and creates a circularity, a vicious circle, that cannot be overcome from within the very same logic. The mass of non-owners of capital perceives the immediate reality, where they live and work but are also excluded from the process of theorisation, as the latter is either provided to them as an external input, or when performed by them, is then appropriated by the capitalist who gains control of all further development and implementation. In summary, nonowners of capital who attain perception are, however, excluded from the process of theorisation which creates the social temporal perception, and are obliged to act in the transformation of the present and creation of a future, from which they are disentangled, and appear to operate and have become machine-like beings. Henceforth, history appears to become, on the one hand, only the history of the elite power and, on the other, a random fact.⁴ For this reason, the critical approach of the process ontology

sprozeß Des Kapitals,' in *MEW Band 23* [Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1962].)

4 The *end of history* is an ideological dimension against the struggle for social change and recognition (Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).); ontologically speaking, there can never exist an *end of history*. Thus, my proposition can also be read as follows: the social subjective perception created by its proclamation has produced an objective barrier for social transformation and must, hence, be critically investigated.

It is similarly important to note that even the capitalist elite power is not based first and foremost on its will; instead, as it is with labour, it first appears to it as an external imposition: the use, the leverage, the reproduction, the accumulation of the elite power is given by the logic of capital, by the logic of the movement of capital as

of the human being appears indispensable to build the methodological framework of the critique on the *perpetual present* as a whole.

ceaseless—eternal—accumulation. Under capitalism, a combination of an all-encompassing causality and fate becomes the main social drive. As my PhD dissertation has shown, all real relations are ontologically causal and always remain so; however, the teleological setting constantly shapes and transforms them, giving causality a quality not previously contained in non-anthropomorphic nature. Thus, when the lack of power to act teleologically exposes a complete submission to causality, ergo, humanity stops writing history, social history and natural history become one and the same, the results of our actions are no longer determined by our collective and individual wills but become autonomous, random: destiny appears to have become the condition of reality. (See: João Romeiro Hermeto, *Lukács' Ontologie Des Gesellschaftlichen Wandels: Von Einer Mythologischen Ontologie Des Absoluten Geistes Zu Einer Ontologie Des Gesellschaftlichen Seins* [Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2020].)



MARXISM AND THE PERPETUAL PRESENT

THE CONCEPT of the *perpetual present* immediately expresses the prevailing incapacity to create social relations beyond the realm of capitalism; thus, it denotes its eternisation by the subsumption of history into contemporary social relations. One can find a direct reference to the *perpetual present* in Guy Debord's *Spectacle*¹ or the social critique of Daniel Bensaïd;² it can also be seen in (an approximation of) other notions such as the “timeless of the market,”³ where theologian Harvey Cox explains the mythologisation of markets and their God-like becoming. Additionally, in his essay *Kapitalismus als Religion* [Capitalism as Religion], Walter Benjamin emphasises not the cult character of the market—as in Cox—but of capitalism, which “is a religion of mere cult, without dogma.”⁴ The “immense guilty consciousness” makes the cult “universal,” and further “the ‘worries’ are the index of this guilty consciousness of hopelessness.”⁵

The *perpetual present* is a powerful concept because it captures the replication of a determined *Zeitgeist* in the very critique directed against it. Domenico Losurdo in his books—*La sinistra assente: Crisi, società dello spettacolo, guerra*; *Il marxismo occidentale: Come nacque, come morì, come può rinascere*; and, *Fuga della storia? : La rivoluzione russa e la rivoluzione cinese oggi*⁶—reveals the meltdown of Western Marxism and

1 Guy Debord, *La Société Du Spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

2 Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx L'Intempestif* (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée: Fayard, 1995).

3 Harvey Cox, *The Market as God* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 34.

4 Walter Benjamin, *Capitalismo Come Religione*, ed. Carlo Salzani (Genova: il melangolo, 2013), p. 46.

5 Ibid., pp. 42, 48.

6 **Ed. Note:** Respectively, *The Absent Left* (Forthcoming, Washington: Iskra Books), *Western Marxism* (2024, New York: Monthly Review Press), *Flight from His-*

as part of it, also of critical theory—since, in accordance with what often happens to many oppressed people, it has adopted the ethos and *Weltanschauung* of the oppressors that they, in discourse, opposed. In this sense, SELF-CRITIQUE BECOMES AN IMPERATIVE INSTRUMENT FOR ONE TO REAPPROPRIATE HIS OR HER OWN HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND DETERMINATION. While the oppressed makes the perspective of the oppressor his own, he perpetrates social psychological conditions of domination, such as *self-hate* and *autophobia*. The debacle of Western Marxist movements and intellectual elites expresses precisely what Losurdo claims to be “synonymous with capitulation and the renunciation of an autonomous identity.”⁷

In the face of imperialism, most—but not all—Western Marxists succumbed to the constant memory reshaping by the power elites. *Not only* did imperialism impose economic blockades and sanctions; mediatic war; ideological fostering, tactical training, arming, economic funding, etc., of militias and terrorist groups—then rhetorically turned into “freedom fighters”—secret invasions and infiltrations; promotion of coup d’états; etc.; calling this process the collapse or implosion of socialism, or the proof that socialism cannot work. This disregarded *both* the social benefits that socialism brought to Western societies in the form of the welfare state, which essentially means that Western elites compromised due to the historical, immense socialist pressure, *and* the Western premeditated effort to prevent any socialist development to occur by means of covert and overt regime change operations.⁸ *Not only* does such a distorted perception represents *an ongoing reframing of the perception of reality*, in which memory is being taken hostage to such an extent that the only coping mechanism appears to resemble some sort of Stockholm syndrome; thus, cultural memory becomes significantly different from

tory? (not yet translated).

7 Losurdo, *Fuga Da História? A Revolução Russa e a Revolução Chinesa Vistas de Hoje*, p. 15.

Not to mention the vital role socialist countries (e.g., Soviet Union, China, or Cuba) played in the struggles against colonialism by capitalist imperialism, with the latter developing its productive forces and building its welfare states upon the suffering and exploitation of the (formerly) enslaved, exploited, and colonised.

8 Lindsey A. O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2018).

objective reality. *But also, even* after being captured, a not insignificant *part of Western intelligentsia* helps solidify and perpetuate such notions, which means that *itself becomes an agent of imperialism* while claiming to fight for liberty and equality. Thus, socialist failure is foremost a failure of perception, not of socialism. Socialism has historically been in many ways an incalculable success—as has capitalism—although hostage to grotesque Manicheism, where complexities and their valuations are urgently expurgated and repressed; and it is undeniable that the very notion of socialism represents a process of transformation.⁹ Therefore, to claim a failure as if socialism were a fixed, rigid model that has, along these lines, no historical and ontological grounding is preposterous. No social process takes place overnight, much less simultaneously and homogeneously among its many complex elements and dynamics.

The profound mental colonisation of Western Marxism is best expressed in such a distorted binary expectation of failure or success, as if the immense complex [*Komplex*] of social relations that gives rise to modes of production could be equated with a capitalist enterprise, in which, in abstract, the binary model of perfect competition either fails or succeeds. However, not even real capitalist enterprises simply fail or succeed. The notion of success is a fraud, an intrinsic element of the *perpetual present*, because it portrays itself reaching a finish line, a competition, and a win (if not the end of history, at least of the story). In reality, a capitalist company that is economically failing can raise private or public funds to continue existing, and a government may interfere because of conflicts of interest at a private or social scale, under the guise of defending jobs and national interests (the concrete historical examples are countless); hence, the practical failure of many capitalist enterprises is not accepted at a social level, and their “lives” are prolonged. On the other hand, *no* capitalist enterprise can *de facto* win, for as long as it exists, it will have to face the changes in subjective and objective conditions which may affect its existence. Thus, when Western Marxism accepts and perpetuates the notion of the collapse of socialism, in reality, it legitimises de-ontologised ahistorical claims and reaffirms what itself claims to be opposing.

9 Domenico Losurdo, *La Questione Comunista: Storia e Futuro Di Un'idea* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2021); Domenico Losurdo, *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Lauesen, *The Long Transition Towards Socialism and the End of Capitalism*.

No process of transformation can be regarded as a failure or success; the very development of each process represents a constant transformation, ceasing to be itself and becoming something qualitatively different. It is nonetheless never something absolute, rigid, and final.

There can be no doubt about both the existence and the impacts of propaganda wars—both internally and externally. Nevertheless, Western intelligentsia accepts the information provided by the capitalist state, capitalist media, and capitalist monopoly blocs at face value. How is it possible then for Western Marxism to present a critical view of capitalist social relations when it accepts dominant discourse without flinching? How can its theoretical positions not be influenced by the whole machine of *manufacturing consent*?¹⁰ Losurdo is clear when he denounces that the so-called implosion of the socialist bloc “does not mean renouncing a ruthless balance sheet of the history of ‘real socialism’ and the international communist movement.”¹¹

The case of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt speaks volumes about this problem. According to Losurdo,¹² in their critique of imperialism, it is impressive that an apology of the empire ultimately arises. Or in Torkil Lauesen words, “Negri and Hardt’s thesis of the establishment of a single global Empire was the left-wing version of Fukuyama’s thesis that capitalism was ‘the end of history.’”¹³ Comparing the United States and Europe, the former is regarded as a nation conceptualised on freedom, where every man is equally created, unlike the latter, that was certainly not the guardian of freedom.¹⁴ Portraying the birth of the United States in such a fashion implies a mythological genesis with little to no historical ontological reality. Europeans slaughtered over 120 million indigenous

10 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Vintage Books, 1994).

11 Losurdo, *Fuga Da História? A Revolução Russa e a Revolução Chinesa Vistas de Hoje*, p. 34.

12 Domenico Losurdo, *Il Marxismo Occidentale: Come Nacque, Come Morì, Come Può Rinascere* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2017).

13 Lauesen, *The Long Transition Towards Socialism and the End of Capitalism*, p. 257.

14 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge (UK), New York (USA): Harvard University Press, 2000).

people in America (the continent), many of them in what has become the United States; US-Americans fought a war against Mexico to annex part of it to its territory, re-establishing the institution of slavery, which had already been abolished in Mexico; moreover, it took until the 1960s for the United States to formally—although not yet practically—accept the rights and equal existence of the US-American black people. Alone, these few examples would not allow the description of the formation of the United States in the same manner that the two Marxist critics of the *Empire* do. Marx also had an idealist perception of the United States, believing in the possibility of the emergence of a new society not entrenched in the old European values; however, Marx's mistake—as the European values indeed played a not insignificant role in the formation of the United States—was not nearly as great as those of the Marxists Negri and Hardt. After all, they live in a period where the United States is no longer an emerging society of the 19th century but the dominant leading society of the world, and enough historical evidence lays bare the atrocities they committed ever since its formation from a colony to an independent nation.

Thus, even though Marxist doctrine has in its core the goal of promoting an immediate, unconditional critique of capitalism, many of its Western versions—and here one example was given¹⁵—have become so

15 Besides Losurdo's *Western Marxism* (see: Losurdo, *Il Marxismo Occidentale: Come Nacque, Come Morì, Come Può Rinascere*; Domenico Losurdo, *Western Marxism: How It Was Born, How It Died, How It Can Be Reborn* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2024)), one could, of course, go back to the late 19th century and find the communist group split into two factions: those revolutionaries sustaining the need to strive beyond capitalism and those reformists believing in the inexorable mutation of capitalism into socialism (W.I. Lenin, 'Staat Und Revolution: Die Lehre Des Marxismus Vom Staat Und Die Aufgaben Des Proletariats in Der Revolution,' in *Lenin Werke Band 25* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1974)); or Trotsky's method and betrayal of the October Revolution of 1917, who joined forces with Nazi-Germany in order to destroy the Bolshevik Revolution so that he could install his personal version of what revolution ought to be, relinquishing all social and historical complexity (Grover Furr, *Leon Trotsky's Collaboration with Germany and Japan: Trotsky's Conspiracies of the 1930s: Volume Two* (Kettering: Erythros Press and Media. LLC, 2017)); or Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, the first distancing communism from its history and reducing it to an abstract idea detached from objectivity, the second explicitly supporting imperialism and aprioristically admonishing real socialism without providing any material-historical analysis (Radhika Desai, 'The New Communists of the Commons: Twenty-First-Century Proudhonists,' *International Critical Thought* 1, no. 2 (2011):

deeply embedded within the very social relations their critique ought to confront, that the Marxist critique has not only lost its power altogether but also became its antithesis. Thus, it is undeniable that the practice of Western Marxism fostered the eternisation of capitalism—the *perpetual present*—as an important tool of the very power it claimed to be fighting: it has become a capitalist-controlled opposition.

204–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2011.584163>; Gabriel Rockhill, 'Capitalism's Court Jester: Slavoj Žižek,' *CounterPunch*, 2 January 2023, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2023/01/02/capitalisms-court-jester-slavoj-zizek/>).

DIE EWIGE WIEDERKUNFT OR THE ETERNAL RETURN

WHEN UNDERSTOOD in its historical context, it is undeniable that the doctrines put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche represented one of the highest forms of irrationalism, creating an important shield for the subsequent ideologies of Western power elites. Although Nietzsche has not defended the creation and fostering of either fascism or neoliberalism, it is easy to recognise that his ahistorical, irrational method of powerful rhetoric and constant leaning on aphorisms are very much intertwined with the development of capitalist ruling ideology, culminating in these two different phenomenological forms, or better said, strategies. As discussed below, our contemporary era reveals that the differences between these two in-themselves very heterogenic notions could in effect be superseded by their merging, enabling an even higher and more irrational form of social control and domination.

Originally as distinct manifestations, both fascism and neoliberalism emerge from the ideological need to contain the expansion of socialism and Marxism. Furthermore, their dissimilar appearances obscure the central feature that unites them. For one can hardly speak of a singular fascism or a less singular neoliberalism. Not only the former but also the latter are entangled in so many knots, such multifaceted strings, that it becomes impossible for one to claim the former or the latter as homogenous doctrines. While Benito Mussolini's *fascismo* did not aim at world expansion, Adolf Hitler's fascist enterprise had world expansion as one of its most fundamental tenets. On the other hand, while Friedrich von Hayek's neoliberal theory considered the rule of law a pivotal element to enable the sacrosanct of the so-called [capitalist] free market (oxymoron), he had, in reality, no qualms to support, for instance, the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet—with total disregard for the rule of law—to implement the very same so-called free market. Both

fascism and neoliberalism have an equally broad and heterogenic theory and practice, thus representing strategies of domination and not a set of values and doctrines.

The methodological framework that enables such strategies owes a great deal of its strength to the Nietzschean doctrine of domination. In Nietzsche's "*ewige Wiederkunft*"¹ (*eternal return*), there is an intrinsic postulation of repetition of the same—some sort of an *Aufhebung der Zeit*, or rather a postulation of the inevitability of the laws of domination. This means that the *will to power* always determines the same result, or, even, as György Lukács says, "with Nietzsche, struggle of classes² appears as that of the higher and the lower races."³ Furthermore, the Hungarian philosopher emphasises that the becoming is not about the creation of variations "within the 'eternally cosmic' lawfulness of the will to power"—as can be commonly misinterpreted—but the "eternal recurrence draws these boundaries even tighter: the emergence of a new is 'cosmi-

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Ausgabe, KSA 4* (München-Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag de Gruyter, 1999), p. 402.

2 The term used by Marx is *Klassenkampf*, hence, the correct translation is struggle of classes, whilst the usual translation of class struggle inverts its meaning. *Klassen* is plural, meaning classes, *kampf* is singular, that is, fight or struggle. While there can be *Klassenkämpfe*, that is both in plural as struggles of classes, the German term *Klassenkampf* denotes struggle not in plural and class not as a singular, universal, and abstract category. Therefore, the struggle is between specific classes, in plural. Classes are historically determined, not abstract and universal. The usual translated term class struggle erroneously (or inadvertently) removes the historical conflict between classes and substitutes it with an internal conflict. Struggle appears not as clash between two or more classes but as an effort of a singular class to endure its own difficulties or simply the movement of the concept in-itself (very much like the professional-managerial class (PMC) has handled this essential conflict). Consequently, this book uses the term struggle of classes and not class struggles. This emphasis does not have the pretension to rule out or play down additional struggles; highlighting struggle as a singular struggle is a tactical emphasis. After decades of being relegated to oblivion, the contention over the *means of production*—that is, over *social relations of property*, over *economic relations* that fundaments the material basis of social relations—must be placed as a central element within the struggles of classes; attaining this awareness is pivotal to understand the *totality* of the *struggles of classes* (now in plural), that is, how gender, "racial" (ethnic), and sexual equalities have related to capitalist oppression and exploitation throughout history.

3 György Lukács, *Die Zerstörung Der Vernunft, Band II: Irrationalismus Und Imperialismus* (Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974), p. 50.

cally' impossible."⁴ The significance of this nonmoving movement is that Nietzsche overcomes Schopenhauer's passivity and puts "reactionarism" in motion, for instance, in his Zarathustra,⁵ about which Nietzsche himself emphasised: "I have given humanity the deepest book it possesses, my Zarathustra."⁶ Although there is some resemblance between the powerful concept of *ewige Wiederkunft* (*eternal return*) and the *perpetual present*, it is imperative to differentiate between them.

While the *perpetual present* reveals a determined form of social relation, a process that tries to eternalise capitalism and, accordingly, the capitalist rule, Nietzsche's *eternal return* does not reveal the specific character of domination within capitalism and fails to show its historical character.⁷ If they are historically conceived, then these social relations can also be changed; his claim goes in the opposite direction and annihilates history, eternalising the ruling of the powerful over the weak and powerless. In this sense, Nietzsche's theory presents a general concept of domination, as it does not provide a direct, immediate apology of capitalist rule but of (aristocratic) power as such. However, as power changes, or rather the forms of power, then Nietzsche's idealisation of domination can be easily applied to specific cases. Capitalist rule appears as a specific form of domination; however, as capitalism is itself a historical product, it continues to mutate. Thus, capitalism in a broader sense now appears as the generic form of domination, whilst determined historical moments of capitalist rule appear as particular forms.

Hence, it is immensely difficult to define both fascism and neoliberalism, since there are no sets of doctrines but rather manifestations of particular forms of capitalist dominations; insofar as there are differences

4 Ibid., p. 70.

5 Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Ausgabe*, KSA 4.

6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *NIETZSCHE Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Ab. VI, Bd. III, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1969), p. 147.

7 Losurdo's brilliant analysis has shown how Nietzsche identifies already in Socrates through Judaism to the French Revolution the element of slave revolt antithetical to eternal, natural, aristocratic values. In: Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, Il Ribelle Aristocratico: Biografia Intellettuale e Bilancio Critico* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002). [Ed. Note: Available in English as *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2021)].

emerging in the dimensions of time and space, the application of capitalist ruling has to identify these differences and adapt to them.

Neoliberal (see the section below for more) and fascist tactics derived from strategies that consist of the simultaneous delegitimation and legitimation of the state, the appropriation of language and discourse; in one word, the transformation of culture to amalgamate a secure and frictionless privatisation of social wealth with the support of the very people being exploited and expropriated by the capitalist ruling class. Needless to say, the way these strategies have been and are implemented may vary greatly, causing confusion that separates them into completely different doctrines. The fundamental difference between both can be best seen in an artificial separation between subjective and objective social conditions. Neoliberalism attempts to focus on a more subjective perception of reality, where our minds, memory, and perception are colonised. Fascism, on the other hand, seeks to provide a greater focus on objective elements of reality to convince the public of its own importance. Important for both is the distortion of subjective perception on the one hand, and of objective perception on the other. Neoliberalism reduces the collective to the self, whereas fascism reduces the self to the collective, both destroying the perception of reality and history, disentangling the part from the whole and the subject from the object. Neoliberalism fosters the total control of the elite over the people by framing the atomised self in a state of complete tension due to self-control, self-optimisation, self-censorship, self-exploitation, etc. Fascism promotes another form of total control in which one loses touch with the self, the differences surrounding the individual, and the differences that characterise individuals. For both neoliberalism and fascism, the individual becomes apathetic, unable to perceive the other, and unable to feel empathy. In the former, one is merely a cog in the machinery of social production; in the latter, one becomes social production without cogs. In practice, neoliberal and fascist strategies are not mutually exclusive but rather work in tandem, and for this reason, the so-called *disaster capitalism* phenomenon should not come as a surprise. To name just a couple of concrete examples, it was the brutal fascist force—with total assistance of US-American imperialist interventions—that enabled the implementation of neoliberal strategy both in Chile and Indonesia, respectively, under Pinochet's and General Su-

harto's⁸ fascist dictatorships.

What theory has thus far failed to understand is that neoliberalism and fascism are two sides of the same medallion; while some authors give a very strong emphasis on the subjective domination of the mind, for instance, Byung-Chul Han calls the neoliberal phenomenon "Psychopolitics,"⁹ others view the incessant growth of direct domination as the greatest menace to the world, such as William I. Robinson's notion of the "Global Police State."¹⁰ Although this theoretical duality presented by these authors is nothing but rich, full of complexities and nuances, this dichotomy exists only in theory and, thus, fails to grasp that, in practice, notions of "pure" forms of fascism and neoliberalism are representations of abstract tactics being performed in a broader spectrum of a determined strategy of domination. As one sees below (see the section *Eternisation of Capitalism*), the so-called neoliberalism was historically deeply intertwined with bourgeois social democracy. Since the 1980s, the social democratic features of capitalist domination have been disappearing because socialist blocs have lost objective and subjective relevance at both local and global levels and former colonies, now independent, did not provide the necessary surplus to sustain capitalist imperialism in welfare state clothes. Hence, there was an intermezzo, in which neoliberalism *appeared* to have become the essence of capitalism. However, this is not a correct assessment, for this shift represented the starting-point of the assimilation of fascist elements into neoliberal strategy (from the periphery to the centre/core, but promoted by the very capitalist elites), which, first with the beginning of the so-called "War on Terror" and second after the 2008 financial collapse, has gained more impetus and an ever-greater new dimension with the acceleration of the privatisation of institutions such as Western war machines.

8 Indonesia's case does not appear to be broadly known, which in-itself reveals plenty about the appropriation of narrative and reconstruction of collective memory in the West, as The United States Government was behind the Indonesian *coup d'état* and fostered Suharto's regime, which massacred a million people, put another million into concentration camps, and, according to Vicent Bevins, created millions more indirect victims. (See: Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade & The Mass Murder Program That Shaped Our World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020).)

9 Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitik: Neoliberalismus Und Die Neuen Machttechniken* (Fischer Verlag, 2014).

10 William I. Robinson, *The Global Police State* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

Insofar as the eternisation of capitalist domination remains an important feature of the social relations of capitalist power, Nietzsche's assertions, rhetoric, and aphorisms remain essential tools for the power elites. If one loses track of the essence of capitalist relations, by problematising not the totality of capitalism, but just some of its manifestations and tactics as if they themselves represented totalities, this means that these very tactics are succeeding in their task of providing further existence and legitimacy to capitalist rule.

OUR BROAD—YET VERY NARROW—PRESENT OF A DE-ONTOLOGISED SYSTEM

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE UNDERLYING TOPIC can also be exemplified by the considerations in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *Our Broad Present*. To a certain extent, it may appear at first that he emphasises that the “presence”¹ has priority² over “interpretation” since it is “more elementary.”³ Even though he does not proclaim a *perpetual present*, Gumbrecht's assertions certainly give substance to a reflection on this concept as “no one can simply ‘get away’ from the rhythms and structures that constitute our globalised present and its forms of communication; yet, at the same time, it is important to hold firm to the possibility of doing so inasmuch as it provides an alternative to what is only too readily accepted as ‘normal.’”⁴ The lack of perspective to create new venues for social relations and social change presented by the *perpetual present* is also thematised; he continues: “That we no longer live in historical time can be seen most clearly with respect to the future. For us, the future no longer presents itself as an open horizon of possibilities; instead, it is a dimension increasingly closed to all prognoses—and which, at the same time, seems to draw near as a menace.”⁵ For him, the inexistence of a future in the present makes action (virtually) impossible, as the inexistence of a place for projection hinders the realisation of the now. However, by emphasising that “the historicist chronotope no longer constitutes the

1 Here I underline that Gumbrecht writes about “presence” and not “present.”

2 “Priority” is my understanding—which emerged from my PhD research of the ontology of the social-being—and not Gumbrecht's concept.

3 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. x.

4 *Ibid.*, p. xi.

5 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

matrix of assumptions that shape how we experience reality,”⁶ Gumbrecht himself seems to fall into the “trap” of the *perpetual present*, as he fails to understand the historical development of the umbilical synergy between monopoly capital and state, especially when he claims that “[i]n the new chronotope the authority and hierarchical power of the state (and perhaps not only the power of the state) have diminished.”⁷ Therefore, he appears unable to grasp the true relations of power, where state and corporate power have merged and are constantly growing and becoming more powerful.⁸

On the other hand, when Gumbrecht explains the “second-order observer,” which creates the problem of endless perspectives, making it difficult not only to define but also to attest to the existence of the object, he then emphasises a Hegelian element, which is equally underscored by Byung-Chul Han, that solves this problem; namely, the narrative.⁹ The narrative, as Han notes, goes beyond the primitive form of knowledge presented by the correlation, or even the more complex correlation presented by causality, but rather the mutual reaction (or interdependence).¹⁰

6 Ibid., p. 55.

7 Ibid., p. 56.

8 Just to give a few examples of what could be an endless list of texts that reveal the virtually complete fusion between the state and capital, even if this were not the author’s intentions. Luiz Moniz Alberto Bandeira, *A Desordem Mundial* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2016); Luiz Moniz Alberto Bandeira, *A Segunda Guerra Fria* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2014); Cédric Durand, *Techno-Feodalisme: Critique de L’Économie Numérique* (Paris: Zone, 2020); Robinson, *The Global Police State*; Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*; Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, New York: Verso, 2006); Phillips, *Giants: The Global Power Elite*; W.I. Lenin, *Lenin Werke Band 22* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1971); Chris Hedges, *Empire Of Illusion, The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation Books, 2009); Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019); Max Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery: How America’s National Security State Fueled the Rise of Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Donald Trump* (London, New York: Verso, 2019); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2008); Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and The World of Arts and Letters*; Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (London, New York: Verso, 2018).

9 Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture*, p. 54.

10 See the section ‘Geist.’ In: Han, *Psychopolitik: Neoliberalismus Und Die Neuen*

The narrative, according to Gumbrecht, absorbs the “plurality of representations of experiences,” hence creating a connection among them. Although perceiving this important element, the most controversial element in Gumbrecht’s thinking—according to himself—underlines the supersession of the historicist chronotope, which means that phenomena changed according to time in the way we perceive reality, or in his words, the *chronotope* means a “social construction of time.”¹¹

The contradiction presented here, namely, that the narrative, creating historicity, suppresses and is suppressed by the suppression of the historicist chronotope. This means that the very narrative destroys itself as narrative, fails to grasp that the narrative is an element of social reality and *accordingly changes (as it is shaped) to the latter*. Insofar as the narrative expresses a plurality of experiences, the very loss of perception of the changes of the phenomena through time represents solely a specific narrative, which is historically determined. For this reason, he ends up overemphasising postmodern relativism, which he expresses as a new chronotope. A subject-object inversion takes place. When he states that “[i]n our new chronotope the relentless dynamic of historical movement has weakened and, in any case, the momentum of temporal procession has stalled in the meantime”¹², then the chronotope gains independence above and beyond history. The so-called historicist chronotope is a triviality. Yet he fails to grasp that the very perception of history and the ever-changing phenomena are in-themselves not “immune to temporal change,”¹³ namely, they are historically determined.

The theme of the eternisation of capitalism is also found in Niklas Luhmann’s essay on the “Temporal Structures of Modern Society.” According to Luhmann, bourgeois society had in its principle the denial of its past by a postulate of equality.¹⁴ This equality is, according to him, not

Machttechniken.

11 Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture*, p. 29.

12 Ibid., p. 56.

13 Ibid., p. 54.

14 Niklas Luhmann, ‘Die Zukunft Kann Nicht Beginnen: Temporalstrukturen Der Modernen Gesellschaft,’ in *Vor Der Jahrtausendwende: Berichte Zur Lage Der Zukunft*, ed. Peter Sloterdijk (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 143.

based on reality but on time.¹⁵ Thus, bourgeois equality is based not upon ontology; instead, it represents its negation, it becomes *de-ontologised* time, namely, the *perpetual present*. However, one should not confuse the *perpetual present* in this book with Luhmann's notion of "*dauernde Gegenwart*" (permanent present) or "*ewige Gegenwart*" (perpetual present), as, for him, this perception of an eternal time relates to precapitalist societies.¹⁶ Whereas Luhmann's focus lies on the communication and communication acts that open "the chance of a nontemporal extension of time,"¹⁷ my investigation focuses on an ontological dimension of social relations, which creates a social perception of time, *id est*, labour. This difference becomes blatant when one considers Luhmann's conclusion, which disregards—in his words—"the boring controversies of Marxist vs bourgeois or utopian vs technocratic theory"¹⁸ and substitutes them with a *Systemtheorie* as the starting point. According to one of Luhmann's pupils, Dirk Baecker, *Systemtheorie* is simultaneously science and magic, which "only appears now and then, and usually soon prefers to withdraw again. It observes the point of difference between observer and world, and that doesn't last long"; in this sense, while the so-called "boring controversies" are immediately addressing the issues of ontology, power, and ethics, *Systemtheorie* "transforms the world and its observer into a black box, only to miss no chance of getting to the bottom of the mechanisms of this organism."¹⁹ This scientific, magical method reaffirms the existing, creating a black box, where central elements of social reality—such as politics—appear as external entities. Thus, it falsely conceives itself as neutral (black box), causing a problem of representation as the observer is artificially situated in an abstracted world looking into the real world.

The *perpetual present* is a power relation, yet many authors have failed to grasp this essential fact. Conversely, when the problem of power is put at the centre of the debate, then a somersault is often required to circumvent or avoid the question of power, which ends up reinforcing the

15 Ibid., p. 150.

16 Ibid., p. 135.

17 Ibid., p. 136.

18 Ibid., p. 144.

19 Dirk Baecker, ed., *Schlüsselwerke Der Systemtheorie*, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-30633-5>.

perpetual present. A noteworthy example can be seen in John Holloway's Marxist attempt to shed light on the path towards a postcapitalist society by "chang[ing] the world without taking power."²⁰ William I. Robinson notes the shortcomings of such stubborn acceptance of capitalist relations even when aiming beyond capitalism. Consequently, this perfectly illustrates another important example of the *perpetual present*. Robinson writes:

The dominant tendency in many late twentieth and early twenty-first-century global justice movements and popular rebellions became variants of anarchism, syndic-anarchism, 'horizontalism,' 'autonomism,' and so on—varied approaches to struggle that have in common two notions above all. The first is that we can 'change the world without taking power,' that is, that we can create an alternative society in the interstices of the existing global capitalist society, without confronting the (capitalist) state, overthrowing it, and utilising revolutionary state power as part of a broader transformatory project of emancipation. The second is the idea that neither revolutionary theories and political organisations (whether called parties or not) nor socialist (or even any) programs are necessary.²¹

Ironically, I. Robinson himself denies such nuance to actually existing socialism. Ignoring the century-long colonialism by Western countries that depleted and reduced China to one of the poorest countries on the planet, the decades-long economic war (sanctions and embargoes—as weapons of mass destruction used by the United States against China) imposed by the West on it after its revolution;²² ignoring the struggle for survival against capitalist imperialism,²³ which has since the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 been committed to squash and destroy real socialism throughout the world employing endless tactics; ignoring the achievements China has made rendering itself less vulnerable to imperialism whilst developing its productive forces and the standards of living of its citizens without recurring to imperialist wars and colonial

20 John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005).

21 Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, p. 221.

22 Losurdo, *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History*.

23 Cheng Enfu and Lu Baolin, 'Five Characteristics of Neoimperialism: Building on Lenin's Theory of Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century,' *Monthly Review* 73, no. 1 (1 May 2021), <https://monthlyreview.org/2021/05/01/five-characteristics-of-neoimperialism/>.

rule but rather being part of the anti-colonial struggles;²⁴ ignoring the intrinsic character of socialism as a constant process of learning, a laboratory that is not separated from real life, subjected to mistakes, drawbacks, and reassessments, thus, a process that involves multiple tasks and stages—Cheng Enfu himself considers the socialist path of China to be envisioned in three phases and China is still undergoing the first stage.²⁵ Ignoring the dialectics of quantity and quality that was so dear to Hegel,²⁶ no consideration is given to the fact that China must manage a population of 1.4 billion people and, consequently, that existing challenges and methods required to deal with them will be necessarily different from those in the imperialist core (not to mention the difference in culture and material dimension); I. Robinson accuses China of becoming entangled in imperialist rule of the so-called “Global Police State,” leaving still undifferentiated the very question of power that Holloway emptied out and was correctly reproached by I. Robinson.²⁷

24 Domenico Losurdo, ‘Has China Turned to Capitalism?—Reflections on the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism,’ *International Critical Thought* 7, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 15–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2017.1287585>.

25 Enfu Cheng, ‘On the Three Stages in the Development of Socialism,’ *Science and Society* 86, no. 2 (2022): 159–81, <https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2022.86.2.159>.

26 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft Der Logik I, Werke in 20 Bänden, Band 5* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

27 Robinson, *The Global Police State*.

POSTMODERNITY AND THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

THE PERSISTENT DIFFICULTY to understand capitalism as a complex system; the recurring critique of singular phenomena; the lack of apprehension of the centrality of, first, a methodology for every analysis and, second, the monopolisation of the discourse and appropriation of an ever-changing methodology to fit the determined context in order to secure social power, prevailing virtually in every contemporary social critique; all these elements find their ideological expression in *postmodernity*.

In his *La condition postmoderne*, Jean-François Lyotard defined the “*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives” because he believed that not only “this incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it,”¹ in other words, a “problem of the legitimation of knowledge,” where “grand narratives” are substituted with “the little narrative.”² By abandoning the Habermasian “principle of consensus”—noting that Haberman’s conception is based on the validity of the narrative of emancipation—Lyotard fails to grasp the power of consensus brought on by propaganda. However, the fact that the power of ideology, mental colonisation and assertiveness of discourse are thoroughly colonised by power elites³ reveals that such post-modern condition transcends concrete reality, and what Lyotard calls *progress* appears as nothing more than (*ruling class*) *ideology*.

Consensus might not be achieved in the romantic Habermasian

1 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

2 Ibid., p. 60.

3 Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. For further references see the examples I gave of the fusion between capitalist and state power in a previous footnote.

manner, but some of it is certainly an imperative to hold the social fabric together. By following Aristotelian tradition, the underlying ontological fact appears to be the opposite, namely, there cannot be progress in-itself because the social being is immanently a political being.⁴ Karl Marx leaves no room for doubt. According to him, there is no such thing as science in-itself,⁵ media in-itself, or being-in-itself; instead, all of these elements not only carry historically determined social values but also reinforce, reshape, reframe, and relegitimise themselves.⁶ Every economic, philosophical, epistemological, aesthetical, and moral act is, to a certain extent, also a political act.⁷ Any claim of being unbiased, neutral, and completely objective, in fact, veils its opposite, namely, its partisan political content.

Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* compares our contemporary reality to the one seen in *Children of Men*,⁸ where a dystopia is not part of an uncertain future but is indeed being lived through in our reality, meaning that ultra-authoritarianism and capitalism have become a unity. Thus, action becomes pointless and "only senseless hope makes sense," with the proliferation of superstition and religion as the recourse for the "helpless."⁹ Lyotard's reduction of reality to the little narratives reveals, on the

4 Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Jonathan B (New Jersey, Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1984), 4268,1252b1.

5 Lyotard creates a difference between science in-itself ("pragmatics of science itself") and science influenced by a socioeconomic system as if only then it became contaminated and lost its purity. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, p. 64.

6 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *MEW Band 13* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1961), pp. 8–9.

7 It is worth quoting Ellen Meiksins Wood: "Every complex civilization with a state and organised leadership is bound to generate reflection on the relations between leader and led, rulers and subjects, command and obedience. Whether it takes the form of systematic philosophy, poetry, parable or proverb, in oral traditions or in the written word, we can call it political thought." (Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'Citizens to Lords: Antiquity to the Middle Ages,' in *A Social History of Western Political Thought* (London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2022), p. 1.)

8 P. D. James, *The Children of Men* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006); Alfonso Cuarón, *Children of Men* (United States, United Kingdom, Japan, 2006).

9 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester (UK), Washington (USA): Zero Books, 2009), p. 3.

one hand, the real defeat of the left-wing discourse, as the apprehension of reality is reduced to the atomistic level, but, on the other, reduces the complexity of reality to the ideologised discourse it itself perpetrates, leading to the mythological figure of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this sense, while postmodernity expresses some changes in capitalist power relations, it also legitimises the latter, eliminating the complexities embedded in the socio-political reality from the socio-political discourse, and fostering the creation of a *new culture of domination*.

In this sense, symbolic capitalist domination, namely, the society of spectacle and its simulacra, gained a new impetus to frame, determine, and control the social being. The rituality of the eternisation of capitalism can be grasped by Fisher's notion of realism. "The 'realism' here is analogous to the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion."¹⁰ What one currently regards as "alternative" or "independent," Fisher says, is in no sense part of something outside mainstream culture but rather the very dominant mainstream styles.¹¹ He also emphasises that the state of affairs where we currently live resembles Jean Baudrillard's "vision of control and communication," "in which subjugation no longer takes the form of a subordination to an extrinsic spectacle, but rather invites us to interact and participate."¹² Postmodernity practices and dogmas go beyond aesthetical experiences and propagandistic methods. As the often distorted notion of the "invisible hand" transcends the so-called market imperatives, postmodernity—understood and coined by Fisher as capitalist realism—"is more like 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."¹³ In this sense, Fisher appears to share the critique proposed in this book, namely, the total failure of moral critique. Instead of revealing the determinations of real social relations, it legitimises the very object against which the critique is aimed. In contrast, a true capitalist critique must be immanent and dialectical, exposing the

10 Ibid., p. 5.

11 Ibid., p. 9.

12 Ibid., p. 12.

13 Ibid., p. 16.

unfeasibility of capitalist promises.

The real and the reality appear as two contradictory elements. While the former constitutes an ontological endless complexity, the latter is a principle determined by ideology and, hence, historically constituted and with a particular, determined existence; in other words, it is finite and defined by specific cultural conditions. Despite the fact that reality presents itself as natural, it represents a social condition determined by socio-political relations. Capitalist power portrays itself as natural, eternising itself, and destroys the real, which, ontologically, is in constant transformation. Reality becomes an element of itself, appears to substitute the real, having thus no (non-metaphysical) ontology. As a consequence, it appears to be a reality that emerges from itself characterising the real but without a *real*_(real)¹⁴ to stand on. Such a reality appears as the abstraction that totalises. The abstraction as total reification. Capitalist reality becomes total reality (*reality*_(reality) or *reality*_(metaphysical)). Such a perception reveals the double dimension of capitalist eternisation. It creates a movement of self-perpetuation in order to suppress any historical movement and stand as eternal. Fisher correctly states: "Work and life become inseparable. Capital follows you when you dream. Time ceases to be linear, becomes chaotic, broken down into punctiform divisions."¹⁵ This chaos resembles Buddha's movement, for he is so active that his motions are easy, motionless, or alternatively a propeller that, when quickly moving, appears to solidify a whole circumference. Such chaos eternalises the present and out of this motion of perpetuation emerges the perception of the eternal, of no alternative. Estranged ("alienated") work appears as human life, human life as estranged work.

Insofar as postmodernity atomises the perception of the real and thus reality itself, the assessment of the conditions of the present has an immediate impact on the discernment of the past. Thus, the narratives

14 By *real*_(real) I mean a real that it is not a product of reality but of a process that exists regardless of cultural subjective determinations, a real that withholds its ontological determinations. It goes without saying that the real and the reality are processes with reciprocal determinations; however, while the latter can only exist within the frame of the former (*reality*_(real)), the existence of the former does not depend on the existence of the latter (*real*_(real) or *real*_(real, reality) but never *real*_(reality)). There is thus an ontological priority of the real over the reality although no hierarchical superiority.

15 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, p. 34.

of the postmodern ideology carry in-them the seeds of a “post-past.” The critique of postmodern conditions supersedes historical notions and creates few narratives of the past. When Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi emphasises the problem of precarity, he dissolves the past within a narrative that metamorphoses cultural memory to accentuate the present. In terms of labour, he claims that “precarity is the cancellation of the rules governing the relations between workers and capital, and particularly of the contractual guarantees of the continuity and regularity of jobs,” which is further explained by a bourgeois “ethical foundation” that “was based on the responsibility of the bourgeois class and the solidarity between workers.”¹⁶ *This assessment has little to no correspondence with historical reality.* Even though it is true that contemporary precarisation reflects a loss of labour rights and power, its “foundation” had absolutely no ethical grounds. The capitalist class has incessantly exploited workers worldwide;¹⁷ only in very determined historical moments and specific locations has the labour class managed to gain some benefits in comparison to previous times, yet labourers were still exploited. Furthermore, finding labour rights and benefits under specific conditions also meant the loss of solidarity among the labour class. The labour class was split and split itself to secure some concrete and partial gains.¹⁸ The moment when the European labour class

16 Berardi, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide*, p. 203.

17 Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker expose the importance of the *hydraulic*—“the organization of the maritime state from above, and the self-organization of sailors from below”—for the development of English capitalism. England’s colonisation and trade across the Atlantic were only possible due to immense violence. A broad system of enslavement that rendered English dispossessed from their lands, Irish invaded by British colonial power, Africans bought and sold, etc., was systematically put in place, and defended by both private capital and the capitalist state. The exclusive private property relations arose through multiple methods of expropriation and appropriation, substituting millenary property social relations of production based on common appropriation. Capitalist violence was reinforced by the ferocity of the capitalist state and the legitimization of this process by the enforcement of laws criminalising any (popular) attempt to prevent this. “Crime and rebellion were inextricably intertwined for these Irishmen and Irishwomen, as for thousands of others in Britain who found themselves living on the wrong side of laws that were changing rapidly to protect new definitions of property.” (Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, pp.144, 187.)

18 This occurred on multiple occasions. For instance, the capitulation of Western working class and anti-capitalist intelligentsia after World War II, which would

most benefited from capital relations without superseding capitalism was after the second world war until the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. During this period, both the labour class and its intellectual representatives tacitly and sometimes explicitly accepted capitalist rough siege

give postmodernism (what I call, social neoliberalism) free reign for destroying anti-capitalist movements. Or when opportunists, such as Eduard Bernstein, not only split the communist movement but also defended the working-class taking part in the imperialist World War, putting proletarians against each other within a sphere of social chauvinism (W.I. Lenin, 'Staat Und Revolution: Die Lehre Des Marxismus Vom Staat Und Die Aufgaben Des Proletariats in Der Revolution,' in *Lenin Werke Band 25* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1974).). Or before that with racism as a tool of social control and to maintain a system of enslavement. Capitalist slavery, which is usually associated with the enslavement of people from the African continent, underwent several transformations. Punishing slaves with burning, hanging, starvation, breaking their bodies on the wheel, etc., was not enough to secure British power. Initially slaves were not conditioned by skin colour, nation of origin, culture, etc. "A rough definition of slavery at the time would include these features: it began in an act of expropriation and terror; it affected children and young people particularly; it compelled violent exploitation; and more often than not, it ended in death. The hewers and drawers, or the laboring subjects of the Atlantic economy, met this definition in an era well before race or ethnicity came to define slavery." For instance, Irish land was transferred to the British immigrant landlord class, creating thus vast amount of dispossessed people that would either die of starvation or be thrown into galleons to become part of the hydrarchy economy as bond-slaves. "Fixed enclosures replaced open fields, single dispersed farms replaced nucleated settlements or the clachan, commercial tillage and an increase in agricultural labor replaced subsistence strips and environmental egalitarianism. This ruthless transfer of the land of Ireland to an immigrant landlord class." Also British servants were in practice slaves. However, as slaves, servants, and religious radicals plotted against the endeavours of the British crown, the solution put forward was to divide and conquer. The laces that brought those people together into a unified struggle was broken when the elite not only physically separated them but also "[t]he upper class also used informal policy to create division, instigating criminality and taking comfort as workers quarreled among themselves." The result was the emergence of racial differentiation as a tool to separate and stratify the working class. "The planters legally and socially differentiated slave from servant, defining the former as absolute private property and offering the latter new protections against violence and exploitation. The effort to recompose the class by giving servants and slaves different material positions within the plantation system continued as planters transformed the remaining servants into a labor elite, as artisans, overseers, and members of the militia, who, bearing arms, would be used to put down slave revolts. The policy of "Tush, they can shift" was institutionalised as a permanent structural characteristic of American plantation society." (Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* pp. 111, 122, 126, 127.)

over underdeveloped societies and their respective working classes. Even in the heart of Europe, where the claim of capitalist democracy was widely celebrated, many fascist dictatorships were simultaneously virtually frictionlessly embraced, e.g., in Portugal, Spain, and Greece.

Throughout this time, Western Marxism and critical theory celebrated Western democracy (euphemism for capitalism), disregarded the struggle of classes, largely—if not completely—abandoned the anti-imperialist fight, and accepted both social property relations that enabled private property of the means of production and the capitalist state, which mediates elite power and ruling over the masses not only at home (domestically) but also overseas (internationally). While the capitalist elites transformed cultural relations into even more ruthless domination, known as neoliberal capitalism (and, as explained in this book, I consider this differentiation misleading), the intellectual voices of the Left and labour representatives succumbed to the rhetoric and mystical notions of capitalist democracy as if each isolated individual repeatedly voting at certain intervals (biennial, quadrennial, quinquennial, etc.) could guarantee a democratic praxis as if the asymmetries of economic power, social circles, narrative control, influence over the state, class identification, lobby and lobbying, etc., did not play a role in determining political power and relations.

What had been learned over centuries by the social struggles seemed to quickly go into oblivion and historical amnesia. Cultural memory had been reshaped. Little narratives celebrating a de-ontologised individual became commonplace. The constant reappropriation and re-establishment of cultural memory thus appear as *anti-memory*. Society ceased to exist. Capitalism now appeared eternal. As Mark Fisher puts it, never questioning or repudiating the stories presented to us “is, also, perhaps the only way to stay healthy amidst capitalism’s perpetual instability.”¹⁹ In other words, forgetting appears to have become an imperative for individual survival under such conditions. However, although this might be to a certain extent correct for suffering individuals, it also reveals the double distancing that intellectuals took: on the one hand, they abnegated contact with the labour masses, forfeiting their role of providing explanations to everyday life phenomena; on the other, they distanced

19 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, 54.

themselves from concrete reality retreating into a theoretical world of abstractions and impervious to any shock of reality.

Postmodernism as little narratives was, and still is, not merely a set of ideas but a practice of social distancing and unwillingness to confront immediate reality, its genesis, and the social power(s) commanding them. The appearance of an alternative to capitalism is certainly difficult to perceive when the very social actors, who are the frontrunners in promoting social transformation, capitulate and relinquish their central role in this process.

HISTORICAL BOOMERANG: FEUDALISM-CAPITALISM-FEUDALISM

[ORIGINAL, COPYRIGHTED¹]

[NEW] While the critique of political economy anchors its analyses in historical material conditions dialectically, some contemporary thinkers are introducing a circular historical worldview that supersedes capitalism altogether. Following their logic, the analysis of capitalism seems anachronic, for the very object of investigation has changed, ceasing to be the main existing social contradiction. The *perpetual present* in which capitalism is eternalised is now different. The fetish is posited not in capitalist onto-historical conditions but rather in its allegedly unresolved form, namely, feudalism. Analogous to the commercialisation model, the fetishised notion that the capitalist system has one-dimensionally evolved from feudalism naturalises capitalism not as a result but as a premise: this is what I call a *historical boomerang*.

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1 **Ed. Note:** See Foreword for explanation of the missing sections.

[REDACTED]

[NEW] The rejection of capitalism as the chief social contradiction becomes utterly clear in both Cédric Durand’s analysis and Yanis Varoufakis’s fictional novel.² The historical process of capitalist monopolisation is blurred; in its place, the notion of techno-feudalism denotes the (d)evolution of capitalism and its technological achievements into feudal social relations. The power of the few would thus correspond to the dominance of feudal lords. This is not a conceptual issue but a historical and methodological one in which capitalist relations simultaneously become opaque and eternal.

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[NEW] Correspondingly, Jürgen Habermas incorrectly understands capitalism to be the outcome of feudalism, for the former merely appears as the development of bourgeois relations within the latter. Still according to Habermas, the conversion from feudal to capitalist occurs when the bourgeois private sphere unfolds, marking a qualitative change and the beginning of a new system. The split between the private and the public defines the critical moment beyond feudal relations; thus, when the “private and public sphere could not be clearly distinguished,” then the “public’s rational-critical debate also became a victim of this ‘refeu-

2 Durand, *Techno-Feodalisme: Critique de L’Économie Numérique*; Yanis Varoufakis, *Another Now: Dispatches from an Alternative Present* (London: Random House, Inc., 2020).

dalisation.”³

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[NEW] Notwithstanding the existing merits in their analyses, two central issues must be alluded to. First, the notion of a re-emerging feudalism evokes the romantic and irrational return to the past. Methodologically speaking, this mistake represents the problem of irreversibility. Based on Lukács, Sergio Lessa emphasises the mutability of the processes of history in which the totality represents an ever-changing “diversity

3 Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel Der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen Zu Einer Kategorie Der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 246.

and irreversibility of the succession of moments.”⁴ It is, therefore, of paramount significance to underscore that the past does not repeat itself. Additionally, all three authors ignore capitalism’s central characteristic, namely its peculiarity as a mode of production. This idiosyncrasy arises precisely from particular social property relations that give birth to the exclusive private property of the means of production, as brilliantly analysed by Ellen Meiksins Wood.⁵ It is, therefore, erroneous to conceive monopolistic power as extraneous to capitalism. The very social condition in which the economy mutates from possibility to imposition contains the accumulation of economic and political power as the vital *raison d’être* of capitalism. Equating the development of capitalism towards monopoly as a return to a feudal past is not only a methodological error but a historical fallacy. The monopolistic condition that Lenin (and to some extent already Marx) showed as the development of capital⁶ is now ubiquitous and unmistakably present.⁷ The *perpetual present* here appears twofold: first, capitalist power and ideology unfold extensively to emerge as the only social relation possible (*feudalism-capitalism-(neo-)feudalism*); second, the assertion of either re-feudalisation or techno-feudalism renders capitalist power invisible, or opaque at best, naturalising it; this means, even under a (allegedly) different mode of production, capitalist relations would still represent the primary and dominant contradictions, despite the absence of capitalism as the primary contradiction—a paradox.

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4 Sérgio Lessa, *Mundo Dos Homens: Trabalho e Ser Social* (São Paulo: Instituto Lukács, 2012), 47.

5 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London, New York: Verso, 2017); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *A Social History of Western Political Thought* (London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2022).

6 Lenin, ‘Der Imperialismus Als Höchstes Stadium Des Kapitalismus’; Karl Marx, ‘Das Kapital: Kritik Der Politischen Ökonomie: Dritter Band: Buch III: Der Gesamtprozeß Der Kapitalistischen Produktion,’ in *MEW* Band 25, ed. Friedrich Engels (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1964).

7 For the contemporary immense concentration of wealth and capital, see for instance: Stefania Vitali, James B. Glatfelder, and Stefano Battiston, ‘The Network of Global Corporate Control,’ *PLoS ONE* 6, no. 10 (n.d.): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0025995>; Phillips, *Giants: The Global Power Elite*.



[NEW] Durand equates feudalism, slavery and capitalism. “First of all, let’s highlight what feudalism, slavery and capitalism have in common. In all three configurations, legal ownership of at least some of the assets essential to production is monopolised by a dominant class.”⁸ He mistakenly assumes legal property as a determinant of the mode and relations of exploitation. In reality, the dominant classes use religious, moral, and legal means not to assert property (appropriation) but to justify, guarantee and legitimate it. Moreover, each of these modes of production is based on different sets of social property relations. What is even more significant is that capitalist social property relations not only differ from other arrangements but are entirely unique in-themselves. As mentioned, the exclusive private property of the means of production is a distinctive feature that characterises no other mode of production but capitalism. The legal domain first represented a hurdle to the development of capi-

8 Durand, *Techno-Feodalisme: Critique de L'Économie Numérique*, p. 199.

talism, and only *a posteriori* endowed it with legitimacy.⁹ These peculiar social property relations were the birthplace of sheer power and violence perpetrated by a portion of the aristocratic elite.¹⁰ The romantic notion of bourgeois commercial (“natural”) development producing capitalism is historically false.

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[NEW] The idealistic, metaphysical, and religious character of these analyses is flagrant. If purified from its sins of monopolisation and accumulation of political-economic power, capitalism appears as a magical place in which free competition would yield positive social results, delivered from its perils. When “free competition” becomes sinful, then this obviously can no longer represent the immaculate “market” relations. It is as if capitalism had an intrinsic mechanism of jubilee—analogueous to the “biblical jubilee (Leviticus),” which “authorized the call for an end to bondage and for the return of the commons to the dispossessed”¹¹—enabling a return to “free competition.” This surely transcends time and space, history, and actual social relations, capitalist logic, and legality. Actual capitalist relations are abstracted, and in their place, an idealised reality is postulated. Capitalism is, in this sense, not a social relation but a fixed concept. Even if reality changes, the postulated concept must re-

9 Marx, ‘Das Kapital: Kritik Der Politischen Ökonomie: Erster Band: Buch I: Der Produktionsprozeß Des Kapitals’; Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*.

10 Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*.

11 Ibid., 11f.

main the same.

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[NEW] Habermas's suggestion that capitalism arises with the bourgeoisie, although historically false, expresses deeply entrenched bourgeois notions, which assert to themselves a greater role in history than they actually had. The obvious thesis that expresses this is the commercialisation model, which naturalises exchange, markets, and capitalism. The vulgar

teleological adherence is patent. Exchange would be part of human nature, a force, a latent potency ready to express itself. Its social actualisation as a natural endeavour forms the natural market, present in every civilisation—as neoliberal Walter Eucken mistakenly asserts.¹² Thus, capitalism, as the expansion of markets, represents the perfect expression of human nature, a natural force waiting to blossom under the right conditions. Exchange is, however, not innate. Instead, it occurs in specific historical moments under particular objective and subjective conditions. Moreover, many societies and civilisations existed in the absence of markets, which neither represent freedom nor are peculiar to capitalism. While one finds markets in modern socialist societies, they were likewise present in slave societies and there enabled the trade of human-beings as slave markets. Thus, markets are neither universal nor homogenous. Finally, if one accepts the commercialisation model, then capitalism should not have arisen in England, one of the least developed commercial societies among its peers, but rather in Florence, Venice, Paris, or Amsterdam. Additionally, it was not the natural outcome of feudalism but only one among many, as the multiple outcomes of feudal societies have shown, e.g., French absolutism, Florine Renaissance, the Dutch Republic, etc.

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12 Walter Eucken, *Nationalökonomie Wozu?* (Düsseldorf & München: Verlag Helmut Küpper, 1961).

[NEW] Varoufakis's novel has the merit of, through fiction, creating an alternative to capitalism in a time in which capitalism is broadly framed as eternal. In this sense, it sparks the imagination beyond the existing. His writing exposes many of our contemporary perils and centres the problem around the monopolistic power of big banks and big techs. The "predation of the tech giants" is what he calls "techno-feudalism."¹³ However, unlike Marx or Lenin, he does not extract the legality of capitalist relations but delivers the liberal ethos from its sins, for even liberal values "could [not] condone big tech's mass manipulation techniques nor defend its gains as a fair reward for entrepreneurship" because their profits are enabled "by a species of techno-feudalism that made billions of people work for it for free."¹⁴ While capitalist property relations are anchored precisely in the extraction of surplus-value as free labour, as unpaid time, how is techno-feudalism not the culmination of capitalist legality but instead a new form of feudal relation? In the 19th century, while Gustave Le Bon, an apologist of capitalist relations, already saw the need for the manipulation of the masses,¹⁵ Marx had already denounced the capitalist appropriation of free labour, of unpaid labour, as a vital condition for the appropriation of surplus-value and formation of capital. In this sense, Varoufakis's critique appears to be a moral critique, which seems to excuse the existing capitalist acts of violence, promoting instead an abstract true capitalism deprived of historical substance. His moral critique is, therefore, an apologia.

13 Varoufakis, *Another Now: Dispatches from an Alternative Present*, p. 146.

14 Ibid., pp. 144, 145.

15 Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002); Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1928).

[ADDENDUM] It is worth recognising that after this book was written, Yanis Varoufakis published a more thorough book on his concept of techno-feudalism.¹⁶ Despite some relevant insights on social critique, it essentially gives further representation to the same idea presented earlier in his novel and also in Cédric Durand's book, namely that the extraction of technological rent has taken over capitalism and thus a reversal to feudalisation has occurred by the hands of the digital oligarchy. Nonetheless, it is essential to highlight that these ideas are not new, not only because, as demonstrated, bourgeois thinkers such as Habermas had already posited such a historical boomerang (even if on other grounds), but moreover—as Domenico Losurdo demonstrated—because, still in the 19th century, Silvio Spaventa, Thomas Hill Green, and Johann Karl Friedrich Rosenkranz had already accused the powerful apparatus of capital of being a “modern feudalism of capitalist lords,” a “new feudalism,” and “a plutocracy under the form of feudalism.”¹⁷

16 Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (Vintage, 2023).

17 Domenico Losurdo, *Dai Fratelli Spaventa a Gramsci: Per Una Storia Politico-Sociale Della Fortuna Di Hegel in Italia* (Napoli: La città del sole, 1997), p. 144f.

BEAUTIFUL AND CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

SUCH DRIVE FOR THE ETERNAL (endless, infinite, unlimited) accumulation of capital that the *perpetual present* appears to endorse can also be seen in its constant effort to normalise and simultaneously conceal from human perception many horrors, which constantly enable(d) the incessant capitalist logic of accumulation. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, Rosa Luxemburg was drawing attention to what has become a routine in Western cultures, namely, the legitimization of wars by calling them *humanitarian wars*. At the beginning of the last century, working-class consciousness still prevailed—so much so that Luxemburg affirms: “Hitherto we lived in the conviction that interests of nations and class interests of proletarians unite harmoniously, that they are identical, that they cannot possibly come into opposition to each other. This was the basis of our theory and practice, the soul of our agitation among the masses.”¹ Therefore, the pretext of humanitarian war set forth a division within the labour movements and turned workers against workers, simultaneously destroying internationalism and creating within the working class the dichotomy between the notions of nation, on the one hand, and internationalism, on the other.² Today, the list of calamities of the past such as child prostitution, child labour, (growth and normalisation of) slums, wars, precarious and necessary migration, etc., are not only still very much present in contemporary capitalist relations, but also more modern technological developments have enabled an expansion of the commodification of all social relations as if they were an “eternal”—inescapable—process. So much so that *mining and selling of human body parts* have become part of everyday life,³ or as Mike Davis quotes Pres-

1 Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Krise Der Sozialdemokratie* (Bern: Unionsdruckerei Bern, 1916), p. 13. Author’s translation.

2 Ibid.

3 An example given by Mike Davis’ *Planet of Slums* reveals that “Cairo’s slums

ident Mobutu: “everything is for sale and everything can be bought.”⁴ The informalisation and precarisation of the economy allow the further expansion of the so-called primitive accumulation. According to Marx, primitive accumulation “should be called original expropriation” and it means in fact “a series of historical processes resulting in a dissolution of the original unity between the worker and his means of labour.”⁵ This is, however, an incessant feature for capitalist expansion and accumulation, forcing upon the precariat (or the “surplus humanity”) increasingly harder existential conditions.⁶ Is this ever-growing drive for accumulation eternal? Could the perception of an eternal capitalism have any ontological validity?

The destruction of the world, whole societies, nature, is not only normalised through the cinematographic spectacle, but it is also an ethos carefully cultivated by the romanticisation of poverty, the mystification of aid and philanthropy (often operating as NGOs), and also the power of the images pushed by marketing, PR, and blunt propaganda. While nature collapses, capitalist power normalises further destruction, now calling it “green”—in simple terms, *greenwashing*—while workers lose their livelihood and their life conditions become harder, capitalist power claims that losing labour rights and bashing immigration are the necessary remedies to improve the conditions of life. After all, precarisation is

have also been mined in recent years for human body parts.” Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 190.

4 Ibid., p. 191.

5 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Lohn, Preis Und Profit,’ in *MEW Band 16* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1962), 131.

6 In his recent book *The Global Police State*, William I. Robinson writes: “New rounds of primitive accumulation have generated a vast army of internal and transnational migrants who have swelled the ranks of the precariat and the structurally marginalized” (Robinson, *The Global Police State*, 46). Expanded, this means: “Hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of people, have been displaced from the Third World countryside through new rounds of primitive accumulation brought about by neo-liberal policies as well as social cleansing, and organised violence such as the ‘war on drugs’ and the ‘war on terror,’ both of which have served as instruments of primitive accumulation and for the violent restructuring and integration of countries and regions into the new global economy. Banks, institutional investors, and corporate agribusiness began vast new land grabs around the world in the 2000s in what amounts to a new round of global enclosures.” Ibid., p. 45.

posed not as related to workers' immediate life circumstances and conditions but as the loss of certain social and moral values. The subtraction of labour rights ought to be compensated by the reinstatement of some ahistorical beautiful values.

Insofar as the abstract promises of a better future for the singular individual, albeit devoid of any concrete content, is pushed forward, the preposterous lies concerning "the other," "the foreigner," and "the immigrant" are accepted at face value. One of the largest capitalist industries in the world, which becomes year-in-year-out increasingly transnational, the industrial-military complex, has no *raison d'être* if governments do not continually fund their private profits by metamorphosing social resources into private gains. However, no government can justify an eternal growth in military spending if there are no external threats or confrontational risks. It is imperative that, even in times of peace, an eternal war is waged.⁷ The announced "War on Drugs" and "War on Terror," namely, eternal wars with no real enemy, are—with enough means of propaganda—pushed frictionlessly into Western societies that are waiting for heaven to fall on earth, namely, until a miraculous solution effortlessly (that is, without the struggle of classes) presents itself. Such methods certainly do not suffice to maintain the profits of such giant industry. Trillions of dollars are transferred from the propertyless to the owners of capital by means of government power. To push this forward, hot wars are also necessary.

If the United States were to take part in the International Court of Justice in Den Haag, most of their presidents would have to be prosecuted (and probably convicted) for crimes against humanity. However, the

7 This, of course, resembles Thomas Hobbes' notion of *war of all against all*: "Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace." (Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (London, 1651), 77f.)

United States perpetrates all this money laundering and atrocities with the comfort of knowing that they will suffer no punishment or consequences. It is publicly acknowledged that the war in Afghanistan that officially lasted for 20 years (2001-2021)—was not only illegal but groundless. It is also well known that the war in the 2000s against Iraq was not only illegal but waged based on lies—there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, as Colin Powell deceitfully claimed with a straight face before the United Nations on February 5, 2003. It is notorious that Bill Clinton’s administration illegally used NATO to push the war against Yugoslavia, thus creating a new breach of precedent for the illegal use of military force by an organisation created solely for defence and whose *raison d’être* ceased to exist with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is also public knowledge—although most people have long forgotten—that the so-called first Iraq War was also based on yet another lie. Nayirah’s case was a notorious but sophisticated lie. As Iraq annexed the southern part of Kuwait, a 15-year-old girl named Nayirah appeared before the United States Congressional Human Rights Caucus and testified that “While I was there, I saw the Iraqi soldiers coming to the hospital with guns. They took the babies out of incubators, took the incubators, and left these children to die on the cold floor. It was horrifying.” Before this testimonial, the public opinion in the United States was against the war; after that, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International echoed these claims. George Bush Senior had what he needed to declare war on Iraq. Immediately after the war, it became known that not only was the 15-year-old girl the daughter of the ambassador of Kuwait but her whole testimony was a lie, which was orchestrated by a PR firm representing Kuwait’s monarchy. While creating false atrocities to justify foreign military actions, the USA’s own list of atrocities and illegalities is endless.⁸

Thus, when in the interest of Western societies, violence appears as its opposite. It represents freedom, liberty, salvation, and democracy. Needless to say that such positive valuation, this self-glorification and beatification, this transformation of the horror of war, mutilation,

8 For instance, the number alone of covert operations of regime change perpetrated by the United States during the Cold War (1947-1989) against enemies and allies was sixty-four divided among *offensive operations*, *preventive operations*, and *hegemonic operations*, according to Lindsey A. O’Rourke. O’Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America’s Secret Cold War*.

death, and destruction into the beautiful set of baseless values, has no objective substance. Western societies appear to cultivate few memories of their long history of atrocities. References to their imperialism—imperialist reality—are often disregarded as something of a long forgotten past (British, French, Belgian, Japanese violence, among other nations and empires, were extremely destructive when not genocidal). Except in few specialised *milieus*, some oases of critical thinking, terror and barbarism have, henceforth, almost no place for contemporary understanding of Western values and practices. They appear not to be part of Western characteristics but those of “the other,” “the foreigner,” and “the immigrant,” “those barbarians”; therefore, they are banished *a priori* from any form of self-critique and acknowledgement at a social level. Their actions hold virtually no consequences in historical calamities, and their societies take practically no responsibility for what they enact hitherto. Insofar as history has been broadly banished from Western culture, there is neither past nor future, just their eternal—self-proclaimed—good intentions, pre-capitalist and capitalist history becomes aristocratic hagiography.

Within institutions of the European Union, public discourse occasionally reveals the bowels of the capitalist elite. Only three days after Josep Borrell Fontelles⁹ publicly acknowledged that, “on our [the West’s] side, there are a lot of authoritarian regimes,”¹⁰ thus, contradicting the binary worldview in which the West is the sacred defender of democratic values, he then had the audacity to plainly express the ethos of the Western ruling class. Borrell said: “Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that humankind has been able to build—the three things together.” In contrast:

The rest of the world—and you know this very well, Federica—is not exactly a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden. The gardeners should take care of it, but they will not protect the garden by building walls. A nice small garden surrounded by high walls in order to prevent the jungle from coming in is not going to be a solution. Because

9 High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (2019-2024).

10 Josep Borrell, ‘EU Ambassadors Annual Conference 2022: Opening Speech by High Representative Josep Borrell,’ *Eeas.Europa.Eu* (Brussels: European Union, 10 October 2022), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-ambassadors-annual-conference-2022-opening-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell_en.

the jungle has a strong growth capacity, and the wall will never be high enough in order to protect the garden.

Hence, it is not that he is against a wall to divide European Eden from the outside jungle of barbaric people, but a wall would not be good enough, so the solution he proposes is the same playbook being used for the last 500 years: more colonialism/neocolonialism. Contrary to Borrell's claims, in Europe everything does not work, except if one considers the European Union's machine of corruption and lobbyism in which *unelected* bureaucrats decide the fate of millions of people, then one might have to agree with Borrell's assertion. On the other hand, a major part of contemporary world problems cannot be disassociated from historical European colonial and ongoing neocolonial rule and interference: slave trade and markets, slave labour, wars, extraction of raw materials, plundering, more wars, World War I, World War II, European liberal colonial empires, fascism and Nazi-fascism, racism, eugenics, imperialism and neoliberalism, environmental destruction and exhaustion, the extermination of uncountable species, mass concentration camps, genocides, shock therapy, and the list goes on. Therefore, when he further asserts that: "The gardeners have to go to the jungle. Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us, by [*sic*] different ways and means. Yes, this is my most important message: we have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world,"¹¹ he then provides historical revisionism, projects and transfers blame on the victims, and, finally, removes any responsibility for the infinite crimes committed by Europeans and European rule. The capitalist elite knows only one game with very well-defined rules: domination, exploitation, appropriation, and accumulation.

After decades of funding, training, weaponising, and directing terrorist groups, after decades of destroying Latin America, multiple parts of Africa, and West Asia (also known in the West as the Middle East), the so-called European refugee crisis of the mid-2010s "suddenly" appeared as a great surprise. In general, the critique on the crisis was either for a

11 Josep Borrell, 'European Diplomatic Academy: Opening Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the Inauguration of the Pilot Programme,' *Eeas.Europa.Eu* (Brussels: European Union, 13 October 2022), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration_en.

humanitarian acceptance and integration of refugees or against them with some shocking disdain for the pain of many, who were caricatured as “those who want to steal or are already stealing from us.” What neither the more humanitarian progressive nor the more egoistic right-wing postures confronted was the cause of such a crisis, since enabling a social self-critique, which inevitably would have to contest its incessant fostering of the death industry (in other words, the military industrial complex and the spying-surveillance industry), seemed almost impossible.

The ontological change in contemporary social relations has been captured by capitalism in yet another fashion. Not only does the neoliberal strategy understand that creating crises or simply taking advantage of existing ones is an indispensable instrument to implement policies for private gains, but these same policies represent for the great part of the populations around the world a worsening of their living conditions. However, this conception pushed forward by intellectuals such as Milton Friedman has a more fundamental basis in capitalist ideology. Friedman’s plan to apply *shock therapy* to entire societies represents the destruction of subjective perception, of subjective and objective means of apprehending their correspondent collective memories, and of the objective conditions to enable the most basic livelihood. Joseph A. Schumpeter’s *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* was a much more direct attack on Marxist doctrine(s), and its main thesis defended an even more all-encompassing form of *destruction* to legitimate and enable capitalist relations.

Capitalist ideological legitimacy rests to a great extent on the idealised premise of perfect, unfettered competition. As many capitalist critiques—and to a certain extent even some of the apologists of capitalism—have shown, this notion is false both in theory and practice. Schumpeter’s task was to set the record straight, providing thus the perfect defence—or better said, the credibly enough rhetoric in favour—of capitalist exploitation and power. He proposes the so-called *Process of Creative Destruction*, where the constant change—in Schumpeter’s term: “creation”—in the productive processes and the respective obsolescence—“destruction”—of the ones that do not fit these changes, promoted a constant rejuvenation of capitalism: “Capitalism, then, is by nature a form or method of economic change and not only never is

but never can be stationary.”¹² Such an economic theory fails to take the concrete world into account, where nature is in-itself always a process of change and movement, whilst capital is merely a particular form of social relation of exploitation that pushes forward a very specific form of movement; moreover, where natural resources are limited, technology is subordinated to concrete social interests and does not carry positive changes in-itself, technological development does not equal progress, since one of the major historical phenomena that fostered (and still foster) technological developments is war. The formation and strengthening of monopoly blocs occur to a great extent precisely due to such a process of destruction of the social relations of capital, as the accumulated mass of capital creates an even greater barrier to competitive entry. Thus, equating capitalist movement with ever greater social possibilities requires a great deal of disregard for real social relations.¹³

In Schumpeter’s vocabulary, change becomes “destruction,” which is then celebrated by adding the adjective “creative.” Not only is *capitalism eternalised*, but the process of *destruction* is also *normalised*. To change is to destroy. That is inevitable. And positive. The horrors perpetrated by the so-called primitive accumulation and by the total competition of human beings—the Hobbesian war of all against all—appear as elements to be celebrated. They contain in-themselves an unstoppable movement. Thus, why expend energy trying to prevent “the perennial gale of creative destruction”?¹⁴ This is obviously a rhetorical question. Schumpeter’s rhetoric eternalises capitalism and turns precisely the argument upside down against those who criticise capitalism because they are failing to understand this eternal dynamic and thus absolutising a merely momentary situation. Schumpeter calls for the apprehension of history to avoid historical reality, thus eternalising a state of affairs conceived by his theory. One ought not to simply recognise the eternal capitalist creative destruction but glorify its beauty as well.

12 Joseph A Schumpeter, *Capitalism , Socialism, Democracy* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 82.

13 As already stated, there are vast bodies of literature concerning the concentration of political-economic power and wealth. Not only capitalist critics are denouncing the problems of such concentration of power but even a great deal of elite ideologues is warning against the malaise of monopolistic capitalism and the instability it brings to capitalism as a whole.

14 Schumpeter, *Capitalism , Socialism, Democracy*, 84.

GLOBAL CATASTROPHE FROM WITHIN: PARADOXICAL (LACK OF) ACTION

IN WHAT COULD BE at first seen as a philosophical cry for collective action, Peter Sloterdijk draws a reflection on Maria Rainer Rilke's sonnet *Archaischer Torso Apollos* where the exhortation "Du mußt dein Leben ändern"¹ emphasizes the need for change in one's life. According to him, this cry for action aims beyond what he identifies as *Hochkultur*, namely, "high culture means nothing more than a system for reproducing hyperbolic or acrobatic functions in retreats for elites—whose general form appears in an ethics of stabilised improbability."² The monumental sum of crises—social, economic, political, ecological, etc.—that are taking place simultaneously could be translated into what Sloterdijk calls *globale Katastrophe*; therefore, the call for transformation beyond such state of what I call *perpetual present* not only seems imperative but also both claims appear at first sight to be consonant with one another.

Nonetheless, the core of what Sloterdijk emphasises differs greatly from the ongoing critique this book is putting forward. He states:

Since the global catastrophe began its partial unveiling, a new guise of the absolute imperative has been in the world, addressed under the form of a sharp exhortation to all and to none: Change your life! Otherwise, sooner or later, the full revelation will demonstrate to you what you have missed in the time of omens!³

He is thus following a principle of individual change while acknowledging a "global catastrophe." However, does action, if not political, or if simply idealised, quickly become opaque and/or fruitless? Sloterdijk seems to fail to grasp this (non-essentialist) ontological condition, call-

1 Peter Sloterdijk, *Du Mußt Dein Leben Ändern: Über Anthropotechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 40.

2 Ibid., p. 426.

3 Ibid., p. 702.

ing for atomistic change, and thus ends up reproducing the depoliticised *perpetual present*.

Political action is imperative to drive social change in determined directions. It consists of both individual and collective actions. The interchangeability of both of these forces is so intertwined that people are often unable to understand the role of each during and within any process of change. Some consider individual action what drives social change—let us call them “singular individuals”—while others will wait for collective forces alone to propel transformation—let us name them the “waiters.”

These (non-dialectical) binary views from both the “waiters” and the “singular individuals” are misguided to the extent that they inevitably miss the immediate relation between them. The “waiters” will argue that society urgently calls for a transformation and that they will join this transformative process as soon as it starts. Alternatively, the “singular individuals” won’t wait for a transformative process; they take matters into their own hands and claim “when everyone else acts as I do, then the world will be a better place.”

One central paradox of the waiters consists of the fact that they often do recognise the urgency to alter the way we live—and that is one of their central claims—on the other hand, the catastrophes professed by them are not met with counteractions. How to reconcile the acknowledgment that there can be an imminent catastrophe with countermeasures just on credit—namely, countermeasures aimed to be started first in the future (or rather in an uncertain, maybe already doomed, future)? How can one only tomorrow start to face the perils of today? How can one speak about the fact there is not going to be a tomorrow due to social and natural collapses and simultaneously promise to administer solutions to these very problems when “the time comes” or after the movement has started? This means, shall one join it when it is already too late?

Conversely, the actions from the “singular individuals” are not less paradoxical; the urgency of social problems met by their engagements faces a *cul-de-sac* (or plainly, a dead-end) because while the confrontation of social problems calls for collective action, the atomistic model remains a prisoner of moral self-satisfaction—“at least I did something about it”—not realising one is trying to put down the fire of a burning

house with water from a single glass. The individualistic so-called ethical consumption and behaviour not only become trapped by an atomistic morality, claiming knowledge of social truth and the common good through the lens of a “scientific” model or individual perception, but they also create social appeasement, since the individuals who perceive social harm to such an extent that they act against it end up legitimising the problem, as fate should take care of the problems, namely, also a solution on credit—again “when everyone else acts as I do, then the world will be a better place.”

What is central is that the “waiters” do not grasp that there is no action to come in the future, action is built in the present—and here I must emphasise the importance of learning from theory and history for a more effective, conscious action, being imperative that the past, the present and the future be regarded as three different moments of a (historical) process. Action on credit is identical to no action. The potential of doing something is not equal to doing something. The possibility (alternatively, the potentiality) needs action to be transformed into reality. The “waiters” are waiting for the train of history to arrive to get in and on with the process of transformation. However, change is something ontologically immanent, it happens whether one wants it or not, change is the most basic principle of nature; thus, the best one can do is take part in the process of transformation to help bring about these changes. It does not matter if one believes either in the liberal bourgeois electoral system or in a socialist revolutionary process because neither can work successfully if people do not engage. Heaven will not fall on earth; it is up to people to organise and create collective forces of transformation.

Then again, “singular individuals” do not understand the relationship between quantity and quality, and that the sum of individuals does not make the whole as in mathematics (“the order of factors does not change the result”). Beyond pure abstract thinking, the specific relations determine not only the result but also the content of the body. Singular individualistic actions are not in any fashion the same as an organised social body, or simply as the direct relation among individuals. The act of consumption for the sake of individualistic needs is not the same as the act of production or even the act of consumption within a process of production and reproduction; thus, it remains refrained from collective forces. Analogously, to put the fire down of a burning house, the most

effective way is through collective action by means of division of labour (or of tasks). This requires common goals and strategies; it also requires working together, communicating, and collaborating. From the perspective of the individual, the effort of collective action may appear greater than individual action; however, the results one can achieve within a collective-social frame are exponentially grander—much grander.

Beyond these two binaries of ideologised capitalist political attitudes and towards a post-capitalist social ethos, unlike the “waiters,” one must indeed take action now, participate, organise, there is no future on credit; instead, we build it in everyday life, here and now. However, unlike the “singular individuals” one needs to create and be part of a social sphere without waiting for heaven to fall on earth and others to copy “my personal ethos” (as if it were a marketing brand); political relations and action require both commitment and compromise, social relations are not the mere aggregate of individuals—like the capitalist elite and its courtiers and apologists postulate—but transformative fluid relations among them.

THE MYTHOLOGISATION OF THE MYTH

TWO DIFFERENT MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES give us some representation of the problem of the eternisation of capitalism: namely, the *perpetual present*. For even if Albert Camus sought a way for Sisyphus¹ to overcome his eternal punishment,² in reality, Sisyphus never conquers his destiny, which is still being determined by the Gods, for if he does not submit to the humiliation of his punishment, for if he holds such a given destiny with pride, then he lives the blindest form of the *perpetual present*, in other words, decoupling the objective conditions in which he finds himself from the subjective condition he creates in his head: his victory appears as a mere act of *delirium*. The concrete effect of the subjective negation of one's own objective reality has a practical effect that can be represented in the punishment of Tantalus, where every action towards his goal places him further away from it.³

1 "Aye, and I saw Sisyphus in violent torment, seeking to raise a monstrous stone with both his hands. Verily he would brace himself with hands and feet, and thrust the stone toward the crest of a hill, but as often as he was about to heave it over the top, the weight would turn it back, and then down again to the plain would come rolling the ruthless stone. But he would strain again and thrust it back, and the sweat flowed down from his limbs, and dust rose up from his head." (Homer, *The Odyssey* (Cambridge (Massachusetts), London (England): Harvard University Press, William Heinemann Ltd, 1919), 429.)

2 Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).

3 "Aye, and I saw Tantalus in violent torment, standing in a pool, and the water came high unto his chin. He seemed as one athirst, but could not take and drink; for as often as that old man stooped down, eager to drink, so often would the water be swallowed up and vanish away, and at his feet the black earth would appear, for some god made all dry. And trees, high and leafy, let stream their fruits above his head, pears, and pomegranates, and apple trees with their bright fruit, and sweet figs, and luxuriant olives. But as often as that old man would reach out toward these, to clutch them with his hands, the wind would toss them to the shadowy clouds." (Homer, *The Odyssey*, 427, 429.)

This problematic within Camus's portrait of Sisyphus has already been an element of my considerations elsewhere and in greater detail, when providing a reflection on the ontological categories of death and dying, specifically the question of suicide;⁴ consequently, now, I simply try to attain the social-political content embedded in what I call the *mythologisation of the myth*.

If I propose the following action: "To grope for oneself in the darkness in search of his own shadow,"⁵ then this indicates a problem of multiple ontological dimensions. In themselves, each category has an ontological existence and characterises well-known contingencies. However, this brief figurative allegory illustrates a representative and relevant problem of everyday life. Every person knows how to grope for him- or herself, regardless if in the darkness or in well-lit situations, independent if underwater or under the cloth of some fabric or even the immediate touch of one's bare skin; one gropes for him- or herself sometimes in an aware fashion, other times willingly with a certain purpose; there are also moments, when one gropes for him- or herself as a reflex, either arising out of pain or itch. Furthermore, for every person who can see light, he or she is also able to perceive its absence, and the existence of light produces a shadow, even if one cannot see it, for the latter can be hidden or "clothed behind" the beams of a different source of light. In this sense, the allegory of searching for his own shadow in the darkness may seem reasonable when one disregards the ontological notion of totality.

The power of any myth does not lie in its absurdity but rather in its elements of immediate reality or that at least resemble it, providing a simulacrum. Containing or simply being similar enough to reality is imperative if a myth is to attain some truth within a given social sphere; thus, Camus's pledge to solve Sisyphus's punishment with the enactment of the idea is not only highly comprehensible but also exceptionally se-

4 João Romeiro Hermeto, 'A Philosophical and Literary Reflection on Death and Dying,' *Seculum* 01/2020 (12 March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2478/saec-2020-0001>.

5 If this image has been already conceived by another person, then I am not aware. I am not claiming originality, this idea simply arose from a conversation with a good friend of mine Leonie Mayer about the creation of paradoxical musical images. Analogous, yet different, would be to contemplate the image of "searching the shadow of a determined music tone."

ductive. For every day, billions of people are faced not simply with many quarrels among themselves but rather the reality of survival within their contemporary frames of social power and domination. How comforting when one feels his or her pain recognised? How reassuring it is when after such recognition, the source of a problem is (allegedly) revealed? Moreover, how hopeful it is when a pledge to overcome such a problem is proposed as an assured and simple solution? One cannot underestimate the power of the mystification of reality that the myth is set to bridge by providing an abridgement of its complexity.

The force and strength of power—or rather of the one who detains it—does not simply consist of a state of fear or the anxiety of being afflicted by external violence; its seduction and promises of a better tomorrow also play a not inconsiderable role in the movement of its legitimation as a form of self-legitimation. The reach of power can be extended as far and as long as such acts of recognition can still touch the souls and hearts of people. Power is a tool of persuasion, convincement, the power of power consists of not being actualised, of being and remaining a *δύναμις*,⁶ waiting to be unleashed but never having its energy (fully) dispersed. For as long as such acts of recognition become embedded within “the other,” they attain a force to create motion and reach the outskirts of communities, determining some crucial vectors of their motions of livelihood: how they ought to organise, structure themselves, behave, and which set values they should follow.

In this sense, how reassuring it is to learn from Camus that, in a world of Gods, one can simply escape their eternal punishments by the simple power of one’s own will. This means that in a world of human domination, it must be even easier to reconquer one’s own fate by the power of one’s own mind and will.

Of course, the fact that the punishment that Camus postulates to overcome in his head—or rather in Sisyphus’s—continues to be perpetrated appears now simply irrelevant. In this context, one’s own will creates its own destiny; it assures the self of being in control of his or her own fate: the will—not God—becomes the master of the self. In its own context, the mind appears almighty. Such power is proclaimed to suffice in the task of overcoming the punishment of Gods; thus, the world of

6 Ed. Note: See fn. 5 on p. 19.

men (patriarchy) should not stand a chance against the power of one's own will.

In these mythologisations, willing and knowing gain a self-propelling impetus; not only do they appear to gain an ontological priority over objective reality but expurgate any trace of objectivity from within and without. It is no longer Schopenhauer's announced *world as will and representation* but rather the annihilation and sacrifice of the totality of the world for the salvation of the self. It is enough to know what a shadow is, it suffices to want to feel it, even if a shadow cannot be touched, even if in the darkness there is no shadow at all. The will and knowledge as elements in themselves become the *detotalised totality*, categories that claim to become and to be totalities in-themselves while disregarding any sign of a totality which represents more than the self. Knowing that darkness and shadow exist, and willing to touch what cannot be touched become truth in-themselves, indispensable, unconditional, and indisputable: the power of the myth.

The myth no longer represents a means to (help) understand reality, to give some representation to concrete difficulties and, correspondingly, their subjective apprehensions. For instance, the notion of the *oxymoron* becomes not simply commonplace in language, but it loses altogether its meanings and capacities to illustrate problems that both society and individuals should reflect upon in order to find practical solutions for concrete problems. In Western societies, the fetishism of *capitalist democracy* goes beyond the myth of the oxymoron these two words constitutes. Perhaps so much so that it would require an explanation of what should be obvious. As capitalism is by definition not a democratic form of social relation but rather a relation of domination, expropriation, and appropriation, the combination of these two concepts represents the mythologisation of the myth, namely, they contain stories of self-celebration and representation that legitimate and justify themselves as truth, albeit ahistorical and de-ontologised, banning not only their genealogical process but also any understanding of the present form of capitalism.

Striving for democracy in and with capitalism should obviously mean one of the following. *Either* one goes back to the concept and poses again the question regarding the very meaning of democracy in order to be able to accommodate capitalist ruling. Thus, one would see

the dictatorship of the people translated into the dictatorship of capital, since in capitalism, it is the capitalist class who appears to constitute the people. *Alternatively*, one could look into the original myths of Sisyphus and Tantalus to learn that repeating the same action over and over again and within the same context does not produce different results. Hence, one would understand that one cannot insist on producing a democracy as the rule of the people, while the rule of the capitalist elite holds political-economic power. First, one should strive for society to change the frame of social-political organisation and production and reproduction of life at a structural, systemic level.

However, insofar as the collective mind has been and remains colonised, thus prevailing a collective historical amnesia, the mythologised myth returns to the order of the day as if it constituted in-itself an ontological element of reality. Capitalist rule disappears as a dominant social force, re-emerging as a normalised element of reality. Capitalism thus becomes eternalised in such a fashion that every attempt to comprehend its limits and promote structural changes beyond it backlashes as a form of its affirmation. Capitalism is not understood as a totality of social relations but rather as a given structure, where partial elements are allowed to be inquired but never the entirety of this so-called structure since the mythologisation of the myth has banished any understanding of that which may diverge from itself.

The myth mythologises itself, producing a de-ontologised ontology, namely, a double false perception, where the totality of capitalist social relations becomes absolute, disappearing from the social subjective perception, and at the same time, singular phenomena transcend their historical ontological existence, gaining an independent reality. Thus, (paraphrasing Fredrik Jameson, already quoted) within this frame, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.



ETERNISATION OF CAPITALISM

LEFTHAND, up is down, in is out, etc. The capitalist necessity to reproduce itself erodes the subjective perception that accounts for the apprehension of the ongoing reality and its conflicts. This need arises and becomes accentuated as the contradictions produced by capitalism convert into an impediment to its process of reproduction. Among them, there are those embedded in capitalism and others that first emerge in correspondence to specific phases of capital—as historical capitalist relations are invariably always changing as anything in reality, and I emphatically repeat: change is the most essential principle in nature.

Contemporary capitalism appears to enter a new phase. This is, however, part of a larger movement of structural crisis that has become an on-going feature of capitalism since the 1970s. Such a crisis that initiated with the maturation and overaccumulation of capitalism in Western postwar economies appears in different forms. The US-American apparent abrupt exit and break from the Bretton Woods System represented an important symptom of the deepening of the crisis that was yet to completely reveal its true being. Accordingly, the further and rapid financialisation of the capitalist economy only made Lenin's critique from 1916 more topical, revealing that capitalism had long abandoned a competitive phase metamorphosing towards a monopolistic one.

It is becoming common sense that along with the structural crisis, some structural changes occurred that enabled what some would call neoliberal capitalism. This again reveals a misconception and eternisation of capitalist relations, as it fails to grasp the essence of the neoliberal strategy. Additionally, claiming the death of neoliberalism reveals in-itself its mythologisation, this means that this central element of neoliberal ideology is unknowingly appropriated and replicated by its critics. The mystical critique is itself proof that neoliberalism is not only not dead but also very much embedded within our social relations and understandings

about it.

Neoliberalism is neither a phase of capitalism nor merely a set of theories, but rather a strategy of capitalist domination. Its content varies according to concrete situations. Its core replicates classic strategies of domination, in addition to clear examples of modern literature created for such intentions, such as Gene Sharp's manual to promote regime change for governments favouring the interests of Western capitalist elites called *From Dictatorship to Democracy* and the US military's *Shock and Awe* doctrine, as its subtitle reveals: to *Achieving Rapid Dominance*, or one might simply read Sun Tzu's millenary wisdom to better understand neoliberal features. Confronting society with not only the struggle of classes but—as Warren Buffett called it—*class warfare*, the political-economic elites proclaimed the end of the struggle of classes reducing all systemic problems to an atomic or even subatomic layer, since social distresses went through a change of the postmodern sorrows over the individual to a deeper angst about individualist *concerns* of each individual. Thus, not only identity became pivotal in Western political debate but also the subjective feeling of each individual claiming a private identity. Back to Sun Tzu in order to grasp the essence of neoliberal strategy. He clearly announced that “every war is based on deception”; thus, neoliberal rule constantly seeks to divert attention from any systemic social problem. The intellectual and artistic elites were—as Frances Stonor Saunders brilliantly revealed—captured by the capitalist forces, unknowingly renouncing their values, tactics, organisations, etc. Again, neoliberal domination succeeded in implementing Sun Tzu's teachings, since the adversarial forces, instead of being crushed, were gently captured, subsuming and capitulating without a fight against their rulers: Sun Tzu states, “To get a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the supreme ability. Subduing the enemy without fighting is the supreme ability.” He continues: “thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy,” “the second best is to undo his alliances,” and finally, “the third best is to attack his army.”¹ Neoliberalism has captured anti-capitalist intelligentsia and integrated it into its practice; it has defeated the anti-capitalist set of beliefs dismantling its strategies; and it has attacked its army—the workers—home and abroad, making them feeble and incapable of action.

1 Sun Tzu, *A Arte Da Guerra* (Köln: Evergreen, 2007).

It was not the beginning of the 1970s or the end of the 1960s that gave way to neoliberal strategy. The 1938 Walter Lippmann's colloquium and, subsequently, the Mont Pèlerin Society represented its real beginning.² As Foucault has shown, the post-World War II reconstruction of Europe, especially Germany, was already filled with multiple elements of neoliberal doctrine.³ The notion that social democracy was part of some Keynesian Left-wing policy—although this has become common sense—has little resonance and resemblance with historical reality. Distilled from anti-capitalist claims, Keynesian social democracy represented the *temporary compromise* by the power elites, which was represented by Lord John Maynard Keynes, while already enabling the practical introduction of many neoliberal elements and simultaneously causing the debacle of any socialist claims and representations that remained socially relevant. This is a perfect example in-itself of the destruction and reshaping of cultural memory, the very neoliberal strategy of creating its own narrative and appropriation of language—clearly seen in the notion of Disaster Capitalism⁴—appears as not only the result of an *a posteriori* appropriation of cultural memory but also its very own *Erscheinungsform* ['manifestations'] represents a distortion of our collective memory (to a large extent, so does conservative Keynesian economics, which became widely accepted as Left-wing socio-economic policy). Thus, neoliberal rule not only diverges and conceals the consequences of their practical actions but also the very understanding of what they are and represent. For instance, the achievement of neoliberal rhetoric is simply spectacular, as it normalises capitalism and deviates itself and capitalism from any critique and criticism; thus, the essence of capitalist relations, which emerges from its specific social property relations,⁵ is lost, and the fo-

2 Bernhard Walpen, *Die Offenen Feinde Und Ihre Gesellschaft: Eine Hegemonie-theoretische Studie Zur Mont Pèlerin Society, Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11), 951–952. (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2004).

3 Michel Foucault, *Naissance de La Biopolitique: Cours Au Collège de France (1978-1979)* (Seuil Gallimard, 2004).

4 Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*; Antony Loewenstein, *Disaster Capitalism: Making a Killing out of Catastrophe* (London, New York: Verso, 2017).

5 Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*.

cus remains solely on appearances.⁶ Neoliberal celebration of capitalism is advanced with a simultaneous disappearance of any understanding of (what) capitalism (is).

In many senses and instances, capitalist critique appears so integrated to their objects of critique that the differentiation of a pure capitalism from a contaminated one emerges in some cases explicitly—such as Naomi Klein’s idealist understanding of the possibility of a fettered capitalism in contrast to an unfettered one—or in many other cases where qualifications are given (what I ironically call *adjective capitalism*) in such a form that one must imagine the possibility of a form without such qualifications. One often hears or reads not only about *disaster capitalism* but also about *surveillance capitalism*, *monopoly capitalism*, *state capitalism*, *capitalist absolutism*, *predatory capitalism*, etc. Imagine if one tried to make the claim of distinguishing between *disaster slavery* and *slavery*? Is slavery not always a disaster? Of course, this depends on the perspective or on one’s set of socio-political values. During such an era, for many classes of people, such as slave owners, slave traders, government officials, etc., slavery was not a disaster, and it could even be claimed that a few slaves with privileges held such a view.

The qualification of the mode of production creates the illusion that another version without such (usually negative) qualification is possible; thus, it mystifies the embedded social relations, and the central questions of its emergence and reproduction lose relevance. On the other hand, neoliberal strategies do this in an even more programmatic fashion. They take general concepts and endow them with positive qualifications. When making self-references, the terms “free,” “freedom,” “agency,” “individuality,” etc., are usually put forward indiscriminately. Thus, by fostering the irrational belief in, for instance, a “free society,” simultaneously, any society which does not qualify as a so-called “free society” appears *instead as an unfree* one, by means of negative dialectics. The neoliberal rule has fostered and controlled entire countries through dictatorships, *coup d’état*, carnages, and undemocratic processes, also waging and perpetrating uncountable wars—military, political, economic, etc., all in the name of “freedom” and “democracy,” as if the term in-itself contained a blessing for illegal actions, murders, destruction, and pillage, as if the concepts of

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981); Debord, *La Société Du Spectacle*.

“freedom” and “democracy” had the power to turn each of their brutal and barbaric actions into their opposite. Accordingly, the appropriation of language and collective memory created the mystification of *the other*. Everything that differs from such practices, namely, those self-identified and self-celebrated as “free” and “democratic,” were *a priori* negative and, therefore, must be combated.

Neoliberalism has been present since 1938 in many different shapes and forms, but its content is determined precisely by its lack of content, which means that the content does not represent any substance but rather an end-it-itself; the goal is simply the perpetuation of a system of human and natural exploitation and destruction. Walter Lippmann, Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Eucken, Milton Friedman, Ayn Rand, Karl Popper, Michael Polanyi, Jeffrey Sachs, Daron Acemoglu, James A. Robinson, Hernando de Soto, etc., consolidated an important mystification that had begun during the Romantic period of the 19th century and was further developed by *Lebensphilosophie* and irrationalism. Leaning on the teachings of Bernhard Walpen, neoliberal discourse contains two dominant facets: on the one hand, it is apocalyptic, and on the other, it is eschatological. The former expresses an immanent warning against “collectivism,” as if collective social arrangements were alien and contrary to human nature. Opposing this alleged danger, the latter announces the freedom of liberalism “because ‘the will to freedom celebrates eternal rebirth in every individual who uses his gifts and upholds his human nature.’”⁷

The neoliberal apocalyptic discourse appears to reveal the apotheosis of a mythological ontology. By expelling collectivist social arrangements from human relations, which are presented as being irreconcilable with nature, neoliberal ideology solidifies the abstraction of the individual above and beyond society—which, starting in the 1980s and thereafter would gain great impetus—thus consolidating the separation between individual and society. The former presented inextricable as good, the latter appearing immanently as a menace to every singular individual, including those highly dependent on the welfare state for their existence. Such mythological character expels the ontology of the social-being,

7 Walter Lippmann, *Die Gesellschaft freier Menschen*, 493. (Bern: 1945). Quoted in: Walpen, *Die Offenen Feinde Und Ihre Gesellschaft: Eine Hegemonietheoretische Studie Zur Mont Pèlerin Society*, 54.

where historically individuals emerged out of the complexities and possibilities enabled by social arrangements, where singular individuals in relation to each other, through the division of labour, created structures, organisation, and configuration inexistent in nature (e.g., language and objective knowledge). Insofar as the [neoliberal] individual arises out of thin air, also representing the abstraction from everything except himself, then the naturalisation and eternisation of this mythology simultaneously epitomise the death of the world and the eternisation of the individual as the perfect expression of human nature. The mystical and religious character involving the mythological neoliberal individual are well exemplified in the figures of—what Milton Friedman called—the “new faith” of “neo-liberalism,”⁸ or—in Walter Lippmann’s *prophesy*—through “the renaissance of liberalism,” to which he adds “may be regarded as assured” but does not mean it “must come in our own time.”⁹

The mystic neoliberal mythology concerning the free individual could also be summarised by an “intellectual Frankenstein,” namely, assembling and stitching together a vulgar notion of Adam Smith with an even more superficial take on Anarchism and finally adding to it Max Stirner’s religious claim of the existence of such a pure egoistic individual, who is his own creator (“*Selbstschöpfer*”).¹⁰ While Adam Smith’s preoccupation was society, morality, and customs, according to him, the notion of markets enables society to prevent private vices from gaining a broader social dimension; thus personal egoism is not thought as positive for the sake of the singular individual but rather for society a whole; however, his writing concerning the *Wealth of Nations*¹¹ is often taken not only out of its own context but hardly ever understood within the moral tradition that Smith himself and others, such as David Hume, represented.¹² Anarchists well-known repulsion of state power can gain a grotesque figure

8 Milton Friedman, ‘Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects’ (Oslo: Fermand, 1951), <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/57816/neoliberalism-and-its-prospects>.

9 Walter Lippmann, *An Inquiry into the Principles of The Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), 207, 210.

10 Max Stirner, *Der Einzige Und Sein Eigentum* (Hamburg: Tredition Classics, 2012), 33.

11 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2012).

12 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (São Paulo: MetaLibri, 2006).

when overstretched by neoliberalism. The doctrine put forward by the latter delegitimises the state in general to a great extent, with little regard to the role it plays as the mediation of elite's power over subordinate classes. Neoliberal discourse has been proven spectacularly disingenuous in the face of neoliberal practices, which have been proven much more far-reaching and influential than those examined by Foucault. The latter revealed that Keynesian social democracy created all the conditions necessary for the neoliberal power relations of exploitation. Since the 1960s, nevertheless, concrete "untainted" neoliberal experiments have been promoted throughout the globe by means of violence, *coup d'états*, human death, social and environmental destruction, etc. Even bourgeois discourse started to give representation to those phenomena, culminating in Naomi Klein's moralist term *disaster capitalism*. Insofar as the neoliberal doctrine delegitimises the state, it then takes over the whole state structure, amalgamating a great transfer of wealth from the public sector to the private sector, while destroying the existing auxiliary apparatus which was built to manage capitalist precarity, namely, the reality of the vast majority of people throughout the globe. In this manner, the ideology present in such practices appears extremely short-sighted, as it destroys a relevant portion of the means of its own power and, accordingly, legitimacy.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

THIS BOOK HAS PRESENTED an introductory glance at a broader social problematic, namely, a phenomenological glimmer of the broader process of *historical amnesia* found in contemporary capitalist societies. However, precisely because of the existence of such historical amnesia, there was the methodological necessity to reveal the shortcomings of contemporary social critique, where (a) it often not only assumes what it needs to explain but also (b), instead of providing a differentiation of capitalist relations that can better help to understand the totality of capitalism in its current *Erscheinungsform* ['manifestations'], ends up creating a further legitimacy of capitalist relations of exploitation by mystifying the already distorted cultural memory. In other words, irrationalism not only becomes a method of domination but also is perpetrated by those claiming to expose elite power.

This study on phenomenology is consequently important because a *belief* in the particular and partial unveiling of capitalist problems *remains* a central pillar of contemporary academic, political and activist works and actions. The present book shows that at the end of each of these unitary, atomised discussions and investigations concerning capitalist social power relations lies a *cul-de-sac* because idealism is their methodological foundation. Ideal concepts gain independence, while social objective reality composed by a totality of social relations is overlooked. Consequently, most contemporary intellectual works are futile attempts to promote social change. In reality, they are successful in achieving the opposite intention, that is, they bestow legitimacy upon capitalism. Hence, for such an impasse to be solved, one needs—as Marx would say—to make such opposition between the particular and the universal impossible. It is first imperative to understand the ontological priority of material reality and second the unrestricted totality composed dialectically by universal and particular.

Nonetheless, this book presents a shortcoming, as it is limited in nature. It does not and cannot provide the required analysis of the general conditions that yield both the destruction of memory and historical amnesia. However, the awareness of such a limitation also represents the key to opening the door for a richer, deeper, and broader critique of the capitalist transformation of collective memory. The investigation that shall follow must first present the general form and conditions of such relations of power, then, as a second step but still within the same analysis, reveal how these general conditions are expressed and contained in particular forms, enabling us to differentiate between general laws (tendencies) and the idiosyncrasies contained in these particular relations of power.

ÉPILOGUE (JANUARY 2024)

WHILE WAITING for this essay to become a short book, I have been working on additional book projects. Besides the constant research these projects entail, incessant reflection also occurs, either active or passive. While I was lying in bed a few nights ago, I remembered some reactions of two scholars during a colloquium discussion at the Institut für Philosophie (at Freie Universität Berlin) in 2021 about a very premature and broadly incomplete version of the ideas herein contained, in which they expressed the impression that my text was *pessimistic* and *angry*. Now that the text is finished, I would like to briefly address these two points not because I might owe explanations to anyone but because other people may be similarly struck and, thus, might share their concerns.

I hope this book has made abundantly clear how intellectuals and academics often hover above reality, distancing themselves from society and people's everyday lives.¹ Their theoretical endeavours can be called

1 This problem is not an exclusive problem of our day and age; it remains, nonetheless, a vital problem. The exchange of such accusations has been a matter of continuous contest among intellectuals of different political factions. In the attempt to save feudalism from universalism pledged by the French enlightenment and by German idealism that aimed for social relations beyond the privileges of particular classes and ranks, reactionaries, such as Burke, Haym, Nietzsche, etc., invoked "historicisation" against humanitarian anti-historical abstractions. Needless to say, this represented not invoking history as a process of transformation but as an eternal, natural given reality that should not and could not be contested. On the other hand, this conservative nominalism invokes an abstract idea of an individual or singular identity detached from any socio-historical totality, detached from an ontological reality of socio-economic production and reproduction, detached from the notion of the human species, thus, ironically, hovering themselves above and beyond reality. (See Domenico Losurdo, *A Hipocondria Da Antipolítica: História e Atualidade Na Análise de Hegel* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 2014); *Losurdo, Nietzsche, Il Ribelle Aristocratico*: Biografia Intellettuale e Bilancio Critico.)

anything but *critique*. For what is the pathos of *critique*? What is its basis? What is its goal?

Critique is the product of indignation. The rejection of the state of things as “they are,” or, as I called it, *the perpetual present*. The *perpetual present* is how dominant elites continually try to portrait reality in order to sustain their dominant *status quo*. The *critique* aims to transform and not embellish a given reality; its *sine qua non* is to understand the limits of the present and concrete reality in its tendencies, with the purpose of transforming it with some degree of awareness. The dialectical character is unmistakable, for while concrete reality frames the *critique*, it is the *critique* that can provide the approximated correct intellectual apprehension of reality.² For this reason, while reality moves, mutates, and transforms itself, intellectual appropriation of reality must adapt in order to yield a somewhat coherent knowledge of both social and natural existences. This intellectual endeavour fosters the shaping of reality, further transforming it and enabling an even greater dynamism.

For this reason, communism cannot be an acritical ideal, it is and must remain in movement and action; it must carry the pathos of critique and self-critique. “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 *actual* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”³ And it is on this basis that Chairman Mao Tse-Tung emphasised: “contradiction within the Communist Party is resolved by the method of criticism and self-criticism.”⁴

2 Needless to say, all intellectual labour can potentially foster the intentional transformation of reality. However, non-dialectical methods of most forms of knowledge often fall short of capacity for actualisation because they remain static in absolutised concepts in-themselves, while actual reality does not “respect” such intellectual universalisation and moves on with the process of transformation. (For a more detailed assessment of this topic, see: Hermeto, *The Paradox of Intellectual Property in Capitalism*.)

3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Die Deutsche Ideologie: Kritik Der Neuesten Deutschen Philosophie in Ihren Repräsentanten Feuerbach, B. Bauer Und Stirner, Und Des Deutschen Sozialismus in Seinen Verschiedenen Propheten,’ in *MEW Band 03* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1978), 35. English translation available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>.

4 Mao Tse-Tung, *On Practice and Contradiction* (London, New York: Verso,

Therefore, destroying illusions does not entail/imply any pessimism; pessimism is the product of passive or active surrender, of taking reality as an unavoidable and inescapable given burden, of an eternal natural reality not prone or susceptible to change. The entire effort of this book has been to destroy the illusions of the intelligentsia, which produces and reproduces the ideology of the *perpetual present*.

Destroying illusions is, thus, one of the fundamental pillars for changing reality. The capitalist academic illusion is such that it does not understand that change occurs in and throughout both natural and social processes. And change is further and invariably catalysed by a sequence of social relationships and events. The *critique* is essential to accentuate human social volition beyond the given precepts of nature. The *critique* cannot apologise because each catalysing moment can represent the accelerating particle that can trigger a process of change, the real foundations of which are undermined and transformed as part of an irreversible process. On the other hand, the *blasé criticism of status quo* intelligentsia, which, in the face of hunger, misery, immigration, wars, exploitation, destitution, dispossession, etc., remains cold and indifferent, high above in its ivory tower, will never represent a form of *critique*, but will instead remain a legitimising element of the dominant order, in our contemporary society of *capital*.



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Written between 2021 and 2025 in Berlin and Pavia, JOÃO ROMEIRO HERMETO's *Phenomenology of the Capitalist Eternisation* develops a Marxist process-ontological critique of contemporary capitalist consciousness. Beginning from his postdoctoral research at Freie Universität Berlin, Hermeto identifies the “perpetual present” as capitalism’s fundamental mode of temporal domination—an ahistorical social condition that disables transformation by destroying collective memory. Through close readings of philosophical, aesthetic, and ideological expressions of the current epoch, he analyzes how culture and thought are reshaped to fit capital’s eternal now.

Engaging thinkers from Marx, Hegel, and Lukács to Debord, Losurdo, and Jameson, Hermeto argues that capitalism reproduces itself by colonizing temporality—by replacing historical consciousness with a constant spectacle of the present. The book ranges from the philosophy of art and media to political theology, ecology, and intellectual property as mechanisms of control over knowledge production. At once philosophical and political, this study is a call to recover a dialectical sense of history—to reignite the capacity for collective imagination and social change within a world that declares itself eternal.

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