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In 2003, I translated Brecht's Me-ti. The Book of Changes into Russian. Me-ti is a slightly distorted name that belongs to the ancient Chinese philosopher and politician Mo-Dzi (Mo Di; 479-400 BCE), while The Book of Changes (I-Ching) is the name of a classical tractate written in the 8th to 7th century BCE, which was subsequently reused by many ancient Chinese thinkers.

Brecht's text is an anthology of fables and aphorisms. He uses Chinese names, realia and plots, but actually, he addresses the most burning issues of the 1930th. Me-Ti is divided into five sections. The first of these is dedicated to philosophy, the second to problems of morality, the third to a critique of capitalist society, the fourth to the theory of revolution, and the fifth to the Soviet Union, Stalin, and Stalinism. Even though this book of prose by Brecht was never finalized and only appeared posthumously, there are good reasons to assume that it is in Me-Ti that Brecht expounded his project for humanity, his anthropology of the leftist intellectual, and his practical philosophy as a revolutionary. It is appropriate to focus on a few moments in Me-Ti that may not be completely clear to today's reader, but that are very important to understanding the text.

The first part of Me-Ti is called **"The Book of the Great Method,"** and in it, Brecht develops his interpretation of Marxism. From the name of this book it is already obvious that its author emphasized the methodological essence of Marxist philosophy in the wake of Lenin, who regarded the dialectical method "the living soul of Marxism." Correspondingly, Brecht decisively rejects any interpretation of philosophy as metaphysics or knowledge of pure concepts, and launches a vehement attacks on such practioners:

"With words alone, without the aid of experiments, they want to force a decision with consequences to behavior. All they try to do is to bring a heap of words into sequences that create a kind of inevitability - the meaning of the words used does not change, and certain rules of sequence always still apply - in saying that everything or nothing is cognizable." [1]

It is only natural that in the light of Brecht's clearly anti-metaphysical position, he also cannot brook any attempts at Marxist Naturphilosophie. For Brecht, as for Georg Lukacs, as mutandis mutandi, for Karl Korsch, the Marxist dialectic only works in social and historical dimensions of reality:

"Me-Ti taught: Thinking is a form of behavior of people to other people. It is far less concerned with the rest of nature; because man only reaches nature through a detour via man. One must find the people from or to whom thoughts travel; only then will their effectuality be understood." [2]

It follows that Brecht did not see Marx, Engels, and Lenin as the intellectual practioners of something akin to a philosophy of nature. Instead, he understood Engels' famous Dialectics of Nature as metaphor.

"Some claim that the classics founded a philosophy of nature. They gave some hints on how to think about this or that, but mainly it was human nature that preoccupied them. Nonetheless Master Eh-Fu said some instructive things about nature. He showed the workers that there are revolutions in nature too, so that one can see revolution as something quite natural. (...) Master Eh-Fu took the principles of the contemplation of nature and logic that the bourgeoisie had gained through their revolution, and passed them on to the workers, so that they might make a revolution of their own." [3]

Philosophy has no gnoseological access to nature independently of modern science. The latter is present at many places in Me-Ti: Brecht mentions Michaelson's experiments, Einstein's theory of relativity, quantum mechanics and Heysenberg's uncertainty relation, as well as determinism and indeterminism on macro and micro-levels. Brecht respected the theory of science, though he did not see it as a genuine philosophical discipline. For Brecht, on the contrary, Marxist philosophy was neither a science nor a theory of science, but a crucial element of revolutionary practice. The dialectic

of Marx and Lenin, according to Brecht, lives not through the element of philosophizing, but in the element of action, through the real transformation of the world:

"Me-ti said: Thought is something that comes after difficulties and comes before action." (A Definition of Thought. p. 31). This clarifies why Brecht saw Lenin (Mi-En-Leh) and not Plekhanov (Le-Pe) as a great Marxist philosopher: "Many said of Min-eh-leh that he was a great practitioner, while Le-peh was a great philosopher. Me-ti said: Le-peh's practice proved that he was no great philosopher; Mi-en-leh's practice proved that he was a great philosopher. Mi-en-leh was practical in philosophy and philosophical in practice." [4]

The emphasis Brecht places on the unbreakable unity of Marxist philosophy and revolutionary practice is so strong that he actually interprets the Great Method, that is, the dialectic, as a teaching on a dialectical way of life, a dialectical behavior:

"Me-ti said: It is beneficial not only to think according to the Great Method but to live according to the Great Method too. To be at odds with oneself, to force oneself into crises, to turn small changes into large changes etc., that all can not only be observed; it can also be done. One can live with more or less mediations, in more or less contexts. One can aim for or pursue a lasting change of one's own consciousness by changing one's social being. One can help to make state institutions contradictory and capable of development." [5]

This dialectical way of life is perhaps the most important aspect of Bertolt Brecht's project for humanity. In examining the Marxist philosophy presented in The Book of Changes, we should keep in mind that its author is following in the footsteps of his teacher in philosophy, the left Marxist theoretician and communist apostate Karl Korsch, who was to become one of the founders of Western Marxism. (In Me-ti, Korsch appears under the names of "Ko" and "Ka-osh.") Here, I would only like to illuminate two of the many points of convergence in the views of Brecht and Korsch. First of all, in his pioneering work "Marxism and Philosophy," Korsch unambiguously declared that a Marxist philosophy could never exist autonomously from practice. "To accord theory an autonomous existence outside the objective movement of history would obviously be neither materialist nor dialectical in the Hegelian sense; it would simply be an idealist metaphysics." Further on, Korsch continues: "Moreover, the unbreakable interconnection of theory and practice, which formed the most characteristic sign of the first communist version of Marx's materialism, was in no way abolished in the later form of his system." [6] Second, Korsch believed that, it would be unacceptable for Marxist philosophy to accept the criteria customary of science in the epoch of late modernity: "The real contradiction between Marx's scientific socialism and all bourgeois philosophy and sciences consists entirely in the fact that scientific socialism is the theoretical expression of a revolutionary process, which will end with the total abolition of these bourgeois philosophies and sciences, together with the abolition of the material relations that find their ideological expression in them." Brecht was fascinated by Korsch's interpretation of the sciences of modernity as an ideology above which Marxist philosophy would rise, not as a meta-science, but a moment of practice that sublates this science into integral knowledge.

At this point it makes sense to look back at what lies at the center of Brecht's view of humanity. In the second part of Me-ti, the "Book of Experience," there is something like a sketch of "fleeting nature" under the innocent title "The Ideal of a Man in Older Times":

"Keep your head when others are losing it; trust yourself when everybody else doubts you; but allow for their doubts; be able to wait and never tire of waiting; hear lies but don't take part in the lying (...)" [7] and so on. If one looks at this text more closely, one soon finds that it is a prose paraphrase of Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "If...": "IF you can keep your head when all about you // Are losing theirs and blaming it on you, // If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, / But make allowance for their doubting too; // If you can wait and not be tired by waiting, // Or being lied about, don't deal in lies..." [8]

Why did Brecht have to retell Kipling's poem in prose? Brecht was clearly trying to defamiliarize the "ideal of a man of former times" that he saw in Kipling's "If..." It is against this ideal that Brecht sets forth his own communist project for humanity, which the entire "Book of Experience" develops in detail. At the same time, one should realize that he does not appear as an enthusiast of this project, but more as its developer and constructor, much like Engineer Preckl, as Lion Feuchtwanger portrayed him in his novel "Success." (Incidentally, Feuchtwanger also appears in Me-ti under the name of Fe-Khu-Wang). If the French moralists of the Enlightenment believed that "the mind is always the dupe of the heart," in Brecht's case, the heart was always the dupe of the mind.

While reading the "Book of Experience," it sometimes seems that its author agrees fully with something the young Lenin said, who conceded to Werner Sombart that "in Marxism itself there is not a grain of ethics from beginning to end"; theoretically, it subordinates the "ethical standpoint" to the "principle of causality"; in practice it reduces it to the class struggle." [9]

Brecht seems to be saying the same thing: "Ka-Me and Mi-en-leh (Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin - S.Z.) never postulated a doctrine of mores." He quotes Lenin almost literally:

"Mi-en-leh said: we derive our mores from the interests of our struggle against the oppressors and exploiters." [10]

By declaring his full support of a Marxism devoid of any reference to ethical frameworks, however, Brecht simply gains additional arguments in favor of his personal ethical utopia. Brecht dreams of a country that would not need do-gooders, a country without any need for a written ethic. Insofar as the Leninist imperative of the subordination of ethics to causality is concerned, Brecht felt that this thesis was a given of a global historical consensus, in the hope that one day it would not be so.

Brecht's ethical utopia is a red thread that runs through his prose of the 1930th and beyond. One finds it in Stories of Mr. Keuner, in his journals, in his Refugee Conversations and in other texts of the time. In a diary entry dated 19.03.1940, for example, Brecht writes "I am thinking about a small epic called 'Mr. Keuner's Worries,' something a little like 'Candide' or 'Gulliver's Travels.'" Mr. Keuner is worried that the world could become uninhabitable once people, in order to make a living, must commit too many crimes or do too many good deeds. So Mr. Keuner runs from one country to the next, because everywhere they ask too much of him: they want either self-sacrifice, or bravery, or intelligence, or love of freedom, or the thirst for justice, or brutality, deceit, and so on. It is impossible to live in any of these places." It follows that in Me-ti Brecht is developing precisely this ethical-anti-ethical position:

"In general, it holds that a country that with a need for a special moral code is poorly governed." [11]

He also fundamentally questions the kind of virtuous person that Plato and Aristotle praised and described as the just:

"In countries that are well governed, there is no need for any special justice. The just lack injustice, just as the lamenter lacks pain." [12]

Embarking on this risky path, Brecht takes yet another decisive step: he launches an ethical rehabilitation of egotism, legitimizing it in the framework of communist thought.

Brecht's dialectical interpretation of egotism is hardly identical though related to the theory of "rational egotism" popular among the Russian revolutionary democrats:

"Yang-chu taught: if one says that egotism is bad, one is thinking of the conditions in a state in which it [i.e. egotism] is having a negative effect. I call such conditions of a state bad. [...] To speak out against egotism often entails wanting to uphold conditions that make egotism possible or even necessary. [...] One cannot be against self-love if it is not directed against others. But one can be against the lack of self-love. Bad conditions come from both the self-love of some and its lack on the part of others." [13]

At the same time, Brecht's ethical innovation cannot be reduced to his utopia and his rehabilitation of egotism. In fact,

Bertolt Brecht's Project for Humanity

at the center of that “intelligent place” at which his communist ethic is located, he breaks with century-old philosophical traditions. The subject of his ethics is not a wise man, a saint, or a hero, but the most ordinary, mediocre type of person, a philistine concerned with survival and thoroughly immune to idealism. This is what one calls a Jedermann in German, an everyman, with all his empirical weaknesses, his survival skills, his calculating schemes, and his mimicry. This is, in fact, the source of Brecht's burning interest in the figure of the Good Soldier Švejk, invented by the wayward genius of Jaroslav Hasek. Notwithstanding his simplicity, which looked like idiocy to “decent society”, it was Švejk who could not be broken by the bureaucratic and military machines of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; in fact, it was Švejk who ultimately made these machines break down. This is why Brecht saw the “Švejks” of this world as a revolutionary resource that had yet to be tapped in developed capitalist countries. This shines a rather absurd light on the leftist avant-garde's polemic against the “philistines,” the petit bourgeoisie, the middle class of bourgeois society that was undergoing a process of proletarianization during the Great Depression. In this point, Brecht proved more far-sighted than all of Comintern put together. Yet that does not mean that he was any less suspicious of the established left in the West, which quickly became an element crucial to late capitalism's preservation and survival.

Brecht rehabilitated the moral status of the everyman, for whom the main hypothesis on the world is that it must be inhabitable. This went hand in hand with a sharp attack on moral imperatives:

“There are few pursuits, said Me-ti, that damage the morality of a man as much as the pursuit of morality. I have heard it said: You must love the truth, you must keep your promises, you must fight for the

good. But the trees do not say: you must be green, you must let fruit fall straight down, you must rustle your leaves when the wind blows through them.” [14]

The only moral imperative that Brecht recognized was as follows:

“Me-ti said: I have not found many sentences beginning with ‘you must’ that I wanted to repeat. By this I mean sentences of a general nature, sentences directed to the world at large. One of the few sentences of this kind, however, is: “You must produce.” [15] Unlike many recognized authorities on morality, Brecht actually tried to follow the imperatives that he formulated in theory in his life. This brings to mind one of his poems: “I am in no need of a grave stone, // But should you need one for me // I wish it said // “He made suggestions. // And we accepted them. // This inscription would // do honor to us all.” [16]

You must produce... It is characteristic of Brecht that he addressed this demand to something so subtle as love and lovers:

“[...] Love should be examined separately, because it is a production. It changes the lover and the loved, for better or for worse. Even from afar, lovers appear as producers, producers of a higher kind.” [17]

But even in love, Brecht was incapable of giving up his intellect. He was convinced that to preserve their love, lovers would need a “third component.” They needed to find a cause in common. And for the men and women of the left, this common cause would be revolutionary activity.

These is a short version of introduction to the Russian translation of the Bertolt Brecht's “Me-ti. The Book of Changes”, published by Logosaltera in Moscow, 2004

Translators notes:

1. Exploring the Boundaries of Cognition. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti. Buch der Wendungen. Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt/Main 1977. p. 28
2. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, “On Thought”, p. 19/20
3. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, The Great Method. The Philosophy of Nature. p. 120
4. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, Care in Safekeeping Experience. p. 40
5. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, How to Live According to the Great Method. p. 88/89
6. Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy, 1923. Monthly Review Press, 1970, reproduced in its entirety at <http://marxists.org>
7. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, p. 154
8. Rudyard Kipling, “If,” 1896, <http://www.kipling.org.uk>
9. K. Tulin (V.I. Lenin), The Economic Content of Narodism, 1894
10. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, Condemnation of Ethical Doctrines,
11. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, A Country Should Not Need a Special Morality, p. 44
12. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, The Virtue of Justice, p. 44
13. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, On Egotism, p. 57/58
14. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, The Pursuit of Morality, p. 92
15. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, Me-ti and Ethics, p. 86/87
16. Bertolt Brecht: Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden. Vierter Band: Gedichte 2. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1997. p.223
17. Bertolt Brecht, Me-ti, Kin-jeh on Love. p. 158

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Dmitry Vilensky / Practicing Dialectic

Mixing Different Things

The editorial and exhibition policy of Chto Delat is often accused of inconsistency, of lacking a clear “party line.” What is important for us today is to arrive at a method that would enable us to mix quite different things—reactionary form and radical content, anarchic spontaneity and organizational discipline, hedonism and asceticism, etc.

It is a matter of finding the right proportions. That is, we are once again forced to solve the old problems of composition while also not forgetting that the most faithful composition is always built on the simultaneous sublation and supercharging of contradictions.

As Master Bertolt taught us, these contradictions should be resolved not in the work of art, but in real life.

Apropos the polemics with Master Jean-Luc, it is worth noting that one can place quite neatly from one shot to another and still not end up with a whole film. The question is what the third shot in the sequence will be. And how this third shot will relate to what came before the one plus one.

This, apparently, is just what Master Jean-Luc had in mind: it is always useful to emphasize the source of the whole.

On the Usefulness of Declarations

Everyone has long ago given up wracking their brains over the question of whether it is possible to elaborate precise rules for organizing the work of a collective. It is now quite rare to come across a new manifesto or declaration. The cult of spontaneity, reactivity, and tactics—the rejection of readymade rules—is the order of the day. Tactics, however, is something less than method. Only by uniting tactics and strategy can we arrive at method.

Hence it is a good thing to try one’s hand at writing manifestos from time to time.

On the Totality of Capital, or Playing the Idiot

Today it is all the rage to say that there is nothing outside the contemporary world order. Capital and market relations are total, and even if someone or something escapes this logic, then this does not in any way negate it. This is a trait of moderately progressive consciousness: such is the opinion of leftist theorists, and the capitalists have no real objections to their equitable thesis.

We should play the idiot and simply declare this thesis a lie. We know quite well whose interests are served by it.

Being Productive?

Master Bertolt said that a person should be productive. Following his method of thinking, we might boldly claim that a person should be unproductive or that a person should not be productive. We end up with a big mess. We can get ourselves out of this muddle by asking a single question: *to what end should we be productive?*

By constantly asking ourselves this question, we can resolve various working situations and understand when it is worth producing something and when it is not.

On Compromises

Politically engaged artists inevitably face the question of compromise in their practices.

It primarily arises when they have to decide whether to take money from one or another source, or participate in one project or another.

There are several readymade decisions to which artists resort. Some artists keen endlessly that it is impossible to stay pure in an unclean world and so they constantly wind up covered in shit. Other artists regard themselves as rays of light in the kingdom of darkness. They are quite afraid of relinquishing their radiant purity, which no one could care less about except they themselves.

The conversation about the balance between purity and impurity is banal, although finding this balance is in fact the principal element of art making.

Master Bertolt suggested us to “drink wine and water from different glasses”.

On Working with Institutions

It is too little to postulate that collaborating with cultural institutions is a good thing or, on the contrary, that it is a bad thing. We should always remember that it is worth getting mixed up in such relations only when we try to change these institutions themselves, so that those who come after us will not need to waste their time on such silly matters and will immediately be able to get down to more essential work.

On Subjugation to the Dominant Class

We cannot deny the fact that the great artworks of the past were produced *despite* the subjugated position of their creators.

As we recognize this fact today we should emphasize the vital proviso “despite.” We thus constantly remind ourselves what art could and should be if the subjugation to the dominant classes and tastes could disappear.

On the Historicity of Art

Like everything else in the world, art is historical. What does this mean?

First of all, it does not mean that what was created in the past has no meaning today.

Master Bertolt and Master Jean-Luc demonstrated that art is something that arises from difficulties and rouses us to action.

Those who deny art’s dependence on the powers that be are stupid.

Those who do not see that people’s creative powers never dry up, even in the face of slavery and hopelessness, are blind.

The essence of the great method is to assist the *power of creativity* in overcoming its dependence on the system of art.

The Formula of Dialectical Cinema

As Master Jean-Luc quite aptly noted, “Art is not the reflection of reality, but the reality of this reflection.”

To this we should add that this reality is transformative. It has less to do with life as it is, and more to do with how the conditions of people’s lives can and must change.

On Financing

Master Jean-Luc unexpectedly spoke out in favor of “ten-dollar financing” for authentic films over Hollywood-style budgets.

At first glance this idea sounds like mockery. Upon more careful reflection, however, we realize that the master was not promoting the total absence of financing. And he made no mention of the sources of this financing.

On the Boundaries of the Disciplines

It is believed that we should have long ago put an end to the division of knowledge into separate disciplines. The mantra “knowledge is one” is hugely popular with many progressive people. They say that there is only one kind of knowledge, which serves the cause of emancipation.

And they are right insofar as there is hardly any sense in using the proud word knowledge to describe methods for enslaving consciousness.

It is a good cause to use all our powers to bring closer that day when the disciplinary divisions will disappear, but it is premature to speak of this today.

We should say rather that knowledge is one, but *for the time being* it consists of many disciplines. We must try and achieve perfection in each of them.

For now this is the most important contribution we can make to the cause of emancipation.

On the Question of Self-Education

More and more often we hear that all imposed forms of education are unavoidably evil, that we should close all schools and organize ourselves into non-hierarchical circles in which there would be no difference between the learned and the ignorant, old and young, man and woman, the person born in misery and the person born with a silver spoon. All this sounds nice and of course we know the historical origins of such ideas.

Born at a certain historical moment, they played a supremely important role in transforming all of society and shifting capitalism to a new stage—the knowledge economy, the flexible labor market, exploitation of the general intellect, etc. Does it make sense for those who see all the dead ends of this path of development to repeat these new truisms of capital?

Let us leave the rhetoric of self-education to the corporations, which have such a need for the newly flexible worker willing to engage in lifelong learning.

Why shouldn’t we again think hard about creating a methodology of learning and teaching that takes account of the contemporary moment?

I see nothing bad about having all children study Marxist dialectics, value theory, the history of the workers movement, and art history. The problem is how to make such obligatory courses thrilling and entertaining, how to combine discipline and freedom.

If we are unwilling to think in this direction, however, that means we have already lost.

On the Theory of the Weakest Link

The question of where a breakthrough is possible, in what countries—that is, where it will be possible to create new relations outside

the dominion of private property and the egotistical interests of individuals—is the most vital question.

The theory of the weakest link proved its utility in the past. Can it prove workable again? On the one hand, we are witnesses to capital’s unbelievable experiments in the development of technology and new forms of life. On the other, we see clearly that the period of prosperity in the First World, paid for with the slave labor of the rest of the world, led to a situation in which *even oppressed people in the First World* were embourgeoisied. Their class consciousness, even in the most progressive circles, is bourgeois consciousness. In the west, even the most out-and-out punk is bourgeois to a certain extent.

The situation outside the First World, however, looks just as hopeless. Since the emergence of cognitive capitalism, the colonial hegemony of western countries has only grown. Detecting new emancipatory potential in the Third World is no less difficult than in the First World, despite the fact that it is precisely here that forms of collective consciousness have been preserved.

We should pay close attention to newly emergent enclaves of the Third World within the First World and of the First World on the periphery. If they cooperate in the future they might become a revolutionary force capable of changing the world.

And of course we should carefully analyze everything that is happening in Latin America.

On the Withering Away of Art

To create an art that withers away—that is, a powerful art that disappears as its functions disappear, an art that reduces its own success to naught—we should build its institutions dialectically. That is, to begin with we need to generate a healthy conflict and then devise a mechanism that would enable us to abolish the gap between the act of creativity and the system that represents it.

This is only possible, however, given a total transformation of the entire system of power and political relations. Here the forces of art (even an art that is withering away) are insufficient. Although we also should affirm that unless art’s function is changed *right now*, any transformation of power relations will prove impossible.

On artist—Master Di-Gu—believed that his works were so autonomous that they could be exhibited in any context without losing any of their power. In all likelihood, he greatly exaggerated their autonomy. The ease with which his works turned up in any number of the most dubious contexts finally called into question all his utterances. Unfortunately, his fate was typical for most practitioners of critical art, who for some reason considered themselves independent.

Another master—An-Os—suddenly decided that only by resurrecting the object’s commodity aura could the struggle in art be continued. He failed to take one factor into account, however: the commodity aura had not gone away during the time it took for him to learn this expression. Following this path, he thus became one of the multitude of artists who are as difficult to count as the grains of sand on a beach.

Chto Delat and Method

On the Utility of Reading, Viewing, and the Supreme Privilege

Many people greatly enjoy reading, viewing films, and visiting museums. There is nothing wrong with this.

What is wrong is that in our society only a tiny minority is capable of creating something from their experience of reading books, watching films, and visiting museums.

There is an old argument. Should art dissolve into life, or should it, on the contrary, absorb the entire experience of life and express it in new forms? Which position is the most correct one today?

Art should absorb the entire experience of life and express it in new forms. The principal task of these new forms—to come back transformed and dissolve into life, thus provoking life's transformation — is to change the world, the thing that everyone so loves talking about.

Ideas and the Masses

Ideas mean nothing unless they seize the consciousness of people. Does this principle allow us to judge the quality of ideas? No, it does not. History teaches us that ideas need time in order to possess the consciousness of many people; it is a lengthy process. We can say with certainty, however, that ideas that

do nothing to possess people's consciousness mean very little.

Therefore we have only ourselves to blame for the fact that we have remained unpersuasive.

On Universality

A universal method might well be applied to a multitude of particular cases. But the great method is unlikely to arise from a multitude of particular cases.

On World Art

Everyone remembers how the Great Teacher wrote in a manifesto about the origin of world literature. Who would be so bold as to talk about world art today? Of course this would sound totalizing and bombastic. Statements of this sort will always appear suspicious.

It is just for this reason that we should try to speak of world art.

On Leaders

Even in the most horizontally democratic organization the police can fairly quickly determine who they should arrest in order to paralyze its work.

We should consider organizational models in which this situation would be inconceivable. We don't need an absence of leaders, but a surplus. Only when each of us becomes a

leader can we reject this notion itself. For the time being, however, we should not forget that our leaders need special protection from the police.

The brightest minds are willing to write and meditate on the dialectic, but only a few of them are capable of doing this dialectically.

The best artists make works on politics, inequality, and ordinary people, but only a few of them do this politically.

The best politicians try to mitigate people's hardships—to guarantee that their rights and freedoms are observed, to help the weak and the sick—but only a few of them are capable of questioning the very system of relations that destroys, robs, and cripples people.

On Defamiliarization and Subversive Affirmation

Nothing has so spoiled the consciousness of the handful of politically minded contemporary artists than using the method of subversive affirmation. Many of them have decided that this is the most appropriate method for critiquing society and raising consciousness. But is this the case?

It is as if everyone has forgotten that capital has no sense of shame, that it is essentially pornographic. Of course it's tempting to turn soft porn into hardcore, but what does this change? This does not mean that we should

discard these methods altogether. We should simply always employ them in the right proportions. It is not enough to make shit look shittier and smell smellier. It is vital to convince the viewer that there is also something that is different from shit.

And we shouldn't count on the fact that viewers will figure this out for themselves.

Is It Possible to Make Love Politically?

Master Bertolt said that love between two people becomes meaningful when a common cause arises between them — serving the revolutionary cause or something of the sort. Only then are they able to overcome their finitude in bed as well.

The most vivid example of dialectical affirmation in history is Benjamin's thesis that communists answer the fascist "aestheticization of politics" with a "politicization of art." It turns out that aesthetics is on the side of fascism, while art is on the side of the communists. I think that we shouldn't so easily farm out aesthetics to history's brown-shirted forces. Today we should re-examine this thesis and, most likely, conclude that we really lack an *aesthetics of the politicization of art*.

Only in this case we will have the chance to see, perhaps, the emergence of something comparable in power to the Marseillaise.



Peio Aguirre / From Method to Change:

1.

The day Godard and Gorin set out to America to finish *Tout va bien* (1972), it seems the latter forgot his passport at home, while the former went to a bookstore to buy Bertolt Brecht's *Me-ti* when Gorin warned him that they would have an accident. In the Rue de Rennes a bus hit Godard's motorcycle leaving him and his companion (film editor Christine Aye) seriously injured. Godard spent several years in and out of hospitals. It could be called a "dialectical" accident, or the "logical end of 68", or the last days of the Dziga Vertov Group. This affected the shooting of *Tout va bien* and months later, when they encountered Jane Fonda again, she had changed her state of mind to the point of "not working with men" and the film ended with no less difficulties.

Some other witnesses from the period place the same book, *Me-ti*, at the root of Godard's political films since 1968 to 1972: "In particular, they both had spent four years reading and discussing *Me-ti*. This was Brecht's uncompleted book of aphorisms and personal and political anecdotes written while in exile in Denmark and Finland. When I met Godard briefly in April 1973, while on tour in the United States, both he and Gorin reaffirmed this book's importance for them. When I pressed to know why, Godard replied that it showed the need for a cultural revolution." [1]

It is worthwhile to see Brecht's *Me-ti* [2] playing a role and it is good to know now, in retrospect, that book was particularly influential in the development of such an aesthetic, namely Dziga Vertov Group's filmography, an aesthetic extensive to the whole dialectical cinema also named as Third Cinema.

Brecht's *Me-ti* is the literary equivalent of an artist's artist. This means that it does not only exist at a book in itself but enables upcoming works and encourages their production. It is not by chance that Godard and Gorin were attracted by a book consisting in a fictionalization of politics as a masquerade of key intellectual and political figures (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Plekhanov and so on) turning them into Chinese characters. *Me-ti* appeared on their horizon in the middle of their Maoist days, as they were deep into the digestion of Mao Zedong's *On Contradiction*.

Basically, *Me-ti* is a compilation of aphorisms using the name of the ancient Chinese philosopher, Me-ti or Mo-tzu. The style of writing is based somehow in the Chinese moral and pedagogical parable-like form. The doctrine taught by Brecht's *Me-ti* is The Great Method and its aim or aspiration is to lead society towards the The Great Order, the first being a keyword for dialectics and the later for Communism. The path is rather simple then: a hidden revolutionary lesson. It has been said so often that the dialectic is neither a doctrine neither a philosophy but a method, also that the principal law that governs dialectics is contradiction.

It also seems that Brecht wrote it to demonstrate dialectics at work by emphasizing the experimentation of the formal, as if form would define its own content.

In addition, it is still fruitful to review *Letter to Jane: an Investigation About a Still* (1972), the film that analyses in detail a fixed photograph of Jane Fonda taken in North Vietnam as the most vivid example of the use of the dialectic, beyond the fact that a debt seemed to have been charged by them after the shooting of *Tout va bien*. I could be said that *Letter to Jane* is an "exemplary" film in the way it serves as a model (or example) for the dialectical as well as helps to set up the visual essay as a specific form. In the same way than *Me-ti*, it might be arguable that Godard and Gorin made it to demonstrate dialectics at work (and it is well known that these two films mentioned above were fully Brechtian in the same way that others were Althusserian, as *Luttes in Italie*, from 1970), or at least to show up the analytical linguistic strength to be found in the dialectical method (beyond the ability to create dialectical sentences in their own). The deep concentration in the detail allows the gradual construction of an entire system in the search for the cultural, social, political and ideological totality.

So, here we have an example for the study of the dialectic intertwined with Walter Benjamin's claim of reading an image dialectically. But what does this mean? And where does it lead to read an image dialectically?

The dialectic has classically been defined through some of its features, such as the unity of theory and practice, as the search for totality and its inner contradictory tendencies, as the struggle or unfolding of the opposites, as infinite process, thought based in motion, as values of quantity and quality, as the eternal return of the old or as the struggle of content with form, to name just some of its premises. Yet none of these definitions can fully hide the inner contradiction between the dialectic's own mode d'emploi through stylistic devices, from the carefully crafted (dialectical) sentences to montage or assemblage techniques, and the global goal it serves, namely social change or final revolutionary aspiration. Even if both have gone hand in hand in certain concrete passages of history, it is nevertheless true that each one might have taken its own path in a kind of disjunction, giving dialectics its own afterlife in the postmodern.

There is evidence too that the recent documentary turn in current contemporary art has been somehow heavily indebted to a Western Marxist tradition where the dialectic is attached to the form itself as a method or technique, from Brecht's "ethics of production" in his own playwriting or in the film *Kuhle Wampe (or Who Owns the World)* [3] (1932), to Benjamin's other technological essay "The Author as Producer". [4]

This emphasis in the method (as in the essay form) leads to productive analogies in different cultural or political spheres. In art, this essay form applied to visuality and discourse has led to a number of conversational practices where the discussion is shared and where the dialectic (as "discussion on dialogue" in which the truth is reached by the clash of opposite opinions) might



Dialectics in contemporary Art

just turn into endless speech production if not ventriloquism. In this sense, *Me-ti*'s usefulness lay in that it drew a parallel line with these theatrical mono-dialogues and conversational genres, which one can encounter in several performative contemporary art practices, from writing to art making, and from artists that write to art criticism.

Earlier, the reading of Fredric Jameson's *Brecht and Method* [5] became revealing to me to the point of discovering at the same time *Me-ti*'s Spanish translation, published together with Stories of Mr. Keuner. [6] At that time, I was surprising not to have an English version of *Me-ti* (so I wonder if Godard and Gorin used to read the original German, or if there were a French version of it). These associations (from the methodological to the dialectical) were at the heart of our Great Method, a book with artist contributions and writings on the question of methodology in artistic practice. The focus was on the presence or absence of methods and their ideological connotations and historical backgrounds, the goal to examine some of the conditions that surround the production of contemporary art. [7]

The fact that artists were addressing this very question of method, or the existence of a "great" method, did not necessarily mean that the contributions commented or questioned dialectics. No. Rather, the aim was to form a whole (as a unity of form and content, including its design) that could lead to a reflection of the dialectic in an indirect manner. The Great Method also included excerpts of *Me-ti* as a guideline translated into English for the first time. Thus, search and reflection on method differs from the dialectical method in action, especially in the discursivity of contemporary art in our days. Method is everywhere, including the method of the non-method, but dialectics as a method is somewhere else. Whatever this distinction's relevance in this context, there is a strategic necessity to search for artistic examples in which (in the same movement) theory and practice form a synthetic whole. Without its secret codeword (as dialectics) any reference to the Great Method seems little more than a formula for achieving or accomplishing. Someone (an artist or a curator searching for the magic pattern or recipe) might think exactly the same (in dialectical fashion), I mean, that everybody is looking for (the Great Method), but in fact there is no Great Method, but just the search for it. Or rather that there is not just one, but many, etc. Yet the question still remains: what is the dialectic and how does one use it? But first, how is it possible to learn what dialectical thought means in order to apply the essential critical weapons it provides?

2.

But for an instant, just recall *Me-ti*'s entire title, *Buch der Wendungen*. Jameson himself translates and refers to it (intentionally I guess) in an unfixated way both as *Book of Turning Ways*, or *Book of Twists and Turns*, whereas in Spanish the book is translated as *Libro de los cambios*, literally as "book of the changes". Arguably, Brecht was referring to the other "book of changes" in Chinese philosophy, the I-Ching. This is also actually the second meaning of the dialectic: infinite change (and motion). There is another artist who wrote an entire theory of art as governed by the law of changes, even though he had little to do with China, aside from observing the Cultural Revolution from afar. I am referring to the Basque artist Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003), one of the most powerful and original thinkers in the Art History of the 20th Century. Oteiza's Law of Changes establishes the rules for an understanding of art as an entire process in history (from prehistoric paintings to the avant-garde). This Law of Changes explains his political commitment and his conclusion in sculpture as the final stage of his own formalization (around 1958-59) as the result of the end of an experimental laboratory phase in his art, after which he turned to life, namely the city (cinema, architecture, urbanism and more). He wrote that "a Law of Changes in aesthetic expression, which includes all the research on a new language within a logical overall scheme, whose goal was to show all the experiments that have already been accomplished and those that have yet to be realized. It allows one to follow a method, a certain order in the evolution of trends. It allows each trend to exhaust itself in its moment, saving time for the artist researching within it and permitting the total and relative time of the artist's stay in art to be established." [8] But this Law of Changes, with its totalizing aspiration of how historical processes realize themselves in art, also offers its own explanation for its inner aesthetic developments and mutations, as if in a biphasic curve, when expression rises a progressively growth, or expression is accentuated geometrically via formalization (convex), and then the contrary movement when there is a cease or decline in expressivity, a disformalization a decomposition or a back to a negative zero (concave), as a spiritual frontier where the artist begins once again. Oteiza's account does not only come to the conclusion of his own end in contemporary

art around 1960, but provides (as a typically dialectical totalisation) a full theory for the end of contemporary art itself. Of course, art has continued since then.

Here, it makes sense to remember the dialectic as a vision of the world based in infinite growth and notice that this consciousness is to be found precisely in the open-minded historicity of artistic trends in Modernism, which followed one another in quick succession (from Impressionism to Expressionism, Constructivism or Productivism, Bauhaus or De Stijl and so on), creating an operational field for both theoretical and practical experimentation. It seems pretty obvious that such a position seems somewhat outdated for artists of today, risking obsolescence, when the recognition of a postmodern condition seems to be the accepted general rule and where the "art after the end of art" advocated from the last modernists in the 60's (as Oteiza's), and later adopted by the postmodernists has not exhausted the production of commodities but increased it. Of course, there are artists in where a receptivity of historical consciousness still exists, but whether or it is mainly a privative matter for making the work, or becomes a metacommentary of an older paradigm (with its neo-, post- and ultra- prefixes, not to mention current revisions of Modernity via the vernacular) rather than a collective, strategic shared mechanism for a larger transformation.

However, Oteiza might become a relevant figure in this context, because he aligns both the development of an aesthetic of Modernity in the middle of a struggle between the universal and the particular (ahead with its formal laboratory), with a strong political and emancipatory commitment that calls for a reactualization of the old "Brecht-Lukács debate" in between an aesthetic of Avant-garde and another of Realism. [9] This become especially relevant when a certain Realism (and certain examples of the new documentariness are not far from it) appears as the univocal method for achieving the dialectic. For example, in Oteiza's "Dialectical Law of Changes: one divides into two", he links his own Law of Changes with the revolutionary transformative and destructive quality of the dialectic, as he wrote: "For Mao, the dialectics of movement is not produced through synthesis but through contradictions (as in my dialectical pair), one divides into two, and one major contradiction follows another and determines the displacements. These displacements in my Law of Changes correspond to a series of secondary law of changes that cut and situate themselves along the temporal axis and that correspond to the different experimental trends in contemporary art, like a chain of contradictions, in which trends follow upon and destroy each other. The struggle between different trends is the motor behind these displacements, as, for example, the class struggle in the history of social transformations. Without a dialectics of change, without such a logic of displacements that ends in the destruction of all tendencies, these same incompletely experienced trends would survive eternally". [10] So here the dialectic is defined in its transformative mode, different from the insolubility of the Hegelian idealist dialectic. And all this he experienced in the formal laboratory of sculpture. When people in the artworld today hold speeches about revolution, this artistic discourse often sounds like the same Idealism, drained empty of any truly transformative aim, especially if it comes linked as the subject (or theme) for the next international biennial.

There is, however, a provisional solution for the application of the dialectic specifically in cultural and political local situations that might bring sparks for an endless alteration in a world in motion. With Brecht, Godard, Oteiza and beyond.

1. The first anecdote is narrated by Colin McCabe in his *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at 70*, Bloomsbury, London, 2004. The second is a quote from Julia Lesage's *Godard and Gorin's Left Politics, 1967-1972*, from *Jump Cut*, no. 28, April 1983, pp. 51-58.
2. Bertolt Brecht, *Me-ti Buch der Wendungen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1983.
3. *Kuhle Wampe (or to Who Owns the World?)* (1932) is a film conceived and written by Bertolt Brecht, directed by Slatan Dudow and music by Hans Eissler
4. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", in *New Left Review* 1/62, July-August 1970, online at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/8059339/Walter-Benjamin-the-Author-as-Producer>
5. Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, Verso, New York / London, 2003.
6. Bertolt Brecht, "Me-ti Libro de los cambios", in *Narrativa Completa n° 3*, Alianza, Madrid, 1991
7. See *The Great Method: Casco Issues X*, (edited by Peio Aguirre and Emily Pethick). Contributions by Peio Aguirre, Stuart Bailey, Ricardo Basbaum, Martin Beck, Copenhagen Free University, Stephan Dilleuth, Falke Pisano, Florian Pumhösl, Wendelien van Oldenburg, Haegue Yang, Stephen Willats. Published by Casco Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht / Revolver Verlag, Frankfurt, 2007.
8. Jorge Oteiza, in "Ideology and Technique for a Law of Changes in Art", from a 1964 paper, published in the catalogue *Oteiza: An Experimental Proposition*, La Caixa de Pensiones, Barcelona / Madrid, 1988, p.
9. See the volume *Aesthetics and Politics* (Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernest Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács), afterword by Fredric Jameson, Verso, London / New York, 2002.
10. Jorge Oteiza, "Dialectical Law of Changes: one divides into two", fragment from 1975, in *Oteiza: An Experimental Proposition*, p. 327.

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If we reflect about the general condition in Serbia and direct connection of the reality and the stories we had collected together, building the screenplay within the project Partisan Songspiel, we conclude that right now it is not possible to structure all aspects and information of one society in one short text or even in one newspaper. There are many thinkers, activists, journalist and theorists that must be involved for this work and that should reflect profoundly on every particular situation.

It is important to mention what was the relevant source of the texts that we had collected and had wrote for the Partisan Songspiel movie screenplay. Working many years together with our colleagues from various fields of contemporary art, social and political activism, we had built a complex practical and theoretical background which gave us final decision on issues that should be discussed. Four oppressed characters: Roma Women, Lesbian, Worker and Invalid are chosen by all of us as the main trigger and as the representatives of the conflictual situation in post-war Serbian society.

The struggle of the collectives and organizations in Serbia and the Balkans in general, such are one that fights for workers rights as Freedom Fight, ASI or Party of Work does, was a deep inspiration for our work last years. Not to forget groups that are fighting for the LGBTQ rights as Queer Belgrade, Labris, GSA, Queeria, and others very active in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Women in Black are very important organization that fights against militarism, war, sexism and nationalism, choosing anti-militarism and non-violence as aim to act.

Roma organization have very special task and very special position in Serbian society as Roma people are the most discriminated group. The triggering point for the screenplay was a banishment of Roma and refugees in Belgrade and reactions from the citizen, politicians, and other to this situation. We have reflected the whole situation in our text titled: "Antiziganism and Class Racism in Europe" that we wrote after the protests and attacks on Roma settlements in Belgrade. As we already state in its title, Antiziganism and Class Racism is a problem of the whole Europe and not only a local Balkan story.

Belville is the name of a new residential complex in New Belgrade, built by Blok 67 Associates Ltd. This company was founded by Delta Real Estate and Hypo-Alpe Adria Bank. Their aim is to build business offices and apartments for athletes taking part in the Summer Universiade in June 2009 in Belgrade. After the Universiade, the apartments will be handed to new and predefined owners. On April 3rd, 2009, in a sudden action with mechanical-diggers, forty houses were demolished in a Roma settlement that had begun taking shape during the last five years in a location near Belville. The decision to demolish the Roma houses was made by Belgrade's Secretariat for Inspections. City Mayor, Dragan Djilas, said on this issue that: "Whoever is illegally occupying a part of city land in places planned for infrastructure facilities cannot stay there. It has nothing to do with the fact that the people in question are Roma or some other ethnicity. A few hundred people cannot stop the development of Belgrade, and two million people living in Belgrade certainly won't be hostages to anyone. This practice shall continue to be implemented by the City Authority in the future. Simply - there are no other solutions". The police assisted in the demolition of the settlement by securing the diggers, without giving residents the time to rescue their belongings. Several inhabitants had to be practically drawn out of the ruins at the very moment when one digger was clearing the area. As we were close by, we joined our neighbors from the very beginning of this action in Block 67. As an act of protest to the home demolitions, Jurija Gagarina Street was blocked around noon that day. The settlement's inhabitants then organized another protest in front of Belgrade City Hall. Although Serbia is currently presiding over the "Roma Decade" in 2009, city authorities didn't have a plan for alternative housing at the moment the houses were demolished. It took three protests and pressure from international organizations to stop the media lynch against Roma and to try to find a solution for alternative housing. After the protest the Major Djilas was concerned, the Roma issue was 'solved' by placing a three Roma mothers with children into containers in Mirijevo, near the old Roma settlement. The majority of the people still have no alternative solution.

by Vladan Jeremić, Rena Rädle

Partisan Songspiel

A Belgrade Story

Long shot of a stage. Two groups of people stand on two platforms. One of these platforms, the tallest, is an abstract reconstruction of a monument to World War Two Yugoslav partisans. "Inside" the monument we see a Chorus of Dead Partisans—young people dressed in white overalls. On the second platform we see representatives of the ruling class (the Oppressors) dressed in black business suits—a Mafioso, an Oligarch, a Nationalist, and a Woman Politician. Two bodyguards protect them. The four heroes of the film slowly enter the space between the platforms. They represent the Oppressed: a Worker, a Romani Woman, a Lesbian Activist, and a Disabled Veteran. The worker carries an object - human size "cut finger".

Music is heard. The chorus slowly comes to life, first somewhat drowsily, in recitative, then optimistically, demonstrating faith in its own necessity. However, undertones of sadness can be heard (the female voice that sings a separate part) or rather doubt ("We have turned to stone..."). The same theme of sadness, to which disappointment is added, becomes dominant in the closing theme. The chorus gestures in a way that is reminiscent of Greek tragedy.

Chorus:

It's hard to wake up...It's hard to wake up...
Wake up...Wake up!
Our children are ruining our country!
We have turned to stone...What of it!
We are partisans forever!
We have turned to stone...
We are immortal.
We have turned to stone!
We are your conscience,
We are your constant reproach!
We are partisans forever!
Our war is mysterious forever.
We remain in the dense forests
of your conscience
As the secret scouts of communism.
We shall steal into your souls,
We shall tear blow up the bridges
on which your shameless thoughts roll.
The ideas of Marx and Lenin
are our cannons,
Marshal Tito is our machine gun,
Fraternity and equality are
the fighter planes of our souls.
We shall build lighthouses of nonalignment,
We shall set up dugouts of solidarity.

Your faith in justice is our ally.
We believe in you!
We shall lead you!
Close your ranks, comrades!
You don't see us,
We are immortal,
We have turned to stone!
We are partisans forever!

The Woman Politician steps forward. She begins speaking in a long shot that segues into a medium shot.

Woman Politician:

The Universiade of youth and students is approaching. Healthy forces from all around the globe will be gathered under the auspices of our fatherland Serbia! Welcoming these beautiful young people and uniting them in magnificent, newly built stadiums, we say YES! to the European Union.
(The Nationalist starts to get agitated. He can be seen standing behind the bodyguards.)
Our city is fully prepared for these guests. We are erecting new buildings and fixing up old ones; we are planting flowers and removing garbage from our streets. Our slogan is "Clean up Serbia!" Admittedly, there are forces in our country that resist the great, unifying force of the Universiade, as well as sport and sports activities in general. Who are they? They are Roma and others who illegally occupy city lots. With their ridiculous actions, they obstruct the building of new sporting sites.

While she speaks, the camera gradually shifts to the Oppressed. Each of them is frozen in a characteristic pose. The Romani Woman begins the dance "My House Is Torn Down" from this position. As the camera pans on the Romani Woman, the Worker looks into the camera, thereby bringing the audience into the action. Viewers should have the feeling that they are part of this group.

Worker (pointing at the Romani Woman, he begins his lines haltingly):

Look, this is the Romani Woman. Her dance is called "My House Is Torn Down." She and her family are refugees from Kosovo. They fled to Germany, but there they told them, "The war is over! Go back home!" But they didn't have a home anymore. They built a shanty out of boards and lived under the bridge. Then other people came and a settlement emerged. She says they worked hard rummaging through the trash



Screenplay for a video film /// Written by Tsaplya, Dmitry Vilensky, Vladan Jeremic, and Rena Raedle /// Music by Mikhail Krutik

dumps of Belgrade and selling things at the flea market. At night, skinheads and junkies sometimes attacked them. Both the old and the young worked. They saved money to buy a stove, a fridge, and a TV. She says they were happy, although they lived very modestly. But suddenly police and bulldozers arrived under the bridge and tore down their houses, with all their belongings. She asks: How long is this going to last?

The camera rises from the position of the Oppressed. We see the Chorus in a low-angle close-up.

Chorus:
All the Oppressed should join the fight for justice.
The Roma fought in our ranks
In the fight against fascism!
Forward, all who are oppressed!
Brotherhood and unity!Unity!
Communism—that is the progress of humanity!

Woman Politician (*addressing Chorus; high-angle long shot from their point of view*):
These usurpers of municipal lands are standing precisely in the way of progress!

Worker (*addressing Chorus*): The Romani Woman remembers her people being forced to leave their homes in socialist times as well.

Woman Politician (*addressing the Oppressed*):

It's unhygienic to live under the bridge!

Oligarch (*elbowing towards the front of the platform and pushing others away; he prevents the Nationalist, who tries to interrupt him, from speaking*):

We should immediately integrate into the global market! Thank God, we have my foreign partners and investors. We are prepared to privatize the economy. We shall make it competitive on the world market!

Nationalist (*indignant, he tries to speak out, but the others won't let him; finally, he yells*): They're selling off the fatherland piece by piece!

Oligarch (*continuing unperturbed*):
But, all that aside, I am a true patriot. I look after my people by creating new jobs and feeding many families. In my supermarkets I sell low-price products. But what's happening here? Look: these Roma have blocked the road! They are blocking free access to my supermarket. This means that citizens cannot buy groceries! They work hard and earn money, and they want to eat well! We won't tolerate this impudence! I already called the mayor and told him he would personally answer for all this!

The scene shifts to a high-angle shot from the platform of the Oppressors—we look down upon the Oppressed. The Romani Woman continues her dance. The Worker begins the "Dance of the Severed Finger." The camera focuses in close-up on the Worker and the Lesbian Activist.

Lesbian Activist (*pointing toward Worker*):

This is the Worker. His dance is called the "Dance of the Severed Finger." He and his fellow workers are on hunger strike. Someone bought their factory and closed it without paying anyone anything. He says that he is fighting for people who have it even worse, the ones incapable of fighting for themselves. He cut off his finger because he had no other

choice—no one pays attention to his struggle. He believes that soon we will all be feeding on our body parts, the only things left to us. Because all people are slaves under capitalism.

The camera shifts to a low-angle shot of the Chorus from the viewpoint of the Oppressed.

Chorus:
Don't forget, Worker—
you are the sovereign!
Your struggle is the class struggle!
Forward!You are right, comrade!
Everyone will rally round you!
Put an end to slavery forever!
Forward, comrade!
Take the lead, Worker—
Don't forget: you are the sovereign!
Forward, comrade,
Forward, towards communism!

All the Oppressors laugh:
Ha-ha-ha!

Chorus (*continues undaunted*):
Step forward...Fear nothing!

Oligarch (*still chuckling*): But what do the workers decide!? The owner decides everything! The boss!

Nationalist: The communists destroyed our country! They destroyed it! They murdered true patriots!

Chorus:
Forward, comrade...

Oligarch: I'm losing money by the second! I won't allow this!

Woman Politician: We won't allow this!

Chorus:
Forward, forward, comrade!

The camera moves to the platform of the Chorus and pans down on the Romani Woman and the Worker. They each dance their own dance, but somehow slow and feebly. The Disabled Veteran starts the dance "I Fought for My Country like a Real Man, but No One Appreciates This".

Romani Woman (*pointing to the Disabled Veteran*):

This is the Disabled Veteran. His dance is called "I Fought for My Country like a Real Man, but No One Appreciates This." He says that he went to war for his country and his people when he was twenty-three because he thought life was impossible without these values. Once, on the frontline, the blast wave from an explosion threw him in the air and when he fell, he cracked his skull. Today he receives a small disability pension and lives in a basement with his family. Neighbors from the building recently called the police to evict them from the basement, although no one uses it. He says he doesn't understand why they are promising apartments to the Roma, while no one is interested in how he lives. He fought for these people after all.

The Worker is still absorbed in his dance. The camera switches to a high-angle shot from the viewpoint of the Partisans. The Oppressors are talking among themselves rather aggressively.

Chorus:
Our children killed each other
In a bloody war!
In an unjust war!



Our children!In a bloody war!
SREBRENICA! SREBRENICA!
Brother fought against brother!
Brother fought against brother!
SREBRENICA! SREBRENICA!
Our war was holy,
Yours was a bloody massacre.
SREBRENICA! SREBRENICA!
Don't let them make our death meaningless—
We died so you could live in peace...

Long frontal shot of the Oppressors. The Mafioso, a war profiteer, steps forward, pushing the others aside. His bodyguards tail him.

Mafioso:

What a disgrace! They're insulting the war veterans! Take me: I'm a war hero myself and a true patriot, and I always help our veterans (*points to his security guards*). I give them jobs. And why? Because I'm generous! Everyone knows how much I've done for our people. I've also done a lot to support sports, to support our football clubs. And what's football without football fans? I'll say even more—what's Serbia without fans? So many true war heroes came from the ranks of fans! And now what? Should we deprive these honest citizens, these true patriots, of a new stadium, of a great sporting celebration, only because the Roma refuse to budge from under the bridge? If our government cannot restore order, we shall solve this problem together with the war heroes.

Woman Politician (*as if in an aside, not wanting to show her hand and make a direct accusation, speaking simultaneously with the Mafioso*):

We know how you restore order! You took the money, but didn't solve the problem!

Mafioso (*not hearing or ignoring the Woman Politician*):

What matters is that everything should be fair. And those who claim that I'm war profiteer—I will shut their traps! I'll make them compensate me for moral damage, and I'll give the money to orphans!

Chorus (*as if coming to its senses, with great enthusiasm*):
The heroes of our war,
The ones who didn't fall on the battlefields with us,

Built towns, factories, railroads...
But war profiteers we shot
on the spot...
We shot them on the spot...

Everyone is dancing except for the Lesbian Activist. She now begins her dance.

Disabled Veteran (*pronouncing this speech with visible difficulty*):

This is the Lesbian. Her dance is called "Love Is a Revolutionary Force." During the war, she and her friends supported the deserters and all the others who didn't want to fight. She feels that all war criminals should be punished. Now she's an activist for the rights of sexual minorities and a social worker. She says we can change the world with small steps, and that love should be free. She believes marriage is legalized prostitution, and she helps female victims of domestic violence. During the last gay pride parade, during a fight with neo-Nazis, football hooligans, and priests, someone cracked her skull.

Chorus (*with passion*):
When we spilled blood for
your bright future,
We didn't divide ourselves
into men and women:
We were comrades.
But the most important thing
Was love for our common homeland!
Love!
For our common homeland
Love...
Our Homeland is the Revolution!

Romani Woman:
Then what about socialist laws against homosexuals?
You think *they* have forgotten that?

Long frontal shot of the Oppressors.

Nationalist (*finally pushing his way to the front*):

What's going on here, brothers! Isn't it enough that the capitalists already sold Kosovo! They lost all the wars! Isn't it enough that they want to sell Serbia! Nothing is enough for them! Due to their laxness, faggots, foreigners, and other Masons have raised their heads. I declare before the whole Serbian people—they want to deprive us of healthy offspring and therefore the future of our nation! The Roma living under the bridge spawn like rabbits, and these gays and lesbians urge us to renounce the family, abandon all divine laws, and turn against our Church, our holy traditions! Brothers! Let's look up to our Russian brothers led by Putin! I invite all healthy forces of the nation to gather in one fighting fist! One fighting fist! Worker! War veteran! Come to your senses! Whose side are you on? Clean up Serbia! Clean up Serbia! Clean up Serbia!

Chorus of Oppressors:

Clean up Serbia! Clean up Serbia!
Clean up Serbia!

Dance of the Oppressed. Everyone is dancing. This is their reaction to the slogan "Clean up Serbia!" and a kind of group dance therapy as it were. After the dance, they each take turns speaking. They speak for each other.

Worker: The Veteran is here by accident. Besides, he has some business with the Roma. He buys scrap metal from them. Ordinarily he wouldn't do this, but the man has to make a living.

Lesbian Activist: The Veteran met the Roma during the war. They fought together in Kosovo against the Albanians.

Disabled Veteran: The Romani Woman's grandfather was a partisan. He fought the fascists together with my grandfather.

Romani Woman: Some think that the Veteran is a lost soul. A lost soul.

Disabled Veteran: The Worker feels that apartments should be given to workers. And not to the Roma, because they are lazy bums.

Lesbian Activist: What does the Romani Woman want? Just a little land to build a new house and live peacefully with her family.

Worker: The Romani Woman feels that everyone should have the freedom they want. Everyone should have their freedom. That's what she thinks.

Disabled Veteran (*He pronounces "pacifist" and "civil society" almost syllable by syllable.*): The Lesbian thinks the world can be changed without war and violence. She is a pacifist and dreams of building civil society.

Romani Woman: The Worker is quite alone in his struggle. No one needs him anymore.

Disabled Veteran: The Worker feels that a woman's place is in the home. And that lesbianism is just a fad. And that the struggle should be a class struggle.

Romani Woman: The Worker knows that for the Lesbian all people are equal.

Lesbian Activist: The Veteran hates America and the European Union because they bombed Serbia.

Worker: The Veteran hates lesbians less than he hates faggots. What can you expect from a broad? That's what he thinks.

They again come together and continue verbalizing each other's positions.

Lesbian Activist: The Worker thinks that Kosovo is part of Serbia.

Romani Woman: The Lesbian doesn't think so!

Disabled Veteran: The Romani Woman doesn't care.

Worker: Serbia for Serbs! That's what the Veteran thinks.

Romani Woman: Serbia for Serbs! That's what the Worker thinks.

Lesbian Activist: The Romani Woman doesn't think so!

Disabled Veteran: The Lesbian doesn't think so!

Worker: Does the Romani Woman want a revolution?

Lesbian Activist: No!
Disabled Veteran: Does the Worker want a revolution?

Romani Woman: No!
Lesbian: Does the Veteran want a revolution?

Worker: No!

Romani Woman: Does the Lesbian want a revolution?

Disabled Veteran: No!

Worker: What does the Romani Woman want?

Lesbian Activist: A better life!

Disabled Veteran: What does the Worker want?

Romani Woman: A better life!

Lesbian Activist: What does the Veteran want?

Worker: A better life!

Romani Woman: What does the Lesbian want?

Disabled Veteran: A better life!

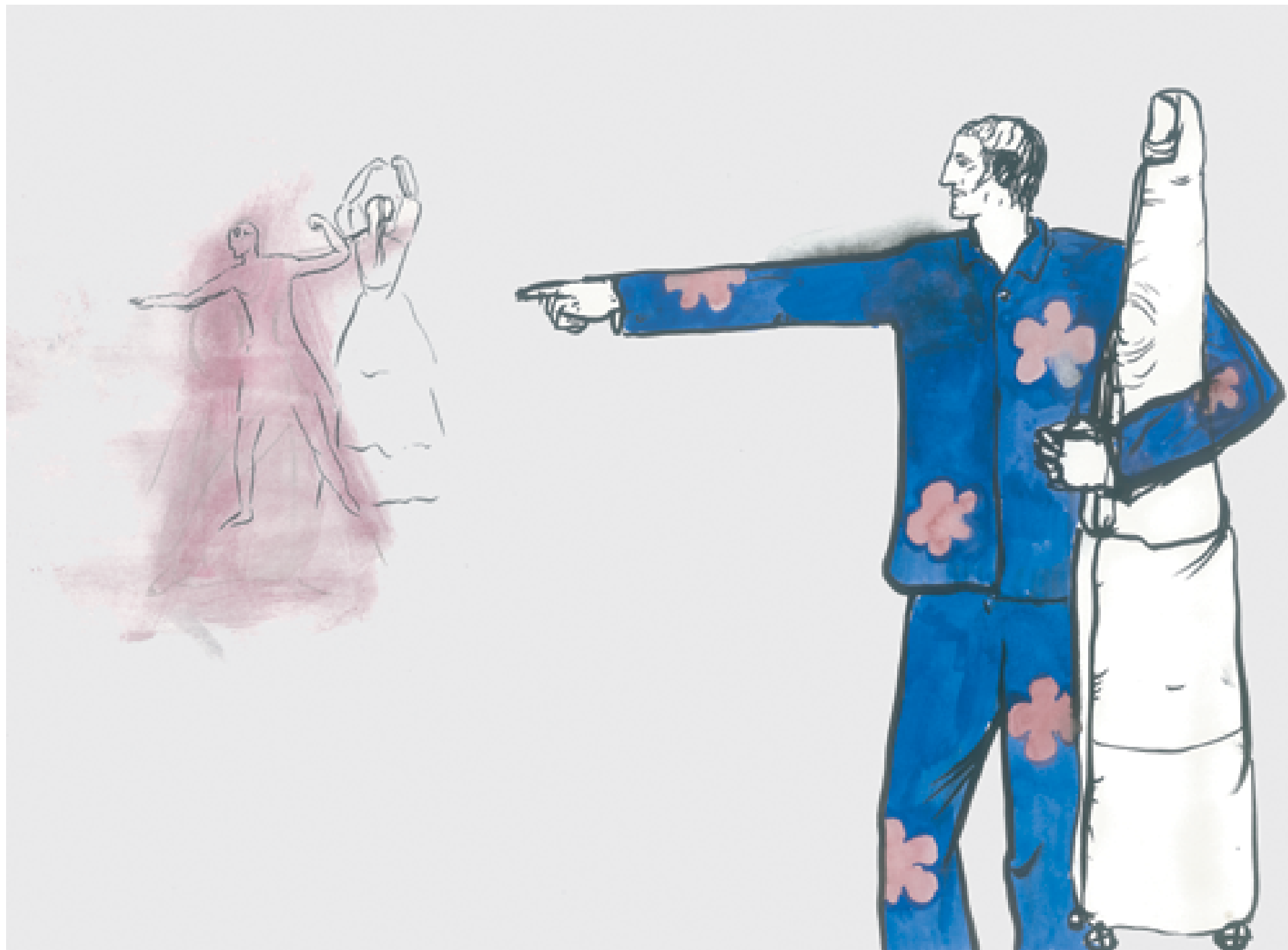
A better life! A better life! A better life!

The camera slowly pans to the Partisan Chorus. On the whole, their song is a lament, but we also hear in it a decisive voice that sends us the message — "Look for new partisans!"

Chorus:

We have turned to stone...
Our heroic deed was useless...
Our heroic deed was not useless!
We have turned to stone...
Our deed was not useless!
They don't hear us...
We lost the war...No!
Our victory is immortal!
We are partisans forever!
They no longer have need of us...
The cannons of conscience have faulty triggers,
The machine guns of unity are rusty...No!
The trenches of justice are covered in dirt,
Overgrown with grass...No! No!
Our struggle is not over!
Look for new partisans!
Our explosions are muffled by their contradictions...
They'll come to their senses!
They are trying!
Look for new partisans!
Their contradictions...
Their contradictions...
Look for new partisans!
Close your ranks, comrades!
Look for...
Close your ranks, comrades...
Look for...
Close your ranks...Look for...

The camera rises higher and higher. We see the satisfied faces of the Oppressors. The Oppressed stop their dance and look up. The Oppressors also look up towards the Partisans. The camera climbs higher and higher. The Chorus sing ever more softly and poignantly. The Partisans fly off into the sky, as it were, leaving Serbia behind. But they also leave us with the hope that that one day a new struggle for emancipation will commence in new forms.



Gene Ray

Some Notes on Brecht and Dialectics

In the theater and forms of writing he practiced, Brecht tried in many ways to depict “the immense pressure of misery forcing the exploited to think.” In discovering the causes of their misery, they discover themselves, as changed, changing and changeable humanity. Seeing the world opened up to time and history in this way, Brecht was sure, inspires the exploited to think for themselves and fight back. Any art that shows this process becomes a weapon of class struggle. Brecht theorized this kind of committed art under different names at different times. “Realism” and “dialectics” are probably the most useful, and the most important to grasp. In the precise but flexible way he developed these terms, they may be helpful to those seeking to develop an effectively politicized artistic practice today.

Dialectical Realism

In the polemics with Lukács in the late 1930s, Brecht aimed to defend his work against charges of “formalism” and to position it within the official, Comintern-sanctioned conceptions of “realism.” In some essays written for *Das Wort*, the Moscow-based journal, but not published at the time of these debates, he sought to broaden the notion of realism according to some very sensible criteria. He rejected, in fact demolished, simplistic attempts to separate artistic form and content into crudely opposed elements. For Brecht this was a dangerous tendency that distracted from the real critical problem. Every artwork, every artistic innovation or experiment, brings form and content into some kind of relation – in short, into a dialectic. What critics need to ask is this: does a particular dialectic of form and content reveal the individual as a “causal nexus” capable of struggling and collectively changing the world? This question can only be answered by looking at the work itself and the effects it produces in context. The answer can’t be looked for, Brecht insisted, in past models imposed once and for all or in abstract rules set down in advance.

Brecht’s version of modernism, theorized in the essays on epic theater from 1930, unfolded from the possibilities he saw to open up the static relations between form and content conventionalized by tradition. Against Wagnerian fusions of form and content into an intoxicating aesthetic soup, experienced as an overwhelming unity, Brecht called for a “radical separation of elements.” Music, spoken and sung words, and staging, as well as additional elements such as film and radio, were to be clearly differentiated and deployed in order to take up a critical position or attitude vis-à-vis the plot. Each formal element, in other words, sets up a separate dialectic with the unfolding action, or content. The total effect of these dialectical moments or episodes was insight into the changeable nature of reality that stimulated and empowered the spectators’ critical faculties. Radicalized in a context of partisan struggle in Germany, this strategy led directly to the *Lehrstücke* or didactic plays.

Defending these experiments in the essays for *Das Wort*, Brecht argued for a broader understanding of realism than the narrow one advanced by Lukács: “We must not abstract the one and only realism from certain existing works, but shall use all means, old and new, tried and untried, deriving from art and deriving from other sources, in order to put reality in the hands of people in such a way that it can be mastered.”

Since there are many ways to do this, some established and others yet to be discovered and developed, it’s important to encourage artists to explore all means available in seeking effective combinations of form and content. “For time flows on, and if it did not it would bode ill for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods exhaust themselves, stimuli fail. New problems surface and demand new means. Reality changes; to represent it the mode of representation must change as well. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes out of the old, but that is just what makes it new.”

Representing the Enemy

In Brecht’s notion of realism, any artistic strategy is effective if it exposes the social totality as a causal nexus of relations and changeable product of history. To put it differently, Brecht’s art always aimed at a dialectical representation of capitalist society and its processes of exploitation and domination. Dialectics, as I’m using the term here, means grasping how time and possibility flow continuously through social life, actually or potentially transforming from within all that tends to be mistaken for fixed, eternal and unchanging. A dialectical representation of social reality is one that de-reifies and de-naturalizes human relations. Ultimately, it shows humanity to be an open essence produced in and by history, rather than an invariable nature imposed by fate.

In this regard, it would be instructive to understand Brecht’s oeuvre dialectically as well – as a sequence of dialectical representations produced at particular moments within an unfolding social context. That is, each of his theater works, poems, textual fragments and multi-media collaborations with Weigel, Hauptmann, Steffin, Weill, Eisler, Laughton and others, can be seen as an intervention, an attempt to establish a dialectic with the causal network, the social force-field, as Brecht perceived it in specific times and places: Germany during the partisan struggles, when a revolutionary passage to classless society was still a global project and evaluations of the USSR under Stalin

a difficult problem; the stations of exile after 1933, when the Nazi seizure of power deprived Brecht of direct access to an apparatus and public; Europe after 1939, when war made support for the alliance against the fascist states an urgent priority; California from 1941 through the end of the war, as the disclosures of Auschwitz and the news of Hiroshima impelled reassessments of fascism and capitalist modernity; East Berlin after his return in 1948, as he tried to hold open space for an experimental realism under the pressures of the Cold War and a Stalinist regime.

Working back through Brecht’s production in this way would at least help us to see that any contemporary practice inspired by Brecht would have to be more than a mere application of his categories and positions. It would have to establish the essential features of the contemporary context, in order to clarify the conditions for an effective dialectical representation and interventionist practice today.

It also opens up somewhat Adorno’s polemic against Brecht in the 1962 essay “Engagement.” Aside from their obviously different positions regarding the politics of artistic autonomy, Adorno’s specific dialectical criticisms of Brecht here have mainly to do with the effectiveness of Brecht’s dialectical representations of fascism and Nazism. The *Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and other anti-fascist works of the late 1930s and early 40s deploy humor to undercut the aura of invincibility of the Nazi war machine. Writing after critical reflection had begun to expose the full historical meanings of Auschwitz, Adorno condemns Brecht’s strategy as a dangerous trivialization of fascist power. For Adorno, the problem had become, not just how to depict capitalist relations and processes in an adequate way, but how to represent the whole disaster of capitalist modernity. On that point, Adorno’s critique bites. But with regard to Brecht, we may find that it goes too far and strays off target, especially given, first, that these works were meant to be weapons of struggle at particular moments rather than definitive representations and, second, that Brecht, recognizing their limitations, chose not to stage them after the war.

Why Dialectics?

It is probably unnecessary to pose this question for regular readers of *Chto delat*. But given the persistent prevalence of Deleuze-inspired rejections of “dialectics” in art theory today, it won’t be a waste of time to review quickly the case for holding on to the weapon of dialectics, as sketched above. Capitalist relations impose a fundamental division of labor on productive activity and processes, that between those who control and direct production and those who carry it out through wage labor. Making it possible for those who control production to pump surplus value out of those who have to perform it, this division is a wound that literally tears social reality in two. Mediated, institutionalized and enforced by state power and violence, it spreads through every aspect of what is now a globalized class society, saturating everyday life with alienation. Dialectics is the mode of thought that digs out and tracks the effects of this social division. It is not simply one intellectual tool on a menu of many, to be called on if we feel like it. Dialectics is imposed on us, as a necessary urgency, so long as we aim to hold the capitalist causal nexus in view and overcome it.

It is not that these categories – division of labor, exploitation, class – amount to an exhaustively complete description of social reality, accounting for all forms of human activity, conflicts and possibilities. They don’t. But they do account for the forces and processes out of which class society unfolds and is reproduced. If we want out of capitalism and class society, then we are obligated to become critical dialecticians. In doing dialectics, we are simply empowering ourselves to see the main cause of our collective misery. If we manage to find the political solutions with which to overcome the historical impasses of revolutionary practice and make the passage to a classless society – that is, one which organizes production without exploitation or domination – then we won’t need dialectics any more. Until then, what we need is more dialectics, not postmodernist confusions about this.

Saying this is not of course to claim that all forms of thought that have historically gone by this name are the same or are equally valuable or even legitimate. We have known for many decades that the crude forms of Dialectics that supplied the pieties of orthodoxy were hostile to dialectics as outlined above. It would be nice if this were acknowledged more often. In any case, if we’re going to go on reading *A Thousand Plateaus* for inspiration today, then we had better at least read it together with *Negative Dialectics* and Brecht’s *Collected Works*.

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Antonio Negri / Some thoughts

1. Dialectics of antagonism

Anyone who took part in the discussions on the dialectics developed by so-called Western Marxism during the 1930th, 1950th and 1960th would easily recognise how the roles played in those debates by Lukàcs' *History and Class Consciousness* and the work of the Frankfurt School were complementary. In a strange and ineffective hybridisation, a series of phenomenological descriptions and normative hypotheses produced in those periods regarded life, society and nature as equally invested by the productive power of capital and their potential as radically diminished by it. The question of alienation traversed the entire theoretical framework: the phenomenology of agency and historicity of existence were all seen as being completely absorbed by a capitalist design of exploitation and domination over life. The dialectic of *Aufklärung* was accomplished by the demonization of technology and the subsumption of society under capital was definitive. The revolutionaries had nothing to do but wait for the event that reopened history; while the non-revolutionaries simply needed to adapt to their fate, *Gelassenheit* [1].

Obviously, confronted with this (often inert) *pris de conscience* of the subsumption of society under capital, some opposed resistance. In this stage of Western Marxism, a critical point of view was emancipated and, for the first time, an ethical-political attitude emerged to connect theoretical devices towards the exaltation of the 'subversive particular'. This attitude created the conditions for a new kind of dialectics in a period of massive expansion of capitalist power over society. Opposed to the dehumanising dialectics of the capitalist relations of exploitation, another ethical and subjectivised dialectic opened the totality of the social context to the expression of new resistances. The principle of a new figure of subjectivity, or, rather, of the production of subjectivity was virtually affirmed, as was an open dialectic of 'critique' against the closed dialectic of 'critical-critique' and a standpoint of rupture within the placid and painful acceptance of the totalitarian high-handedness of capital in its two forms of management, the liberal and fascist form and/or the socialist and Stalinist one.

In France, Merleau-Ponty broke away from Frankfurt phenomenology; at the margins of the British Empire, in the overthrowing of colonial historiography, what would later be known as the post-colonial standpoint began to emerge; in Italy, France and Germany by overturning the injunction to regard technology as the exclusive field of alienation, hypotheses of workers' subversive use of machinery and workerist currents began to form. Thus was dialectics interrupted, so to speak, and on the terrain of this interruption and this hypothesis of an ensuing crisis of the capitalist ability to invest the social totality, the revolutionary subject reappeared in the shape of a free subjectivity that put itself forward as production, or expression.

Dialectics, from being abstract, became concrete. Dialectical development was given its determination on the historical curve of the accomplishment of capitalist development. It is not useless to recollect the pre-history to this, however brief. It brings us back to the ongoing renewal of analysis, not so much of dialectics in general, but of the use of dialectics in 'real Marxism', codified materialist dialectics. Let us consider, in relation to this overturning and the subsequent operative instances, the definition of dialectics proffered by some of the major interpreters of the time, in this case Lucio Colletti as he commented on Evald Vasilyevich Ilyenkov:

'In its most general terms, the Marxist theory of dialectics can be expressed as a theory of both the 'unity' and 'exclusion' of opposites, that is to say, a theory that tries to provide both the moment of *knowledge* (the possibility that the terms of opposition or contradiction can be grasped and comprehended together), and the moment of *reality* or objectivity of the

contradiction itself. The theory can be thus summarised in two fundamental exigencies or instances. The first is that the specificity or difference of an object from all others remains comprehensible, or can be mentally related to that difference that the object is not, or to all that residue that differs from the object. The second is that this comprehension would not abolish the 'difference', that knowledge does not exhaust reality in itself, that the coexistence or resolution of opposites in reason should not be mistaken for the resolution or abolition of their real opposition'. [2]

In the third chapter on 'Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete', Ilyenkov reached the following conclusion:

'Science must begin with that with which real history began. Logical development of theoretical definitions must therefore express the concrete historical process of the emergence and development of the object. Logical deduction is nothing but a theoretical expression of the real historical development of the concreteness under study.' [3]

Finally, *Capital* is directly drawn into the exposition:

'The mode of ascent from the abstract to the concrete permits to establish strictly and to express abstractedly only the absolutely necessary conditions of the possibility of the object given in contemplation. *Capital* shows in detail the necessity with which surplus-value is realised, given developed commodity-money circulation and free labour-power'. [4]

In 1960, the same year of the Italian publication of Ilyenkov, J. C. Michaud's *Theory and history in Marx's Capital* was translated and published by Feltrinelli. Its basic propositions coincided and often reinforced Ilyenkov's hypothesis:

'Dialectics is nothing on its own. It allows for the study of a movement but does not prejudices anything over it. By itself, it could not constitute the whole method, at least in Marx ... We don't believe that on its own dialectics allows us to reach any reconciliation between theory

and history' [5] Immediately after this thesis, Michaud adds:

'Political economy becomes science only in Marx's times, because only the universality of capitalist production is capable of *realising* all the abstract categories that make it possible to comprehend not only capitalist production, but also all of the historical systems that preceded it ... The pertinent feature of capitalism is that it *realises* the abstraction of all economic categories'. [6]

And this was subsequently developed in relation to the present (we will return to this when using the example of the current global crisis):

'The theory of value, if separated from that of surplus value (which is inconceivable for capitalism) presents itself as an abstract dialectics that expresses the conditions of existence of any relatively developed society in order to come into contact with other societies: it is not linked to any particular historical social form', but 'the value form in its most generic expression is precisely the specific form that the capitalist mode of production takes on at a precise moment' [7].

This language is now nearly incomprehensible. Nonetheless, if we pay attention, we can really understand what is at stake here: nothing less than the coming to grips with reality, the break from that obstacle that a fossilised materialist dialectics had become to a reading and transformation of the real. The great effort here consisted in the attempt to bring all abstract categories to bear on the determination of the concrete, to bend the universal to the determinations of historical development. This philosophical progression kept pace with a process of 'de-Stalinisation'. The great categories of Marxist analysis (abstract labour, value, money, rent, profit, etc.) were thus forcedly moved away from the theoretical context of 19th century materialism, where they were formulated, and towards a substantially new research practice. From then on, abstraction would only be justified as 'abstract determination'. But determined by what? By the fact that it is subjected, time and again, not only to an analysis of the generic contradictions

that run through each of the categories, but also to an analysis of the concrete, scientific, and practical determinations of political agency. From this standpoint, both in the Russia of de-Stalinisation and in the West inside and outside the communist parties, the last phase of Marxist theoretical discourse undoubtedly led the analysis of capitalist development way beyond what the Frankfurt school and the enduring legacy of Lukàcs achieved.

In 1968 the clash between these tendencies became fatal: instead of rejoicing on this revolutionary occasion, the realm of theory was definitively split and the defeat of the movements was followed by on the one hand an absolutisation of the dialectics of real subsumption, alienation, the one-sidedness of capitalist domination and the utopia of the rupture of the 'event', from Debord to the final stages of Althusserianism, to Badiou; and on the other hand, a struggle on the issues of difference, resistance and subjectivation. And although theoretical research into capitalist development and the devices of political resistance was transformed and pushed forward, it failed to recompose and unfold a communist perspective. In the attempt to make progress on this terrain, we placed ourselves in this last front of materialism, where a dialectics of antagonism could somehow be founded once more.

2. Materialism as biopolitics

In the period discussed above, dialectics was opened up: on the one hand it became entrusted to a discourse where the revolutionary event was an *Aufhebung*, on the other hand it presented itself as a *constituent experience* that rejected any evenemential or mystical aura. To what extent could we still call dialectics a method that made abstraction increasingly concrete, or singular? A method that made it impossible to resolve in thought and overcome in history the antagonism of productive forces and relations of production; a method that definitively relegated the historical and aleatory tendency and truth to practice; a method that made the effectiveness of the production of subjectivity increasingly virtual? It is difficult to answer this question. Difficult, especially when we see that in this last period, the abstraction of the categories



on the use of dialectics

was confronted with the experience of and experimentation with an epochal transformation of capitalist development that fixed them onto new figures of historical determination and presented this method a series of concepts that translated the phenomenology of capitalist development into completely new images and devices.

For example, the sequence of abstract labour – value – money was inserted into a completely new figure of financial capital; the process of real subsumption - or the shift from commodity production to the control over life put to work - the construction of the welfare state on the one hand and the institutional presence of ‘real socialism’ on the other presented capital as *biopower*; finally, the transformation of the law of value (when the power of cooperation, the means of circulation, the productive services and communication replaced the temporal measure of value as agents of capitalist valorisation) gave rise to a sort of ‘communism of capital’.

The analysis presented here follows the transformations of living labour, but when faced with social antagonism the categories of power it fights against no longer seem to have that dialectical ductility that the old materialism had given them. The compactness of the categories of biopower seems to exclude any possibility of rupture. Here, dialectics - that old dialectics against which the resistances we described had already developed - appears to be reduced to a mere *apology for capital*. What is left of dialectics then? Are internal reform and a shift of accent - outlined above as the insistence on the determination of abstraction, the assumption of a particular standpoint against the real subsumption of society under capital, etc. - sufficient to reconstruct dialectics as an effective research method? Probably not. If dialectics could no longer be seen as a ‘method of exposition’, this was not only due to the fact that it had fallen into crisis as a ‘research method’, but also because the *ontology of materialism itself had changed*. Materialism, today, is the biopolitical context.

It was necessary to move *inside* the determination, rather than to simply follow the passage from abstraction to determination, especially when the law of labour-value entered into crisis. The law of value functioned as a definition of the measure of exploitation, of the capitalist appropriation of surplus labour. But in the analysis of the transformations of labour exploitation and the new relationship between production and reproduction, looking deeper into the compound that capital had gradually built by enclosing in itself the laws of dialectics, imposing the coexistence of opposites, and realising successive *Aufhebungen*, in a context where modes of primitive accumulation are savagely repeated, one begins to understand how the actual power of exploitation no longer invests the figures of expropriation of singular labour (even when this is massified) but rather the *expropriation of the common*.

This discovery of the common as the point of departure of a redefinition of the potential for a communist political proposal developed unevenly but continuously, beginning with the analyses of new developments of capitalist accumulation after 1968. The gradual shift from the capitalist command over the factory (the Fordist organisation of industry and the discipline of the Taylorised working masses) to the exploitation of society as a whole (through the hegemony over immaterial labour, the organisation of cognitive labour and the control of finance) determined the new grounds of the operations of exploitation in cooperation, languages and common relations (which were found in the so-called ‘social externalities’).

If this is true, it is no longer a question of running after dialectics for its ability to reconstruct the unity of development whatever its contents. If the ‘common’ qualifies living labour as the basis and tendency of its emergence on the scene of production, then antagonism is given as an insuperable basis and tendency too, as the radical weakening of any dialectics of

‘coexistence of the opposites’, or more probably as the impossibility of any ‘universal’ resolution of the opposites. Capital has not lost all chance of internal reform because it is confronted by new figures of class struggle. In fact, given the new conditions of accumulation, the common is opposed to any universal appropriation, dialectical mediation and definitive institutional inclusion. The *crisis* is everywhere. Antagonism is no longer a method, it is a datum: *the one, in reality, has split into two*.

Let us use one example to interpret the *present global economic crisis*. Interpretations of it abound, but from left to right, they all ascribe the reasons for the crisis to the detachment of finance from ‘real production’. Starting from the new presuppositions outlined above, from the recognition of the crisis of the theory of labour-value and the emergence of a new ‘common’ quality of living labour, we would insist on the fact that rather than an unproductive or parasitical deviation in increasing quotas of surplus value and collective savings, the financialisation of the global economy is a new form of capital accumulation, symmetrical to new social and cognitive processes of production of value. The current financial crisis needs to be interpreted as a ‘blockage’ (freeze) of capital accumulation rather than the implosive outcome of a missed accumulation.

How to exit the crisis? On this question, the new science, no longer ‘dialectical’ but simply antagonistic, is affirmed. We can come out of this crisis only through a social revolution. The only possible proposal of a *New Deal* must create new rights of social ownership over common goods, a form of right that is clearly set against the right to private property. Up to now, access to common goods has taken the form of ‘private debt’; in fact the crisis exploded on the accumulation of this kind of debt. From now on it is legitimate to demand the same right in the form of a ‘social rent’. The only way and the

right way out of this crisis entails the demand for recognition of these common rights.

3. From representation to expression

Let us now go back to the “one that divides into two”. We have already explained the consequences of this in our interpretation of the current crisis. But let us examine the situation more closely. If we look at the explanation of the “one that divides into two” from inductive, genealogical point of view, first of all we note that this opening of the dialectical capital relation is primarily due to the biopolitical excess of living labour expressed in the figures of cognitive and immaterial productivity. In this situation, from the standpoint any closure of relationship between constant and variable capital seems inoperable. The cognitive and immaterial labour in general (communicative, tertiary, affective etc.) that is realised in the biopolitical realm can not be completely consumed in the process of capitalist exploitation: it is only constitutes, in the face of exploitation, cumuli of valorising residues (of constant capital) but also alternatives of expression and development, in other words devices of *exodus*. Thus the feature of the new epoch of capitalist production show it to be an epoch of *crisis* and of *transition* outside of the continuity of capitalist development.

This exit from capitalist development is characterised not only by the difficulties that the dialectical dispositifs now definitively entrusted to capital face when closing processes of production; but also by the problems of the cyclical movements of capitalist development in repeating themselves and nurturing one another between stages of development and recession, to insert in this shift moments of technological innovation and new organisations of social relations. We may add that there is no longer any *homology* between the institutional assets and configuration of capitalist power and the proletarian or multitudinous movements in their specific potential. The (communist) philosophers who claim that there are no substantial ruptures from institutions in the spontaneity and free dynamics of the movements

and that the economic and political cages of capitalist power linger on, are both wrong and short sighted because they fail to understand that *any isomorphism of power and potentia*, and of command and resistance *no longer exists*. Not only and not simply because these relations cannot be phenomenologically and logically described, but because, even if they were, these relations are subtracted from the hegemony of the One and linked to the alternative dynamics and exodus of the multitude.

It has to be said that the dynamics of exodus of the multitude from capitalist command and its structures in crisis in real subsumption are often not recognised because we expect to be able to purify and imagine proletarian movements ‘outside’ of the real connections of the historical process. It is as if the insurgence of liberation, rupture and biopolitical transformations could be events uncontaminated by the materiality in which they are immersed even though they develop within the subsumption of society under institutional and political biopower. No, the rupture from capitalism, command and biopower occurs ‘within’ the world of exchange values, inside the world of commodities Ć an outside that is not constructed on the basis of this rupture is unimaginable. And given that we have come to speak of the ‘common’ as the environment where value is constructed and therefore as what is directly exploited by capital, let us say that the only event, the only ‘use value’ that can be recuperated inside the processes of liberation as potentia opposed to power, as constituent power alternative to constituted power, is precisely the ‘common’ from which we move and of which we are both the agents and products.

To conclude, without a doubt the contamination between the determinations of resistance produced in the political theory and experience of Deleuze-Guattari and the historical meaning of the production of subjectivity that is discernible mainly in the last phase of Foucault’s thought cannot be brought back to this new ‘dialectics’: it has nothing to do with so-called ‘materialist dialectics’ (*Diamat*) but has all to do with biopolitical, cognitive and immaterial surplus and with a production that is internal to the biopolitical process of constitution of the real. Allow me to recall Deleuze’s answer to one of my questions on what it means to be materialists and communists (found in *Pourparler*): ‘communism is the production of a people to come...’ [8]. Having said that and insisting on the ‘to-come’ in the dispositif of Deleuze we hear the same rhythm (which we may call dialectical) as Marx and Engels’ in *The Communist Manifesto*, or in Marx when he goes back to the history of class struggle in his writings, the historicity founded in the works of Machiavelli and Spinoza.

There was a recent attempt at recuperating Hegel, especially the young Hegel, from Jena to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and the

‘Additions’ to *The Philosophy of Right* (Axel Honneth) in order to reconstruct an open dialectics from below that could be structured in terms of interactivity and inter-subjectivity that was still able to configure a normative and historically sound theory of justice. This is a repetition in the infinite attempts to recuperate dialectics as both a research method and form of exposition. But the difficulty lies here: the dialectics cannot avoid being constituted as a ‘representation’ of the whole of the process that leads to the affirmation of truth, here in the actual crisis of capitalist development and its cultural and institutional forms the word can only be brought back to the ability of the subjects’ expression. The common is not constituted as representation but as expression, and here the dialectics end.

Let us not forget that although dialectics, as *àcs* taught us, is the theoretical weapon of capital for the development and organisation of society, and although its crisis opens up to expressions of new theoretical needs for building a philosophy of the present, these needs must always assume productive activity as the source of any social configuration. Living labour and human activity on the biopolitical terrain are at the basis of any subjectivation. The new constitution of the common, no longer dialectical but still materialist, is articulated by subjective dispositifs and the desire to flee solitude and to realise multitudes.

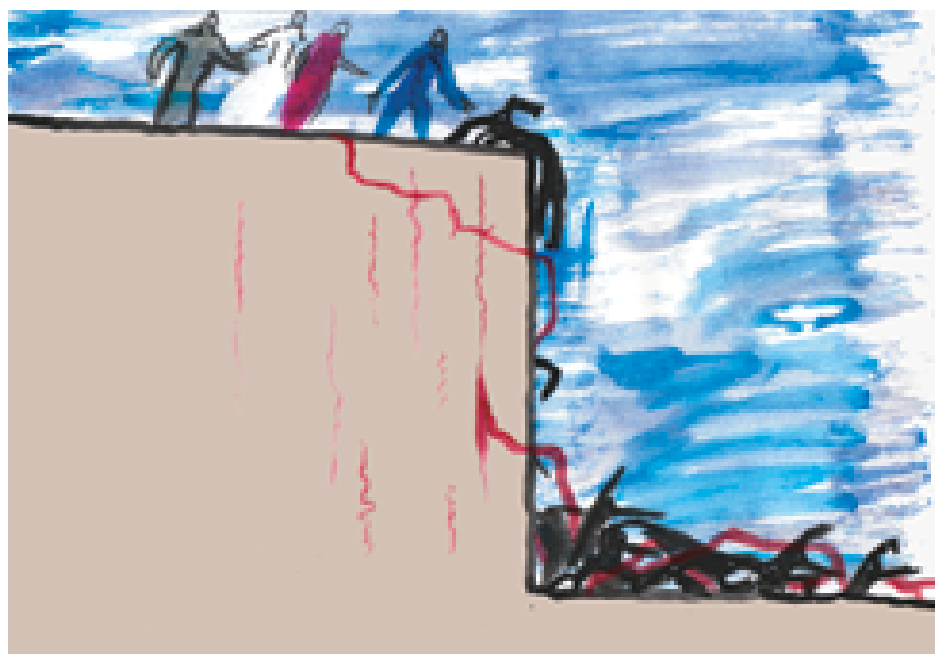
Antonio “Toni” Negri (born 1933) is an Italian Marxist Political philosopher.

These text is written contribution to the conference *Critical Thought in the 21st Century*, Moscow, June 2009

Translation from Italian by Arianna Bove [<http://www.generation-online.org>]

Translator’s note:

1. This word has over 17 meanings. First seen in Revelation 13:10, then used by the Anabaptists, Eckhart, and finally recuperated by Heidegger in his ‘Conversations on a country path’ (Erörterung der Gelassenheit). For more on the latter, see J. Wikse’s ‘Slowing things down: Gelassenheit and the somatics of dialogue’
2. L. Colletti, ‘Prefazione’ to E. V. Ilyenkov [1960], *La dialettica dell’astratto e del concreto nel Capitale di Marx*, trans.
3. E. V. Ilyenkov [1960], *The dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in Marx’s Capital*, trans. By S. Syrovatkin, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982, p. 200, (also available on www.marxist.org)
4. *Ibid.* P. 283, also available on www.marxist.org
5. J. C. Michaud, *Teoria e storia nel Capitale di Marx* [Theory and History in Marx’s Capital], Feltrinelli, Milan: 1960, p. 140
6. *Ibid.* P. 189
7. *Ibid.* P. 197
8. *Futur Antérieur* 1 (Spring 1990), trans. by Martin Joughin, also on <http://www.generation-online.org>



David Riff - Dmitry Gutov

Simply Describing

David Riff: Do you remember when we visited Fred Jameson at Duke University a couple of years ago? On the first night in America, Fred's assistant Colin took us to a burger bar, where we sat around drinking beers and making small talk. Colin was telling us about his research: Adornian music theory, post-operaist virtuosity, and American radical politics. Suddenly, there was this extraordinary moment. Our friend Vlad Sofronov, a very thin Trotskyist bald spectacled activist philosopher who had been silent all evening, leaned over and looked Colin straight in the eye. Head on, he asked him in a thick Russian accent: "Colin, what is your method? Simply describing?" I want to start our dialogue with a similar bluntness: what is your method, Comrade Gutov?

Dmitry Gutov: I remember the situation very well; it is etched into my mind. What did Vlad want to say with his question? That "simply describing" is not our method, that it is non-partisan positivism that suspends its judgement on the phenomena of reality and is therefore poorly suited to the revolutionary transformation of reality. But I want to make a case for "simply describing." It is not so easy to provide a simple description. Tendentious statements are far easier to construct. Everything in the world is dialectical, every object, every event. Before adding home-grown truths to that general flow, or better yet, before inserting them, it is much better to let things speak for themselves. This is really what "simply describing" is for, as a procedure. In other words, there are two kinds of "simply describing," and not all "simple descriptions" are bad. Anyone who says otherwise is being undialectical. Because "simple descriptions" can be false and they can be true. When an author proposes no solution and never takes anyone's side too obviously, but makes an accurate image, his or her position can only gain from it.

DR: I like what you say about there being two kinds of "simply describing." The question is how to tell the difference between a good one and a bad one, and how to get from the false "simple description" to the true. Even if "everything in the world is already dialectical" (which, said like that, sounds like religion), you can't channel the twists and turns of change and rely on blind faith alone for reality to reveal itself. If reality itself is dialectical, that means it is constantly changing in a contradictory process. Most "simple descriptions" do not reveal those contradictions, but obscure them and close them off with a constellation of "simple facts." That, in turn, creates an illusion of eternal truth, not only in the public hairs on a Nazi sculpture, but also the many facts and figures in an IMF report. Both are "simply describing" their respective objects, but as I would argue, in a very positive way. The question, then, is how to avoid doing that, how to avoid letting "simple facts" speak for those powers who think they are eternal, and how to reach a "simple description" of a fundamentally different type. And the former only comes after what Hegel called the "work of the negative;" it will be a way of handling the uncertainty that lies at the heart of all things.

DG: Here, I have to warn you away from using the notion of "uncertainty." This, today, is one of the cornerstones of intellectual mass culture. Via popular scientific literature, the concerns of 20th century physicists and chemists came to the population at large, which is already in a state of permanent stress and inner unease at the uncertain immediate future. Quotes from Heisenberg came in very handy, because they gave some kind of scientific legitimacy to that social psychosis, to what was called the "uncertainty of tomorrow" in the Soviet Union. You can find one of the most vivid descriptions of the world as something unpredictable, instable, and indefinite in a New York Times Bestseller of 2007 by Nassim Nicholas Taleb called "The Black Swan. The Impact of the Highly Improbable". This is a

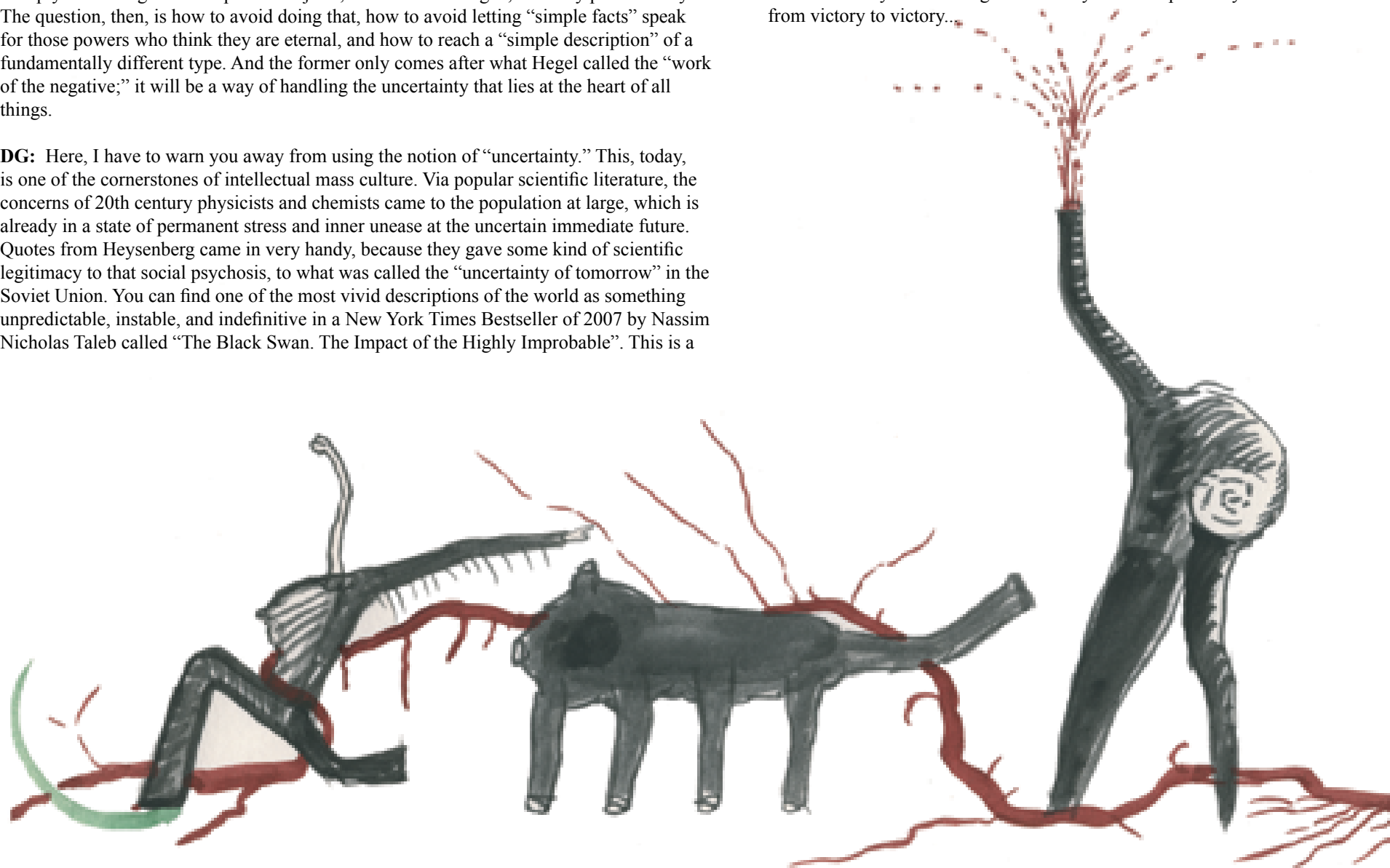
classical example of an undialectical approach. The author writes of uncertainty in more than certain tones. If he were an artist, he would have included uncertainty into the very fabric of his text. In these places, uncertainty itself would have become uncertain, which, in turn, would reveal that there are, in fact, laws that we can grasp. This would be a dialectical method.

DR: So there are two different kinds of uncertainty too. Getting back to the original question, is this how you work as an artist? I know, for example, that you methodically erase your paintings. Is that a dialectical method?

DG: There is no direct relation. Whenever I think that I could have made a better piece on that canvas, I wash it off.

DR: I like the Chinese laconicity of your words. But let me denounce you again. You yourself are introducing the kind of one-sided uncertainty you yourself just criticized in another form, as an obstinate romantic insistence that there are unknowable personal reasons, dialectical secrets maybe. But there is a law governing the "work of the negative," no? Reasons for your paintings to appear or disappear? So again, Comrade Gutov, please, a more dialectical answer: where does the decision to erase an image come from? Is the continual repainting of your work politically motivated? Maybe it would best if you "simply describe" your method...

DG: If you want a precise political analogy to washing off paintings, you can find it in that famous description of proletarian revolution in Marx's "18th Brumaire." The revolution constantly has to return to what it has already done, convince itself of its own limitations and flaws, and begin all over again, every time around. This doesn't mean that yesterday's certainties have been replaced by today's uncertainty. There wasn't any certainty yesterday either. In general, a dose of uncertainty is necessary to make any work of art. Bourgeois taste, by the way, doesn't like that too much. Those people are infinitely sure of themselves in their dealings, and they like to see the same kind of strong hand in art. A bold and slightly savage brushstroke that makes its way across the canvas like a bulldozer. They like the surgical accuracy of the sniper. They like art that moves from victory to victory...



DR: ...and you won't give them that? Allow me to intervene in your "simple description" with a little vulgar sociology. I'm not so sure that you are saying about bourgeois taste is true any longer on a global scale. It's a local effect of the Russian nouveaux riche, a Lumpenized socialist petit bourgeoisie violently propelled to the peaks of hypercapitalism. The haute bourgeois taste has evolved by several degrees. They don't only like strident painting, but also fragility and uncertainty, wonderfully incomplete projects, utopias and follies of any ilk, unhappy consciousness, and even the deep political melacholia of Marxists like you and me. This is bourgeois philanthropy at its best and its most insipid: to fetishize the products of the producers it employs, to "pity its victims," because they are so intricate and fragile, like little flowers, to love the uncertainty of the poor wretches, those subjects upon whose recognition their mastery depends, and to embed them in their world. Maybe we should say that there is fragility and fragility, just like there is "simply describing" and "simply describing," just like there is uncertainty and uncertainty? Much contemporary art suffers from the wrong kind of simply describing, the wrong kind of uncertainty, the wrong kind of self-negation, the wrong kind of fragility. It is the vagueness and self-negation of a recognized slave. Where would you look for examples of the right approach?

DG: You can find a great example if you look at Pushkin's manuscripts. All those endless crossings-out, corrections, combinations. You can see the same thing in the manuscripts of Marx. Nothing comes on its own, and nothing comes easily. This is something like the creativity of nature that produces everything with an unbelievable overexpenditure of energy and material. That is, for the two of us to be able to sit in a corner of the world and talk about dialectics, we needed millions of light years of silent space to be spent in vain. It is a continual process of erasure in which there is a small chance that something might actually emerge.

DR: For me, this again sounds dangerously metaphysical, especially when you speak about lightyears and cosmos. But OK. I think I know what you mean. Not only because I erase every sentence I write on an average of a hundred times, only to then write it once, but properly in the course of ten seconds, but also because I see quite clearly that politically "we stand on the foundation of defeats." Only, I think it is very dangerous to fall into a contemplative attitude in regard to that fact, to revert to "simply describing," humbled, as it were, in the face of those who have recognized our status as the defeated. There must be some intervention in "simply describing" that changes it from positivism and metaphysics into something very different. It is not just enough to read about dialectics for years on end; you have to change something in your way of working, to prevent the wrong descriptions and the wrong uncertainties...

DG: You know that I really love to read not only Marx and Hegel but also Chinese tractates on art. A general conclusion that I have drawn from them is that you have to work through counter-motions. If you want to make an upward line, make a downward line; draw mountains like water, and waves like rocks. Paint heaviness as something light, and lightness as something heavy. Look for dissimilarities in the similar, and for similarity in the disparate. This approach is very different from the more direct methodologies, which, by the way, also work very well. In fact, most of the time, they are even better. Such methods are a little like a hammer, which is a simple and effective instrument.

DR: A hammer like simply describing.

DG: Exactly.

Dmitry Gutov, artist. Lives and works in Moscow. David Riff, critic, member of Chto Delat workgroup. Lives and works in Moscow and Berlin





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