

# Report on the Chemnitz Pogrom

## First-hand report by a German activist

Maybe you've heard of it, maybe not. This is a brief report on recent happenings in Chemnitz / Saxonia.

Chemnitz is a former industrial city of about 250.000 citizens situated in Saxony. This German state is known for its pretty right-wing state apparatuses and a strong fascist street movement (Pegida). Chemnitz, too, has a strong fascist movement and for some time it even was home to the Neonazi terror group, National-Socialist Underground' (NSU), known for having executed nine immigrants and a police officer.

**There is, however, also a left-wing, antifa and anarchist scene in Chemnitz with two housing projects, an autonomous youth center, a feminist group, a local group of the anarchist union FAU and antifascist activists.**

In the night of Saturday to Sunday, August 25th/26th, two groups of men got into trouble during the Chemnitz city festival. An Iraqi and a Syrian national reportedly stabbed two Russian Germans and a Cuban German, the latter, Daniel H., dying as a result of his injuries.

On Sunday morning, when the public learned of the killing, the right-wing football hooligan group Kaotic Chemnitz called on facebook for a protest in the streets. In the evening about 1000 right-wing hooligans, fascists, and so-called ,concerned citizens' gathered and started to march through Chemnitz. Police was not able to control them at all. At some point the mob started chasing and beating up immigrants.

A local fascist fringe party, Pro Chemnitz, that also has deputies in the city council, called for a march on the following day. Now antifascists from Chemnitz and neighbouring cities such as Dresden, Leipzig, Jena, Erfurt and others

started to mobilise, too. On Monday evening 1000 antifascists of all stripes faced a mixture of 8000 hooligans, fascists and right-wing citizens. Police deployed only 600 officers and, hence, was not able to control the fascists. During and after their march several street fighting squads left the fascist rally aiming to attack the antifascists. On the way from the antifascist rally to the train station, to their cars or back home several antifascists were attacked. They got off lightly, though. Only one remained with a broken nose.

Monday was a wake-up call, not only for the radical movement but for the public, too. It was clear that something had to be done. On Thursday, Saxony's Minister-President Kretschmer was to join a citizens' dialogue in Chemnitz and fascists would organise a counter-rally and on Saturday there would be two marches, organised by Pro Chemnitz and AfD. At the end, it was agreed to call for an antifascist rally to be held in Chemnitz on Saturday.

On Monday, about 900 right-wingers held a rally against Minister-President Kretschmer, the 'lying press', the 'political establishment' and so forth. No specific incidents.

On Saturday, fascists and antifascists from all over Germany went to Chemnitz. 4500 fascists and 3500 antifascists were reported. Pro Chemnitz held a first march and then joined the march that was organised by the AfD as a 'silent march' allegedly to commemorate the victim of the stabbing. At some point, the march could be blocked by hundreds of antifascists. After that police kettled hundreds of antifascists, keeping them for hours and checking their ID's. At the same time, fascist groups started attacking counter-protesters again. Several people were injured.

In some West-German cities there were big antifascist rallies. In Hamburg up to 10.000 people took to the streets, in Berlin, too. That's nice but it doesn't change the situation on the ground. Still, it shows that it's not just fascists conquering

the streets but that we're witnessing some kind of polarisation.

On Monday, September 3rd, a concert ,against the right' and ,against hatred' and with the slogan ,We're more' was organised in Chemnitz by different artists, some mainstream (like ,Kraftklub', ,Die Toten Hosen'), others openly antifa (such as ,Feine Sahne Fischilet' and ,Egotronic').

**About 65.000 people reportedly attended the concert.**

The concert didn't change the balance of forces on the streets, though. On Friday, September 7th, there was another march organised by Pro Chemnitz. 2000 fascists and about 1000 antifascists took to the streets. This time, no clashes were reported. As it seems, things are calming down now.

Some notes from an anarchist perspective. On Monday, the second day of the pogrom, there were only 600 police and the fascists' march went totally out of control. That was not, as liberals and democrats assert, government failure. Everybody knew that thousands of fascists would flock to Chemnitz and that things would get extremely violent. It must have been a conscious decision by some higher echelons in the police and state apparatuses to deploy way too few police and, thus, let the situation escalate.

In the pogroms of the past years it's been the same, in Freital / Saxony in January 2015, in Heidenau /Saxony in August 2015 and in other places, too. It seems to be the strategy of a part of Saxony's (and Germany's) state apparatus to encourage and tolerate fascist street violence and terror – **as a means to combat leftists, to discipline the immigrant population, and to legitimise calls for the further buildup of the police and secret services.**

On Saturday, September 1st, we've seen an alliance of fascists across political divisions: right-wing football hooligans, local fascists of Pro Chemnitz, national-socialists of Dritter

Weg, fascists of the party Die RECHTE, the Identitarian Movement, the right-wing populist movement Pegida, the right-wing populist party AfD. This marks a new stage in the history of the fascist movement since 2012. The fascists are growing ever stronger and the level of street violence is increasing.

Also on the antifascist side, somehow organically, **a unity front has been formed**, stretching from the social-democratic party SPD to autonomous antifas and anarchists. Thuringia's SPD, for example, sponsored busses to bring counter-protestors from Erfurt, Jena, and other cities to Chemnitz and almost all antifas, radical leftists and anarchists from those cities took those busses. There is a huge debate on how closely or if at all we should cooperate with politicians and authoritarian leftists and in the past years many of us categorically denied any cooperation. During the pogrom, however, the question was not even raised. This should give us reason for reflection.

Democratic politicians of all stripes (from the conservative CDU to the left-wing party) were quick to condemn the fascist street violence. What's their motive? Some of them were pretty clear about that. They're concerned that fascist violence might cheapen the image of Chemnitz, frighten off investors and entrepreneurs and endanger the integration of immigrants as a cheap and flexible workforce into the German economy. At the same time, there are only very few politicians to condemn state violence against immigrants, e.g. vexatious police controls or deportations, to the same extent. Furthermore, those 'antifascists' felt compelled to distance themselves from left-wing and radical antifascists, lumping them together with the fascists as 'extremists'.

**The objective of their antifascism, i.d. state antifascism, hence, is to maintain a certain equilibrium of forces in order to keep capitalist exploitation and the wielding of state authority going smoothly.**

The AfD is the third strongest party in Germany. In the 2017

federal elections it won 12,5 per cent of the votes. In some states, such as Saxony, it won around 25 per cent, thus becoming the second strongest party. In Saxony, where state elections are going to be held in 2019, according to this election outcome, the only government possibly to be formed would be a coalition government of the conservative CDU and the fascist AfD. Their strategy, as laid out by AfD leader and right-wing intellectual Björn Höcke, is to transform the democratic system into an authoritarian regime. This is to be done by a national opposition made up by three fronts: the AfD as parliamentary force, the Neonazis as street movement, and, thirdly, disenchanted segments of the state apparatuses, i.d. cops, judges, state attorneys, military. This strategy is proving to be successful. The AfD is already the third strongest party.

The street violence scenes of Chemnitz showed the increasing strength of the fascist movement. And there are a lot of cops, military, judges and other state officials in the AfD or in touch with the AfD. To give just one example of these days. In the midst of the Chemnitz events a correctional officer leaked the arrest warrant of the suspected murderer of the Daniel H. to fascists who then published it. Before leaking it, he discussed the move with around a dozen colleagues in a WhatsApp group.

**Fascism, however, is not an endeavour of the new right.**

We should not forget that it's conservative, social-democratic, green, in some states such as Berlin and Thuringia even left-wing politicians who are organising today's deportation regime – not the AfD. During the Chemnitz pogrom it was the Saxon police, i.d. of a state led by a conservative-social democratic government, that gave free rein to fascists and attacked anti-fascists. After the Chemnitz pogrom it was Saxony's Minister-President of the CDU and the head of the German intelligence service, the 'Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution', who doubted and even

denied that there was any mob violence against immigrants in Chemnitz – not the AfD. Even Sara Wagenknecht, a politician of Die Linke, not the AfD, who defended the right-wing mob by stating that not all protesters were fascists, that many of them were socially discontent citizens.

All in all, this is a sinister situation and many of us feel pretty concerned about the future.

---

## **Interview with Kristin Ross | May '68: Beyond the Artificial Commemorations and Remembrances**

*Interview with Kristin Ross by Yavor Tarinski for Babylonia Journal.*

*You can find the interview in Greek [here](#).*

*Kristin Ross gave an interview for Babylonia journal, analyzing the meanings and significance of May '68. She will be among the keynote speakers at this year's B-Fest (25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> of May in the Fine Arts School in Athens). Ross is a professor of comparative literature at New York University and author of many books like "May '68 and Its Afterlives", "The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune" and "Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune".*

**Yavor Tarinski:** This year marks the 50th anniversary of the rebellious May '68, when the Parisian youth took to the streets, challenging established social hierarchies and

**dominant myths. What is, according to you, the relevance that this date bears for us today?**

**Kristin Ross:** The categories you use—"Parisian youth" and even "May '68,"—are precisely the narrative categories that I tried to put into question and actively dismantle in my book, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*. Perhaps what your question shows is the tenacity that certain tropes and images hold in organizing our vision of the recent past. I don't perceive "youth" *per se* to be the political subject of '68; I don't see the events as occurring in the French capital; and the worldwide set of political insurrections and social turbulence to which we have given the name of "68" was certainly not limited to the month of May.

So, if what we call May '68 bears any relevance for us today, we would have to look for it outside the parameters of your question, as I will discuss when I come to Athens: in western France, perhaps, or on the outskirts of Tokyo; in the fruits of the unexpected meetings between very different kinds of people—workers and farmers, for instance, or French students and Algerian immigrants—and the political subjectivization sparked by those encounters; in the great "protracted wars" like the Lip or Larzac in France for example, which traversed the long 1960s (a political sequence that extends, in my view, from the late 1950s through the mid-1970s), and which thus have a duration that far exceeds the month of May.

**Y.T.:** This period is seen by many as a pivotal one in the evolution of revolutionary thinking and praxis. On the one hand it shattered the idea of predetermined revolutionary subject, i.e. the working class, while on the other it challenged the privileges and leadership of "enlightened" experts (even of those that claim to hold expertise in revolution and social change), proposing instead radical forms of direct democracy. Many on the Left, however, have come to view this democratic decentralization as the ultimate reason for the revolt's failure, since it prevented the social

movements of that time from seizing state-power. You on the other hand seem to disagree with this narrative. What really made the rebellious events of May '68 fail in their effort at radically transforming society, if you agree that they have failed?

**K.R.:** I am not a political theorist and try never to put myself in the position of gauging the success or failure of an insurrection or social movement. I don't think the logic of failure/fulfillment gets us very far in our consideration of past movements, but it is a strikingly persistent logic. I'll give you an example. A couple years ago, I had a discussion with Alain Badiou during which he insisted on the Paris Commune as an example of failure. I was tempted to ask him what, in his opinion, a successful Commune at that time would have looked like! I have always found it very difficult to know what counts as success and what has failed. There's a saying in English: how many swallows make a summer?

The events that have preoccupied me—May '68 and the Paris Commune—are a paradise for what I call back-seat drivers, those after-the-fact experts who second-guess the historical actors and make an inventory of their errors. Why didn't the Communards march on Versailles? Why weren't they better organized militarily? Why did they waste their precious time (presuming, of course, they were aware of the imminent demise that would render their time so precious) quarreling in the Hôtel de Ville? Why didn't they seize the money from the bank? Why did French workers during '68 end their strike?

What is amazing to me is how unshakeable the desire to either teach the past a lesson or to have the past's "failures" teach us a lesson (which comes to the same thing) can be. With Badiou I tried several ways of avoiding the pedagogical paradigm he was adopting toward the past. I spoke about how, for those who lived the Commune, a real sense of liberation and network of solidarity were achieved. I spoke of the ideas unleashed, for us now to consider, precisely by the inventive

nature of the event. (Of course, both of these statements hold true for '68 as well). And despite all that, Médiapart (the host of the discussion) still entitled the interview "The Lessons of the Commune!"

What this shows, I think is how much progressive thinking about emancipation still operates as though there were an agreed-upon blueprint of ends to be attained, and as though these ends could be precisely determined and then objectively measured as having been achieved or not achieved according to time-worn standards or to criteria drawn up in 2017. I think people enjoy being in the position of establishing, after the fact, what was possible, impossible, too soon, too late, outmoded or unrealistic at any given moment. But what is lost when one adopts this position is any sense of the experimental dimension of politics.

In order to view the Commune or what occurred in any number of places during the '68 years as laboratories of political invention, and to see the capacities set in motion when ordinary people work together to manage their own affairs, I had to try to completely disengage from any traces of the kind of balance-sheet logic I've been describing.

**Y.T.: In your book "May '68 and its Afterlives" you say that the anonymous militants that were active in the everyday neighborhood grassroots politics of May '68, have been replaced in the "official" memory by leaders and spokesmen that appeared afterwards. A similar pattern you observe in another revolutionary moment in another book of yours – "Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune". Why is that happening and how can the oppressed reclaim their history?**

**K.R.:** My books were each written to intervene into specific situations. In the late 1990s I began thinking about '68 and the way it had been remembered, debated, trivialized, and forgotten over the years. The reason for my fascination with

that question at that moment had nothing to do with a commemoration or other artificial date of remembrance.

Instead, what motivated me was the way in which the 1995 labor strikes in France, followed by anti-globalization protests in Seattle and Genoa, had awakened new manifestations of political expression in France and elsewhere and new forms of a vigorous anti-capitalism after the long dormancy of the 1980s. It was this revitalized political momentum that led me to write my history of May's afterlives. The workers' movements had dislodged a sentiment of oblivion, if not triviality, that had settled over the '68 years, and I felt the need to try to show the way the events, what had happened concretely to a staggeringly varied array of ordinary people throughout France, had not only receded from view, but had in fact been actively "disappeared" behind walls of grand abstractions, fusty clichés and unanchored invocations. The re-emergence of the labor movement in the 90s jarred the 60s loose from all the images and phrases put into place in France and elsewhere by a confluence of forces—the media, the institution of the commemoration, and the ex-gauchistes converted to the imperatives of the market.

At that time only a few faces—I'm talking about men like Bernard Henri-Levy, Andre Glucksmann, Bernard Kouchner, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and Alain Finkelkraut—were visible, and only their voices could be heard over the French airways, recounting what was taken to be the official account of the movement. These self-appointed and media-anointed spokesmen (we have their equivalents in the United States), all of whom could be relied upon to re-enact at the drop of a hat the renunciation of the errors of their youth, were those I called in my book the official memory functionaries.

The labor strikes of the winter of 1995 not only succeeded in forcing a government climb down over the issue of changes to the pensions of public sector workers, they also wrested control of the memory of '68 from the official spokespeople

and reminded people what all the combined forces of oblivion, including what we can now see as a kind of Americanization of the memory of French May, had helped them to forget: that May '68 was the largest mass movement in modern French history, the most important strike in the history of the French labor movement, and the only "general" insurrection western, overdeveloped countries had experienced since World War II.

In any mass political movement on the left, there is always the danger of what I call "personalization" to take place—that process whereby people involved in a leaderless social movement on a massive scale allow the forces of order or the media to concentrate the task of "representing the movement" and speaking for it, in just a few central figures. But this kind of monopolizing of the memory of an event by official spokespeople did not really occur to anywhere the same extent in the case of the Commune as it did with '68. After all, many Communards were dead at the end of the Bloody Week, the survivors were scattered throughout Europe and even the United States. Despite all sorts of censorship on the part of the French government, survivors were able to publish their memoirs and accounts, mostly in Switzerland.

Historians writing in the wake of the Commune do, of course, tend to concentrate their attention on the same figures: Louise Michel, for example, or Gustave Courbet. In my thinking about historical processes, I find that it is always interesting to shove these kind of leading men and leading women to the back of the stage—if only to see who or what becomes visible when one does so.

**Y.T.: Your work encompasses another pivotal revolutionary moment – The Paris Commune. In "The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune" you write that the Commune was not just an uprising against the acts of the Second Empire, but perhaps more than all, a revolt against deep forms of social regimentation. One pattern, for example, that seems to be shared by both is the urge from the grassroots towards**

**dismantling bureaucratically imposed social roles and identities. Can this and other parallels be drawn between these two urban revolutionary experiences?**

**K.R.:** Yes, I believe that deep forms of social regimentation were under attack in both moments—during the Commune and during May '68. Artists and artisans under the Commune managed to dismantle the central hierarchy at the heart of 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic production—the hierarchy that gave “fine” artists (sculptors and painters) vast financial privilege, status, and security over decorative artists, craftspeople and artisans. And one way of looking at '68 is as a massive crisis in functionalism—students no longer functioned as students, farmers stopped farming, and workers quit working.

There's a nice quote from Maurice Blanchot, of all people, that sums up the situation quite accurately. The specific force of May, he wrote, derived from the fact that “in this so-called student action, students never acted as students, but as the revealers of a total crisis, as bearers of a power of rupture putting into question the regime, the State, the society.” The same could be said about farmers at that time—they acted as farmers but as far more than farmers as well; they were thinking about their situation and the question of agriculture politically and not just sociologically.

**Y.T.:** In 1988 you wrote that if workers are those who are not allowed to transform the space/time allotted them, then revolution consists not in changing the juridical form that allots space/time but rather in completely transforming the nature of space/time. Such traits we saw in both May '68 and the Paris Commune. Do you see such revolutionary potential in the contemporary age, in which political apathy, mindless consumerism and generalized cynicism seem to reign?

**K.R.:** May '68 holds absolutely no interest at all for me except to the extent that it can enter into the figurability

of our present and illuminate our current situation. If it doesn't, we are right to consign it to the dust-heap. As a group of radical historians put it in the wake of '68, "Think the past politically in order to think the present historically." Their message was a two-pronged attack. First: think the present both as scandal and as something that can change. And second: history is much too important a matter to be left to historians.

Any analysis of an historical event, and especially the 1960s, conveys a judgment about the present situation. When confronted with any attempt to represent the 60s, we have to ask ourselves what is being fought for in the present, *what is being defended now*. These are the questions I intend to pursue in my lecture in Athens.

---

## **Interview with Redneck Revolt: Arms Possession & Social Anti-fascism in U.S.A.**

*Interview with Redneck Revolt by Yavor Tarinski and Kostas Savvopoulos for Babylonia Journal. You can find the interview in Greek [here](#).*

On this year's B-Fest in Athens we have with us people from the RedneckRevolt movement from the U.S. (25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> of May in the Fine Arts School in Athens). Redneck Revolt was founded in 2016 as an anti-racist, anti-fascist network of community defense formations.

Redneck Revolt are fighting for social emancipation against any kind of oppressive regime or system, by highlighting the

common struggles between people of color, the working class and the under-privileged in general. In the states of the U.S.A. where it's legal to carry and operate firearms they are organizing protests and actions which they guard on their own, exercising their right to carry firearms. They propose a different look on the concept of gun ownership and use. They also operate a number of gun clubs and shooting ranges where they help their members to learn how to protect themselves and others against police brutality and the recent rise of the far right.

Their political ideologies are less important in the face of common and collective action. Through their actions they are providing the necessary space for oppressed people to express and assert themselves against the systemic and everyday inequalities and struggles.

**Babylonia: What is Redneck Revolt and where does it draw it's influences from?**

**Redneck Revolt:** Redneck Revolt was founded in 2016, as an anti-racist, anti-fascist community defense formation. The history of the term redneck is long and complex. One of the earliest recorded uses of the term comes from the 1890's, and refers to rednecks as "poorer inhabitants of the rural districts...men who work in the field, as a matter of course, generally have their skin burned red by the sun, and especially is this true of the back of their necks".

□ In 1921, the term became synonymous with armed insurrection against the state, as members of the United Mine Workers of America tied red bandanas around their necks during the Battle of Blair Mountain, a two week long armed multi-racial labor uprising in the coalfields of West Virginia.

□ We are influenced by the ethos of direct action embodied by John Brown as he and eighteen comrades, including former

slaves, raided a Federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, on October 15, 1859, in an attempt to seize weapons to be used in a massive slave uprising. Brown's raid failed. But their courage and complete dedication to the freedom of all people serves as an example and testament: a refusal to submit to oppression and fear and to organize and act for the liberation of all with insurrectionary zeal burning hotly against the brutal institution of slavery.

We trace the radical, action-oriented racial solidarity of Brown's company into the class conscious organizing efforts of the Rainbow Coalition in the late 1960s. The group formed in Chicago with members of the Black Panther Party, The Young Patriots—"dislocated hillbillies" or white working class youth—and The Young Lords, a militant Chicano gang-turned-political movement. Though targeted by the FBI with massive repression and direct violence, the Coalition defined new territories of anti-racist and community defense organizing.

**B.:** Standing by the 2nd amendment and claiming that the use of weapons is something good or –worst case scenario- something neutral (depends on who's using it) is something that traditionally, left wing (we're not talking about the Democrats or the liberals of course) and leftist radicals stand against. In fact the forces that stand behind the 2nd amendment and the NRA in the US are more or less in the right wing spectrum. How do you view the concept of weapon carrying and what are the differences between you and the opposing forces in this matter?

**R.R.:** We stand for the right of all people to live free and to defend themselves by any means necessary. Within the context of the United States we insist on exercising our right to arm ourselves and organize for our collective defense under the guarantees of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment in the Bill of Rights. We emphasize, however, that we place people's right to defend their own liberty and autonomy over the provisions of any law.

In the United States, the right wing privileges the law over people and we refuse this inversion of abstract power against living freedom.

We also challenge this idea that “left radicals” are against the use of weapons. Perhaps it is useful to place this idea within histories of white supremacy, specifically in the post-Civil Rights era of the 1970s and the rise of armed Black militancy such as the Black Panthers. It is in this moment that a white, liberal reactionary position based on an absolutist insistence on non-violence began to take hold to the point where inflexible pacifism has become the guiding tenet in left wing catechism in the U.S.

This fetishization of non-violence has led to the erasure of histories of armed self-determination and resistance, including during the Civil Rights era of Dr. Martin Luther King. This erasure, we contend, is part of a pattern of whitewashing by liberal, bourgeois white people who would rather preserve State monopolies of power and defang the working class and people of color by making pacifism the only “legitimate” means of dissent and thus coercing people’s behavior and tactical possibilities in the face of government and far right attacks.

*Negroes with Guns* by Robert F. Williams outlines strategies of armed community defense undertaken by African Americans in North Carolina during the 1950s and 60s amid maelstroms of white supremacist arson, violence, and murder. A more recent historical account of this same era, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed* by Charles E. Cobb, Jr., depicts the ways firearms and those who carried them were carefully incorporated into widespread struggles for self-determination and community safety throughout the American South and in so doing, dismantles the ubiquitous liberal myth that the Civil Rights struggles was a completely pacifist undertaking. Instead, this history insists that a diversity of tactics is crucial in building sustainable and victorious campaigns for

justice and freedom.

Redneck Revolt rejects the alienating individualism central to modern, right wing interpretations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. The right wing embrace of firearms is one of single-minded desperation and is ultimately a fetish of hyper-individualism.

We believe firearms are a tool to be learned and used within ethical parameters carefully developed by communities to serve their needs.

The great danger of firearms is an addiction to the limited power they represent. Guns are a tool of destruction. The use or deployment of weapons must be tactically specific and limited within larger strategies designed to provide spaces of security where people can work together to build up the societies they desire, free from fear. Redneck Revolt only carries firearms in carefully-defined situations and at the request of other members of the communities we come from. We are not a self-appointed militia of "the people". Instead, we are accountable to the people we live among. Our tactics and our ethics are shaped by the communities we are responsible to.

**B.: Concerning the latest events in the Florida shooting the debate of whether guns should be banned or not has been rekindled. Where do you stand in this, and secondly what do you think the main reasons behind the long history of mass shootings in U.S.A are? (if we assume that the main reason is the relaxed laws for weapon purchasing and usage)**

**R.R.:** Redneck Revolt does not believe the people should be disarmed. People have the right to choose the means for their own best communal defense, especially while the police in the United States continue to murder with impunity and at accelerating rates—over 3,300 people have been killed by police since 2015. This body count far exceeds those lives lost in mass shootings. While these kinds of mass shootings are a spectacle of horror and produce a social panic, the

media focus on mass shootings distracts from the larger, fundamental crises provoked by capitalism, imperial militarism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and a society intent on controlling and disciplining youth within an unequal schooling system.

Mass shootings are symptomatic of these larger issues that go unspoken and unchallenged within conventional, political discourse. People who are faithful to the State anxiously ignore or elide confronting these deep, societal problems. These people are still entranced by the false promise of symptomatic solutions through government legislation, such as banning a particular kind of gun. The statistical data about the limited effects of gun control is widely available for any curious and critical reader and we encourage people to think in complex ways—against reductive media narratives—about how they perceive the imbalances of power between the State and its people and the fracturing, volatile pressure people are subjected to within such a poisonous capitalistic society as they struggle with debt, poor health, food insecurity, loneliness, and endless war. We are not interested in debating new laws for firearms, knowing that in a capitalist and white supremacist society, any law is likely to be applied most severely against people of color and the poor.



**B.:** It seems that you are taking a different approach from many radical left-wing, anarchist and antifa organizations, regarding the way you interact with society. While often such groups descend into sectarian ideological purity, thus placing themselves and their actions against society, you tend to successfully intervene in your local context by embracing and reframing social traditions with emancipatory potential. In the description of what is RedneckRevolt you write that "In this project, political ideology is less important to us than our ability to agree on our organizing principles and work together". What made you choose this approach that some can call social anti-fascism?

**R.R.:** Redneck Revolt is not interested in sectarian contention. Writing in 1860, the African-American Abolitionist Frederick Douglass understood that ideological and theoretical debate indulged by so many on the left "gratifies their intellectual tastes, pleases their imaginations, titillates their sensibilities into a momentary sensation, but does not move them from the downy seat of inaction."

We take heed and choose action instead.

We are compelled to move, to create, to plan, to engage in our homeplaces: our neighborhoods, our communities, our villages, towns, and cities.

We abandon “the downy seat of inaction.” (We leave that cursed perch to the armchair anarchists, do-nothing communists, and especially to the anxious paralysis of the State-loving liberals.) Nothing substantial gets done by endless debate and a reluctance to actually attempt constructive efforts at making the small, social changes we require. It is important to confront fascists in the streets and in the courts and government buildings. But we also insist on the powerful effect of building up communities and to help them resist fear and oppression through autonomous action. Redneck Revolt is comprised of people from across the political spectrum and we are unified in our antifascist and antiracist goals and our focus on the local ground we share with our neighbors. Solidarity is forged through shared action.

**B.:** Because of your social approach you have encountered and collaborated with people from various backgrounds. How are local communities accepting your anti-racist messages for social liberation and do they also influence your group?

**R.R.:** Reception of our mission varies, but its simple and straightforward assertions, coupled with a belief that we need to meet people where they are and listen to the analysis they already bring has meant that we are able to build open relationships full of rich dialogue. We don't need nor want to convert anyone—we have no party platform people need to conform to. Instead, we are able to amplify and enhance the critiques working people *already have about the world they inhabit*. People are experts in their own lives and they don't need outsiders coming in to tell them what's wrong with those lives. Redneck Revolt seeks to take the struggles people are already experiencing and bring them into conversation with

broader struggles against racism and capitalism.

**B.: What is the potential that social anti-fascism holds for one future that seems to be filled with multidimensional insecurity, encompassing racial, economic, ecological and other issues?**

**R.R.:** Asking about the future potential of Redneck Revolt's strategy is the provocative but unanswerable question. Each member of Redneck Revolt has their own dreams, stitched together with the resilient thread of mutual aid and communal dedication to our shared survival and freedom. Local contexts and individual experiences, skills, and capacity shape how our project manifests and mutates. Certainly we attempt to hold all these social, political, and environmental struggles before us and to analyze the intersections and complex textures they produce. By letting go of the need for a programmatic plan and centralized strategy, there is the uneven and unpredictable flow of micro-energies from communities and regional affiliations that develop practical models and a focus on immediate needs.

We want to grow powerful social possibilities, make friends, strengthen our comrades, figure out how to solve one another's problems, keep each other healthy and fed, preserve our freedom, and defend our lives. We work together in consensus to try to build the world we all desire while understanding that the dangers we struggle against are constantly shifting and are deeply woven into the fabric of the lives we lead. We don't have things figured out. Theory is always in the service of practical action. Like so many of our comrades dedicated to fighting fascism and white supremacy, we are experimenting, playing within the social field, resisting in the ways that are needed in the moment but never imagining we have a perfect method or even that we fully understand the complexity of the issues we contend with. In humility, we are always open to critique.

This is a global moment for courage and radical love. Uncertainty abounds. Risk is always with us. We trust one another and yearn together for the ebullient world of freedom we dream of.

We fight to win!

---

# **B-FEST 7: Πρόγραμμα Ομιλιών-Συζητήσεων | B-FEST 7: Programme of Discussions & Speeches**

(English below)

Το Διεθνές Αντιεξουσιαστικό Φεστιβάλ της Βαβυλωνίας B-FEST επιστρέφει με καλεσμένους διεθνούς φήμης ομιλητές, καλλιτέχνες και ανθρώπους των κινημάτων.

**B-FEST 7 | RECLAIM THE FUTURE**

25-26-27 Μαΐου 2017, Ανωτάτη Σχολή Καλών Τεχνών, Πειραιώς 256, Αθήνα

## **ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΟΜΙΛΙΩΝ-ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΕΩΝ:**

**ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΗ 25/05**

**18:00 Είναι ο Φεμινισμός το Κίνημα της Εποχής; Συζήτηση για την Ατζέντα που Διαμορφώνουν το #metoo & τα Κινήματα Πολιτικοποίησης της Έμφυλης Βίας**

Λίνα Θεοδώρου (ομάδα Κιουρί@)

Parvus Princeps (ακτιβιστής)

Ελιάνα Καναβέλη (διδάκτωρ κοινωνιολογίας, περ. Βαβυλωνία)

## **18:30 Πολιτικός Λόγος & Ποδόσφαιρο: Το Πείραμα της Αυτοδιαχείρισης**

Μάκης Διόγος (αθλητικός δημοσιογράφος)

Μέλος του Αδέσποτου Αθηνών (αυτοοργανωμένη ομάδα ποδοσφαίρου σάλας)

## **19:00 Πόλεμος & Τέχνη | Ροζάβα: Ιστορίες των Κατεστραμμένων Πόλεων**

Mirko Turunc (Salonicasolidarity Afrin)

Önder Çakar (σεναριογράφος της ταινίας)

Ακολουθεί προβολή της ταινίας "Stories from Destroyed Cities", παραγωγή: Ronaja Film Commune + Ζωντανή τηλεδιάσκεψη από Ροζάβα με μέλη της Κινηματογραφικής Ακαδημίας της Ροζάβα.

## **20:30 Redneck Revolt: Αντιφασισμός & Οπλοκατοχή στις Η.Π.Α.**

Μέλος των Redneck Revolt

Κώστας Σαββόπουλος (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

## **ΣΑΒΒΑΤΟ 26/05**

## **18:00 Πετρέλαια, Εξορύξεις, Φράγματα: Ενέργεια για Τι & για Ποιον;**

Συμμετοχές από κινήματα για την ενέργεια και το νερό.

Μέλη από την Ανοιχτή Συνέλευση στα Γιάννενα ενάντια στις Εξορύξεις Πετρελαίου

Τάσος Κεφαλάς (Δίκτυο «Μεσοχώρα-Αχελώος SOS)

Στέφανος Μπατοής (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

## **18:00 «Imprimatur και Ιεροί Λογοκριτές» | Γιατί τα Μέσα που δημιουργούν τα fake news κηρύσσουν σταυροφορίες εναντίον τους;**

Μαρίνα Μεϊντάνη (Ασύνταχτος Τύπος)

Λουκάς Σταμέλλος (omniatv)

Γιώργος Παπαχριστοδούλου (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

+ προβολή βίντεο, γραφικών & ντοκουμέντων

## **18:30 Αυτοματοποίηση, Έλεγχος & το Κίνημα Make Amazon Pay!**

Christian Krähling (εργαζόμενος της Άμαζον)

John Malamatinas (ακτιβιστής)

Γρηγόρης Τσιλιμαντός (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

**19:30 Η Αρχιτεκτονική του Πολέμου: Πόλεις, Βία & Εντοπισμός**  
Eyal Weizman (αρχιτέκτονας, Goldsmiths, παν/μιο του Λονδίνου)  
Χριστίνα Βαρβία & Στέφανος Λεβίδης (Forensic Architecture)  
Σπύρος Τζουανόπουλος (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

**20:30 Ο Μάης του '68 & η Συνέχειά του: Πού Πηγαίνει η Δημοκρατία;**  
Kristin Ross (παν/μιο Νέας Υόρκης)  
Αλέξανδρος Σχισμένος (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

## **ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ 27/05**

**18:00 Ελευθεριακή Παιδεία: Παρουσίαση του Ελευθεριακού Νηπιαγωγείου «Το Μικρό Δέντρο»**  
Μέλη από τη συνέλευση δασκάλων και τη συνέλευση γονέων του Μικρού Δέντρου.

**18:00 Πόλη & Νέα Αστικά Κινήματα**  
Συμμετοχές αστικών κινημάτων από του Φιλοπάππου ως τα ρέματα της Αττικής.

**19:00 Σύγχρονα Κινήματα & Στιγμές Εξέγερσης: Μάιος '68, Δεκέμβρης '08, ZAD**  
Μέλος των Lundimatin (Γαλλία)  
Φιλήμονας Πατσάκης (περ. Έρμα)  
Πέτρος Τζιέρης (Αντιεξουσιαστική Κίνηση)

**20:00 Η Υπόσχεση της Άμεσης Δημοκρατίας & το Παράδειγμα των Κούρδων**  
Debbie Bookchin (Αμερικανίδα δημοσιογράφος, συγγραφέας – με ζωντανή τηλεδιάσκεψη)  
Sven Wegner (Διεθνιστικό Κέντρο Δρέσδης)  
Yavor Tarinski (TRISE, περ. Βαβυλωνία)

---

## **B-FEST 7 | RECLAIM THE FUTURE**

International Antiauthoritarian Festival of Babylonia Journal  
25-26-27 May 2017, Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece

DISCUSSIONS | CONCERTS | CINEMA | THEATRE | BOOK & PHOTOGRAPHY  
EXHIBITION | CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES | COMIX | WORKSHOPS | DJ  
SETS

## **Programme of Discussions and Speeches:**

### **FRIDAY 25/05**

**18:00 Is Feminism the Movement of our Era? Discussion on the agenda that is being created by #metoo and the movements for politicization of gender violence**

Lina Theodorou (Kiouri@)

Parvus Princeps (activist)

Eliana Kanaveli (PhD in sociology, Babylonia journal)

**18:30 Politics & Football: The experiment of self-management**

Makis Diogos (sports journalist)

Member of Adespotos Athinon (self-organized football team)

**19:00 War & Art in Rojava: Stories of Destroyed Cities**

Mirko Turunc (Salonicasolidarity Afrin)

Önder Çakar (Script writer of the movie)

It will follow projection of the movie "Stories from Destroyed Cities", produced by Rojava Film Commune + Livestream from Rojava with members of the Rojava Film Commune

**20:30 Redneck Revolt: Antifascism & Possession of Weapons in U.S.A.**

Member of Redneck Revolt

Kostas Savvopoulos (Babylonia journal)

### **SATURDAY 26/05**

**18:00 Oil, Extractions, Dams | Energy: why and for whom?**

Participation of movements for energy and water

Members of the Open Assembly of Giannena against the extraction of oil

Tasos Kefalas (Network "Mesohora-Aheloos SOS")

Stefanos Mpatsis (Babylonia journal)

**18:00 "Imprimatur and the Holy Censors": Why the media that produce fake news preache crusades against them?**

Marina Meidani (Asyntachtos Typos)

Loukas Stamellos (omniatv)

Giorgos Papachristodoulou (Babylonia journal)

+projection of videos, graphics & documents

**18:30 Automatization, Control & the Movement Make Amazon Pay!**

Christian Krähling (worker from Amazon)

John Malamatinas (activist)

Grigoris Tsilimantos (Babylonia journal)

**19:30 Architecture of War: City, Violence & Detection**

Eyal Weizman (architect, Goldsmiths, university of London)

Christina Varvia & Stefanos Levidis (Forensic Architecture)

Spiros Tzouanopoulos (Babylonia journal)

**20:30 May '68 and its Continuation: Where Democracy is Heading?**

Kristin Ross (New York University)

Alexandros Schismenos (Babylonia journal)

**SUNDAY 27/05**

**18:00 Libertarian Education: Presentation of the Libertarian Kindergarten "The Little Tree"**

Members of the assemblies of teachers and parents of "The Little Tree"

**18:00 City & New Urban Movements**

Participants from urban movements of Filopappou until the streams of Attica

**19:00 Contemporary Movements & Moments of Insurrection: May '68, December '08, ZAD**

Member of Lundimatin (France)

Filimonas Patsakis (Erma journal)

Petros Tzieris (Antiauthoritarian Movement)

## **20:00 The Promise of Direct Democracy & the Kurdish Example**

Debbie Bookchin (American journalist, writer – live connection)

Sven Wegner (Internationalist Center Dresden)

Yavor Tarinski (TRISE, Babylonia journal)

---

Πολιτιστικό Πρόγραμμα **ΕΔΩ**

---

# **“The war in Syria only benefits the counter-revolutionary forces” | Interview with Joseph Daher**

Η συνέντευξη στα ελληνικά **εδώ**.

**Interview-introduction: Lina Theodorou, Antonis Faras**

The Syrian Civil War continues for 7<sup>th</sup> year, but it is still not clear when it will end. During the war, over half a million people died and about 10 million people, about half of the Syrian population, was displaced. On the occasion of the bombing of Syria, targeting the military bases of the Damascus regime, by US forces, the UK and France, the debate was renewed; anti-war strikes were organized and demonstrators even attempted to throw the statue of Harry S. Truman in Athens, Greece.

However, in the anti-war movement against the Syrian war, the hegemonic narrative within the Left has an approach to anti-

imperialism, which, more or less, limits the position of imperialist exclusively to the United States. This view, which is an important analytical tool for interpreting the world outside of the West, takes one geopolitical character that neglects the social element as a factor of change, and on the other hand it implies a structural orientation in the way the Left treats politics, when talking about "others".

Trying to shed more light on the debate, which is obscured rather than clarified by *ad hoc* confrontations, we asked Joseph Daher to answer a series of more comprehensive questions about the Syrian civil war. Daher is a Swiss-Syrian Marxist and scholar, whose books have been published in English, such as "*Hezbollah: Political Economy of the Party of God*" (2016, Pluto Press).

**We want to take a closer look at what have happened these seven years. Briefly: What led to the uprising specifically in Syria? What were Assad's relations with the Syrian left and anarchist space before the uprising? What was his relationship with sectarian extremism? Can you describe how the rebels organized during the first years of the uprising and what went wrong? How islamists prevailed, If they have, in the rebel's groups?**

Syria was a despotic regime, ruled for the past 40 years by one family, and it is also a bourgeois patrimonial regime that went through a process of neoliberalization and privatization, accelerated considerably with Bashar al-Assad's arrival to power. Sixty percent of the population was living under or just above the poverty line in 2011. Syria was subjected to the same form of crony capitalism that is prevalent in the region. For example, in Egypt it was the Mubarak family that benefitted mostly from the privatization and neoliberalization; in Tunis it was the Trabelsi family, of the wife of the dictator Ben Ali; and in Syria it is Makhlouf, the cousin of Assad. In the end what we have are neoliberal and authoritarian systems, and Syria is no different in this

regard.

The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of important sections of Syrian society, in a climate of corruption and growing social inequalities, have paved the way for the popular uprising, which has been waiting for nothing more than a spark. Which was initially external with the fall of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and then internal with the torture of the children of Dar'a. These elements will trigger the process.

At first, the Syrian grassroots civilian opposition was the primary engine of the popular uprising against the Assad regime. They sustained the popular uprising for numerous years by organizing and documenting protests and acts of civil disobedience, and by motivating people to join protests. The earliest manifestations of the "coordinating committees" (or tansiqiyyat) were neighborhood gatherings throughout Syria. A number of youth progressive and democratic networks and groups emerged throughout the country. The regime specifically targeted these networks of activists, who had initiated demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and campaigns in favor of countrywide strikes.

*The regime killed, imprisoned, kidnapped and pushed to exile these activists.*

From the first days of the revolutionary process, the regime dealt with the demonstrations with great violence and this increased with the massive interventions of Iran, Russia and Hezbollah. This situation led to a rising number of defections among conscript soldiers and officers refusing to shoot on peaceful protesters, while at the same time initial unorganized and punctual armed resistance was starting to emerge towards the end of May and beginning of June 2011 in some localities against the security services. In the following months, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was established,

as well as a myriad of other brigades. Armed resistance against the regime was nearly generalized at the end of 2011, creating new dynamics in the uprising. The militarization was mainly the result of the violent repression on the local Syrian population opposing the regime; sections of it resorted to weapons to defend themselves. The first constituted armed opposition groups often had a purely local dynamic and served to defend their hometowns and areas from aggressions by the armed security services. The FSA was never a single and united institution, but rather a network of independent military groups fighting under its umbrella. The various forces of the Free Syrian Army have been increasingly and considerably weakened throughout the years.

The members of FSA units generally originated from the majority component of the uprising: marginalized (informal and formal) workers of the cities and countryside members of the popular classes who had suffered from the acceleration of neo-liberal economic policies since the arrival in power of Bashar al-Assad and of the repression of the regime security forces. The armed opposition was made up of defected soldiers from the Syrian army, but the vast majority were civilians who had decided to take up arms. Some brigades were loosely gathered under some common umbrella, such as the FSA, but most were locally organized and only active in their hometowns. Lacking unity and centralization, they coordinated on specific battlefields, but rarely on political and strategic decisions. They were generally gathered along village or extended family lines, with little ideological cohesion.

Tragically throughout the year, each defeat of the democratic resistance strengthened and benefited the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist forces on the ground. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist movements and their dominations on the military scene in some regions has been negative for the revolution, as they opposed its objectives (democracy, social justice and equality). With their sectarian

and reactionary discourses and behaviors, these movements not only acted as a repellent for the vast majority of religious and ethnic minorities, and women, but also to sections of Arab Sunni populations in some liberated areas where we have seen demonstrations against them, especially among large sections of the middle class in Damascus and Aleppo. They attacked and continue to attack the democratic activists, while they often tried to impose their authority on the institutions developed by locals, often bringing resistance from local populations against their authoritarian behaviors.

**Why we should continue talking about revolution in Syria – Isn't it an old flame that went out? Which forms of struggle and organization evidence the continuity of revolutionary subjects? Could you elaborate on the self-governing local councils across Syria?**

Nobody denies that we are no longer in March 2011 and that the situation of democratic and progressive forces is very weak today in Syria. Revolutionary processes are long-term events, characterized by higher and lower level mobilizations according to the context. They are even characterized by some periods of defeat, but it's hard to say when they end. This is especially the case in Syria, when the conditions that allowed for the beginning of these uprisings are still present, while the regime is very far from finding ways to solve them.

However, these conditions are not enough to transform them into political opportunities, particularly after more than seven years of a destructive and murderous war accompanied by **a general and important fatigue in the Syrian population, just seeking for its great majority to return the stability in the country.** The effects of the war and its destructions will most probably weigh for years. Alongside this situation, no structured opposition body with a significant size and following offered an inclusive and democratic project that could appeal to large sectors of society was present, while the failures of the opposition bodies in exile and armed

opposition groups left important frustrations and bitterness in people who participated and/or sympathized with the uprising.

The other element that could also play a role in shaping future events is the large documentation of the uprising that has never been seen before in history. There has been significant recording, testimonies and documentation of the protest movement, the actors involved and the modes of actions. In the seventies, Syria witnessed strong popular and democratic resistance with significant strikes and demonstrations throughout the country with mass followings. Unfortunately, this memory was not kept and was not well-known by the new generation of protesters in the country in 2011.

*The Syrian revolutionary process that started in 2011 is one of the most documented. This memory will remain and could inspire and inform future resistance. The political experiences that have been accumulated since the beginning of the uprising will not disappear.*

They are however still some pockets of isolated resistance in some areas, but they are very much weakened, in addition some attempts in exile are being worked to build democratic and progressive networks.

Regarding the number of local councils, they have diminished considerably after the fall of Eastern Aleppo in December 2016 and of Eastern Ghouta in March/April of this years because of the military advances of pro-regime forces capturing opposition held territories, and also as a result of the attacks of Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist armed groups that replaced civilians councils with their own.

Regarding local councils that played an important role in the opposition held areas, we must be clear that their very important experiences did not mean that there were no shortcomings, such as the lack of representation of women, or

of religious minorities in general. Other problems existed as well such as some forms of disorganization, undemocratic practices, over-representation of some influential families in some areas, etc. Civil councils were also not always completely autonomous from military groups, relying often on military groups for resources. While numerous council members were generally elected, nearly half of them, there were also a number of councils undemocratically appointed rather than elected, based on the influence of local military leaders, clan and family structures, and elders. Another problem that was encountered in the selection of the council's representatives was the need for particular professional and technical skills.

Despite these limitations, local councils were able to restore a minimum level of social services in their regions and enjoyed some level of legitimacy.

**Is the rise of ISIS a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East? If so, which are the other political and economic factors enabling the growth of fascist and fundamentalist forces. What role does religion play in Syria?**

Explanations that want to find in the Quran and in Islam the reasons for the phenomena of ISIS are wrong, but above all reinforce racist and Islamophobic amalgams while wanting to characterize an intrinsic violent nature to Islam and Muslims more generally. Although ISIS claims to act in the name of Islam, the religion does not explain their behavior and actions. These groups and individuals take their source in the present time and not 1400 years ago, just as their actions.

Do we analyze the US invasion of Iraq by the religious beliefs of Bush (who had reported hearing God in a dream telling him that he had a mission and had to invade Iraq) or according to imperialist motives (political and economic reasons)? Will we find the reasons for the US invasion in the Bible? Will we

analyze the US invasion based on the behavior of Christian 2000 years ago? Similarly, during the massacre perpetrated in Norway on July 22, 2011 by Anders Breivik, who claimed to act to preserve Christianity against multiculturalism, have we sought the reasons for his act in Christianity or the Bible?

The Arab writer Aziz Al-Azmeh, stated that “the understanding of Islamic political phenomena requires the normal equipment of the social and human sciences, not their denial” Not acting in this ways, will lead us to an essentialisation of “the Other”, in much of the current cases today of the “Muslim”.

*Each religion does not exist indeed autonomously of people, in the same way that God does not exist outside of the field of intellectual action of man.*

On the contrary religion, as the supernatural power of God, is a mystic popular expression of the contradictions and material realities in which people live.

We have to understand that ISIS’s expansion is a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East that emerged as the result of authoritarian regimes crushing popular movements linked to the 2011 Arab Spring. The interventions of regional and international states have contributed to ISIS’s development as well. Finally, neo-liberal policies that have impoverished the popular class, together with the repression of democratic and trade union forces, have been key in helping ISIS and Islamic fundamentalist forces grow.

In this perspective, brute military force alone only ensures that other militant groups will take its place, as al-Qaida in Iraq demonstrates. Real solutions to the crisis in Syria and elsewhere in the region must address the socio-economic and political conditions that have enabled the growth of ISIS and other extremist organizations.

The Left must understand that only by ridding the region of the conditions that allowed ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist groups to develop can we resolve the crisis. At the same time, empowering those progressive and democratic forces on the ground who are fighting to overthrow despotic regimes and face reactionary groups is part and parcel of this approach. Clearly, no peaceful and just solution in Syria can be reached with Bashar al-Assad and his clique in power. He is the biggest criminal in Syria and must be prosecuted for his crimes instead of being legitimized by international and regional powers.

**There's a leading leftist narrative regarding the war in Syria suggesting that given the recent developments, the bombing of military bases in Damascus, the cause of anti-imperialism call us to support Syria people, and consequently Bassar al Assad's regime. What do you think about that?**

It is important to remember that, even though conflicting interests exist between international and regional powers that are intervening in Syria, none of these actors care about the uprising or the revolutionaries. Instead, they have attempted to undermine the popular movement against Assad and successfully worked to strengthen sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country. These intervening forces have, for example, helped stabilize the Assad regime in order to oppose Kurdish autonomy (in Turkey's case) and to defeat extremist groups such as ISIS (in the case of the United States).

The intervening powers are united in their opposition to popular struggle. They seek to impose the status quo at the expense of the interests of the working and popular classes. This is precisely why viewing the Syrian revolution only through the lens of imperialist competition and geo-political dynamics will not suffice.

*This lens inherently obscures the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the Syrian population that*

*sparked the uprising.*

We need to rebuild anti-war movements, true ones, by starting a critical assessment of the past experiences, an honest one. This in the perspective of building an internationalist and progressive alternative for all that oppose all forms of authoritarian regimes and all foreign interventions while clearly supporting the self determination of popular masses and their struggles.

In other words revolutionary humanism.

Some sections of the Left and the anti-war movements have refused to act in solidarity with the Syrian uprising under the pretext that “the main enemy is at home.” In other words, it is more important to defeat the imperialists and bourgeoisie in our own societies, even if that means implicitly supporting the Assad regime or the Russian state.

Among these sections of the Left, communist thinker Karl Liebknecht is frequently cited. Liebknecht is famous for his 1915 declaration that “the enemy is at home,” a statement made in condemnation of imperialist aggression against Russia led by his native Austria–Germany. In quoting Liebknecht, many have decontextualized his views. From his perspective, fighting against the enemy at home did not mean ignoring foreign regimes repressing their own people or failing to show solidarity with the oppressed.

Indeed, Liebknecht believed we must oppose our own ruling class’s push for war by “cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists.”

Among many Western leftists, there has been neither cooperation with the Syrian people nor collaboration with like-minded anti-war movements. They also have failed to oppose the policies of their own bourgeois states in crushing

the revolution in Syria.

The Left must do better. Solidarity with the international proletariat means supporting Syrian revolutionaries against various international and regional imperialist forces, as well as the Assad regime, all of which are trying to put an end to a popular revolution for freedom and dignity.

No leftist organizations or anti-war movements today can ignore the necessity of supporting people in struggle, while opposing all foreign interventions (international and regional), especially from our own governments....

As Liebknecht said: "Ally yourselves to the international class struggle against the conspiracies of secret diplomacy, against imperialism, against war, for peace within the socialist spirit." We can exclude none of these elements from our struggle to build a progressive leftist platform on the Syrian conflict.

**Do you believe that the above mentioned narratives and the inability to comprehend an active political and emancipatory struggle, succumb to perception suffering from orientalism, or maybe even racism and islamophobia? Is there a paternalistic approach which we simply cannot get rid of?**

I think reasons are multiple and sometimes interlinked, whether specific leftist inheritance (stalinism, campism, "Third Worldism") yes forms of racisms and orientalism, etc...

But moreover and more generally there is a skepticism in the possibility of mass collective action to achieve the goals of the people, of **power from below**. This concept, which is at the heart of revolutionary politics, faces profound skepticism from some sections of the left. This should not prevent us, however, from building our solidarity on this basis.

Following the same narrative we have witnessed a call to unite under the lesser evil pragmatism of the coalition between

Putin, Assad and Iran in order to ensure stability. Which is the outcome of this alliance during the recent years and against whom it has been forged?

This perception of these sections of the left is completely wrong and destructive of the "lesser evil". The solution does not lie in the collaboration with authoritarian regimes like the Assad regime or collaboration with regional powers and international imperialist powers such as Russia, quite on the opposite.

I believe that we should analyse a State on its class basis and policies as rightly put by Pierre Frank, a French Trotskyist that wrote that: "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation". On this basis Syria, Russia and Iran are clearly not allies of working class people. We can see in Syria their destructive and murderous role.

The less evil is actually the road of defeat and the maintenance of an unjust system in which the popular classes in the region live. The role of revolutionaries is not to choose between different imperialist and regional powers. Our role is to oppose the different counter revolutionary forces and build an independent front from these two forms of reactions and basing it on democratic, social, anti-imperialist basis and opposing all forms of discrimination and working for the radical change of society in a dynamic from below in which the working classes the agent of change.

In conclusion, given the clashes or collaboration between the forces of reaction, let's not choose one form of the reaction, but support, build and organize a popular and radical alternative for the original objectives of the revolutions: democracy social justice and equality.

We Should oppose all foreign interventions. In addition, We must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies of the popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution as we have shown, just as it is not the imperialist contradictions that have been the source of the uprising in Syria or elsewhere as well in the region, but the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the popular classes.

**The regime's refusal of any kind of opposition and the violence it has committed demonstrates that it has fascist tendencies. Were those evident and existing before the uprising and how did they interacted with the characteristics of the Syrian state and society?**

The Assad despotic regime definitely has fascist trends, demonstrated by its refusal of any kind of opposition and the violence it has committed. Regarding the nature of the Assad regime, I would argue it is a despotic, capitalist and patrimonial state ruling through violent repression and using various policies such as sectarianism, tribalism, conservatism, and racism to dominate society and mobilize a cross-class popular base linked through sectarian, regional, tribal and clientelist connections to defend the regime on a reactionary basis.

The patrimonial nature of the state means the centers of power (political, military and economic) within the regime are concentrated in one family and its clique, similar to Libya and the Gulf monarchies for example, therefore pushing the regime to use all the violence at its disposal to protect its

rule.

It is therefore very far from being socialist, anti-imperialist and secular as presented by some among sectors of the western left, often ignorant of Syria.

**Given the example of Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan some time ago, the USA intervention is more than catastrophic. Invasions became synonymous with US, it went to war against communism and now it leads war against islamist extremists. What is their goal in the region? How did the election of Trump affect US policies in the region, if it did? What should we expect and prepare for?**

Let's be clear we should oppose as well all the interventions of Washington in the region that are not made in the interest of the popular classes. The recent wars you mentioned or its support for different dictatorships in the region and their actions demonstrate this.

American policy is mired in a host of contradictions that flow from its weakened position after its setback in Iraq and the contradictory foreign policy between Trump and some sectors of US foreign affairs administration. Of course, the U.S. remains the most important power in the world, but it has witnessed a relative decline against international and regional rivals, particularly in the Middle East.

The failure of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the global economic and financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 were severe blows to the hegemony of the U.S. This left more space for other imperialist powers like China and Russia, but also benefited regional powers throughout the world. The relative decline of the U.S. allowed all of these states to act more autonomously and even at times contrary to U.S. interests.

This is particularly visible in the Middle East. Russia has been able to increase its influence and play a significant role in Syria in saving the Assad regime, while various

regional states like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel have played a growing role in the region, intervening in the revolutionary processes in support of various actors in conflict with popular demands for democracy, social justice and equality.

US main policies in the Middle East are to defeat ISIS military and oppose Iranian influence in the region. At the same time, they want to come back to a form of stability in the region while undermining forces like Iran.

Like other imperialist and regional powers they want an end to the revolutionary processes in the region.

**We are facing a complex situation but we jump easily to conclusions and side-taking. How can we serve the main struggle, in terms of internationalist solidarity, which is rather obvious: opposition to all imperialist and authoritarian actors intervening in Syria?**

Yes, I agree with this conclusion.

Multiple things can be done. I think progressives should call for an end to the war, which has created terrible suffering. It has led to massive displacement of people within the country and driven millions out of it as refugees. The war only benefits the counter-revolutionary forces on all sides. From both a political and humanitarian perspective, the end of the war in Syria is an absolute necessity.

Likewise, we must reject all the attempts to legitimize Assad's regime, and we must oppose all agreements that enable it to play any role in the country's future. A blank check given to Assad today will encourage future attempts by other despotic and authoritarian states to crush their populations if they come to revolt.

We have to guarantee as well the rights of civilians within Syria, particularly preventing more forced displacements and

securing the rights of refugees (right of return, right for financial compensations in case of destruction of their houses, justice for the losses of their relatives, etc.).

Assad and his various partners in the regime must be held accountable for their crimes. The same goes for the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist forces and other armed groups.

*We need to support the democratic and progressive actors and movements against both sides of the counter-revolution: the regime and its Islamic fundamentalist opponents.*

We have to build a united front based on the initial objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice, and equality, saying no to sectarianism and no to racism.

We of course need to oppose all imperialist and authoritarian actors intervening in Syria.

In their own countries, leftists internationally should also struggle:

-for the opening of borders for migrants and refugees and against building walls or transforming Europe for example into a fortress that would turn the Mediterranean Sea into a cemetery for migrants

-against all forms of Islamophobia and racism

-against all cooperation of Western states with despotic regimes and the Apartheid, colonial and racist state of Israel (in this latter case, support BDS campaigns)

-against more "security" and anti-democratic policies promoted in the name of "the war against terrorism."

We must be clear on one thing, the impunity given to the continuous murderous crimes of Assad's despotic regime with the assistance and/or complicity of international imperialist

powers encourages other dictators and authoritarian regimes to repress violently their own people. This participates as well in a global international trend of authoritarianism present throughout the world, including among liberal democracies in the Western countries, with the advancement and deepening of neo-liberalism.

---

## **A coffee with Jacques Rancière beneath the Acropolis (pdf)**

*A Coffee with Jacques Rancière beneath the Acropolis,*  
Political journal *Babylonia*, Athens, August 2017.

The brochure of Babylonia “A Coffee with Jacques Rancière beneath the Acropolis” is now available for download in English. It contains the dialogue between Babylonia’s editorial team and Rancière, during **B-Fest 6**, 2017, on democracy, social movements, social change, the rise of the far-right and much more. Originally published in Greek in August 2017.

We met Jacques Rancière on Saturday, May 27, 2017, at the School of Fine Arts shortly before his speech at the B-Fest 6 International Anti-Authoritarian Festival, organized by Babylonia Journal, with a central slogan “We are ungovernable”. Rancière is among the most important European philosophers alive and his work does not need further introductions.

In the cloudy morning of Sunday 28 May, we sat beneath the Acropolis to have a coffee with the big philosopher. The

transcript of our conversation reflects the vigor of thought and the passion of a truly democratic thinker.

Download (PDF, 314KB)

---

# Political Parties: Obstacle to Democracy

Yavor Tarinski

*If understood to the letter, a Democracy must be a stateless society. Power belongs to the people insofar as the people exercise it themselves*

*Giovanni Sartori [1]*

The contemporary political model, vulgarly named democracy, is undergoing deep crisis, which can be attributed to many of its systemic features and the political parties are among the main reasons for it. The Party, once encompassing massive social support and powerful movements, has become today synonymous with dishonesty, greed for power and corruption. Many have embarked on journey to recreate it in different ways that strive at mimicking the grassroots, decentralized character of contemporary social movements and the internet.

Some party formations emerged, as they claim, from the movement of the squares that swept Europe in the beginning of 2010's decade, like the Spanish Podemos. Others were influenced by contemporary hacker culture like the numerous

Pirate parties. Some former occupy activists initiated the "Occupy the Democrats" campaign, attempting at using the logic of the Occupy movement for overtaking the Democratic Party of the US. All of these and other similar initiatives however remain with questionable results at best.

## **Totalitarian birth**

The negative outlook that political parties have is not due to some distortion but logical continuation of the essence on which electoral politics rest. The introduction of political parties into European public life in the late 17th century should be considered not as step towards democratization of society but as continuation of the oligarchic tradition.

In England, as political theorist Hanna Pitkin explains[2], representation was introduced from above, by the King, as a matter of administrative control and royal convenience over non-royal localities. Situated between the monarchical elite and subordinated communities, representatives, with their role being institutionalized, began viewing themselves as single, continuing body, pursuing its own interests. Political representation, as foundational basis of the political party, slowly became a matter of privilege, to be fought for, rather than a burden or a mere task.

Their oppressive character is also being demonstrated by the philosopher Simone Weil for whom the Party is to a certain extent heritage of political terror[3]. Its role in the popular uprisings of Europe in the last centuries has been expression of its oligarchical nature, sabotaging democratic efforts "from below" in the name of top-to-bottom solutions offered by the State. Weil's conclusion that totalitarianism is the *original sin of all political parties* echoes Mikhail Tomsky's famous saying: "One party in power and all the others in jail"[4].

In popular uprisings and revolutions societies express certain

tendency towards spontaneous grassroots social organizing based on councils and local assemblies. This is what Hannah Arendt calls *lost treasure of revolution* – the creation of truly public space in which every citizen can freely and equally participate in the management of society[5]. This “treasure”, as a break in the bureaucratic oligarchical tradition, becomes target of centralized state power and political parties, whose existence this new social direction radically challenges.

The current system, at whose core is the party politics, has nothing to do with democracy in its authentic sense. Instead of providing the means for people to directly express their views, concerns and solutions on public affairs, political parties tend to exploit popular passions, polarizing societies into majorities and minorities, using the former as a tool to serve their narrow interests.

A common and essential characteristic of all political parties, both on the Left and the Right, as noted recently by author Raul Zibechi[6], is their **obsession with power**. For if they are to successfully fulfill their electoral task that justifies their existence, they must secure for themselves vast amounts of authority. Yet, as electoral politics place political parties in constant competition on national level, while foreign states and private companies are also constantly trying to interfere with the dominant discourse, power is never enough and soon becomes an end in itself. And since there is never limit for the power that each party strives at possessing, it comes as no surprise why so many thinkers have come to view the institution of the party as essentially totalitarian.

One more way in which representative politics hinders democratic deliberation is the former's tendency towards encouragement of antisocial, disordered-like, behaviors. Clinical psychologist Oliver James claims that psychopathy thrives in hierarchical organizations. According to him

“triadic [personality disordered] behavior flourishes where ruthless, devious selfishness is advantageous and where an individual is very concerned to gain power, resources or status”[7]. Jacques Ranciere, in an interview for the Greek National Television ERT3[8], also suggests that political representation and electoralism attracts the worst of people, i.e. those that seek power for power’s sake. Thus the competitive and hierarchical nature of political parties attracts ambitious, narcissistic individuals, turning them into psychopaths (or encourages them to act as such).

## Political “betrayal”

By recognizing the logical connection between representative institutions (like political parties) and unlimited hunger for power we can easily debunk the widely propagated myth of “politicians’s betrayal” of pre-election promises. Its worth noting that this mythical narrative most often comes from electoral candidates or thinkers that support the *status quo* and through it they strive at scapegoating individual “traitors” so as to maintain the integrity of the party system.

Cornelius Castoriadis compares would-be-representatives with merchants of junk that try to push their stuff on us, even if that means saying lies[9]. As he says, what electoral competitors are doing is **trying to deceive, not betray us**. Professional politicians are not traitors but servants of other interests. The electoral race requires competing parties to outbid each other on promises they don’t intend to keep and images they will maintain as long as they bring them votes.

The notion of public interest, most often depicted as national, is a good example for the kind of deception that is being used by political parties. It is constantly being invoked by governments and electoral candidates to serve them as cover for their quest for authority and generate them popular support. In short, politicians attempt at gaining or

strengthening their own power by deceiving the essentially powerless electorate that the immense political inequality, which is constantly being reproduced by representative democracy, is of mutual benefit. Thus, it is no wonder why the language of patriotism and nationalism is among the most preferred by governments of any kind.

It is understandable, however, that people might feel betrayed by political parties. In a representative system that strips society from any meaningful means for effective self-instituting people are left with no other options in the public space but to either place their hopes (and thus their votes) on certain electoral competitor, or resort to abstention from voting. But in reality parties were not and can never truly be on the side of grassroots communities, first and foremost because they are immensely more politically privileged than them.

Nowadays this matter is being further complicated by the dual processes of globalization and financialization. In the contemporary neoliberal era elected politicians, as Jerome Roos explains[10], are being reduced to managers whose function is increasingly that of making the state apparatus work for the profits of bankers and businessmen. It is not to say that the representative institutions are stripped from their powers, but they are being separated even further from society by additional layers of multinational corporate interests.

## **Party membership and individuality**

Contemporary representative oligarchies are making it impossible for individuals and communities to intervene in public affairs without joining or intervening with political parties. Official tools for citizen participation like petitioning and referendums most often have non-obligatory character and are doomed to fail if not backed by any party. Citizenship today is nothing but illusory, since people are

forced with the dilemma between withdrawing altogether from the public sphere or submit to party interest. Instead of citizens we have electorate whose concerns for social matters are being crushed by the party's quest for influence and power.

Unlike the pluralism nurtured by deliberative bodies for participatory decision-making like councils and popular assemblies, political parties demand the maintenance of a party line, even though nowadays they seem to appear more flexible in this aspect. By joining a party, one is expected to agree to its entire program or at least submit to it, since in crucial moments he/she will be expected to support it or leave. Even if he has not previously been familiar with it, he is supposed to endorse it in its entirety, or to not expect much from his newly acquired membership. Often different aspects of such programs appear to be contradictory with each other, since in their race for power parties sometimes take mutually exclusive positions. As Simone Weil concludes[11], whoever joins a political party is expected to submit his thinking to the authority of the party.

Although parties claim that they offer space for political participation and education to their members and supporters, the reality appears to be much different. What they do instead is spreading rigorous ideological propaganda through which the party elite to exercise control over the new recruits and the electorate. Parties that attempt at not doing so find it difficult to achieve significant electoral victories.

As a result of this propaganda party members and supporters tend to adopt certain ideological and political "brands". This "branding" replaces political thinking. One begins approaching public affairs as member of this party and supporter of that ideology, instead of critically evaluating social problems and individually or collectively developing solutions to them.

Parties tend to create positions in favor of or against certain option and call on the electorate to stand behind their position. Taking sides replaces public deliberation with reality being twisted by each party accordingly to its stance, instead of being analyzed in **contextual manner**. Many have suggested that this logic has spread into all spheres of human life.

## **Handling popular dissatisfaction**

As mentioned above, political parties are bureaucratic organizations that breed oligarchy, not democracy. Their electoral hierarchical nature enforces statecraft, rather than direct public participation, while giving the illusion of being the link between the public and the institutions of authority.

The attitude political parties adopt is twofold. On the one hand, they do everything they can so as to reassert their hold on state power through making powerful allies, briberies, backstage schemes and mass propaganda. On the other hand, they have to respond to demands and matters rised "from below", by social movements and popular resistance, either by crushing them or by introducing decorative reforms meant at reducing the pressure.

This second level of handling social dissatisfaction can be separated into two subcategories. The first one includes smear campaigns, briberies and threatenings that are being directed towards activists and community organizers so as their movements's social credibility and integrity to be hurt. This approach is often used by governments on the Right, as recently demonstrated clearly by Donald Trump's administration[12]. The second one is compounded by the cooptation of social movements through offering positions of power to influential activists and inactment of reforms that create the illusion of specific issues being resolved, as was the case with some *Pink Tide* governments of South America[13].

This is preferred strategy by the Left when in power.

## **Institutions beyond parties**

It is important to note here, that the problem with political parties is not that they are institutions, as some of their most vigorous critics would insist, but that they are **bureaucratic organizations**. Real, direct democracy, where emancipated citizens directly decide on all issues of public life and are actively involved in the implementation of the taken decisions, requires institutions with participatory character, that are however embedded in and nurturing one radical imaginary, that makes the values and goals of democratic life thinkable and possible.

Unlike the above mentioned grassroots institutions, political parties participate completely in the imaginary of heteronomy. Their form, structure, organization and ideology are essentially bureaucratic and strengthens oligarchy, whether in more or less liberal outlook. Their very existence is a potential obstacle to democracy, constantly suggesting that people are not mature enough to participate in the public sphere as citizens and instead guardians must be nominated to govern them.

A society without institutions, as Castoriadis suggests[14], cannot exist. Thus the efforts at dismantling the state apparatus and other contemporary bureaucratic institutions that enforce inequality and oppression cannot be proceeded without the establishment of parallel grassroots institutions that nurture equality and emancipation. Their creation and maintenance certainly will have its difficulties as no social activity, including that of autonomous organizations and movements, can go unaffected by the dominant order. No one can completely separate himself or his group from the overall of society, but only this necessary step of **exercising democracy** can allow transformation towards forms of social organization and civic culture. And this necessarily includes popular

grassroots organizing beyond institutional forms of oligarchy, such as the political party.

## Conclusion

Political parties are part of the problem, not the solution. The high levels of alienation and passivity in our contemporary societies are essentially product of capitalism and representation. The electoral spectacle offered by competing political parties seems to resemble to a big degree the one, created by the neoliberal market. The hopes of many on the Left that the former could potentially restrain the latter are naive, to say the least. What they essentially are is different forms of heteronomy, I.e. determination of people's life by outside sources, beyond their reach or control.

Democracy, because of its popularity and potential, is being used by the ruling elites and their intellectual supporters, to mask the oligarchic nature of the contemporary party system. This has mislead many into blaming popular passions for the oppression, theft and exploitation being done by one government after another. Thus the far-right, with its call for diminishing freedoms in the name of security has grown in popularity.

**It is not democracy to be blamed, but the complete lack of it.** The absence of broad public participation allows to competing ruling elites to get hold on power and do as they please. For them popular deliberation is undesirable as it will end their reign over society and thats why they replace it with party electoralism. The dominant institutions, on which their authority is being based are constructed so as to embody this "hatred of democracy", to borrow the phrase developed by Jacques Ranciere[15].

For significant social change to take place, a mere imitation of politics, a simulation of public action, like the one

exercised by political parties, will simply not do. What is desperately needed is what Hanna Pitkin calls real experience of active citizenship. And this necessarily goes through the reinvention of democracy beyond political parties.

## Notes:

[1] Amadeo Bertolo: *Democracy and Beyond* in "Democracy and Nature" Vol.5, No.1, 1993

[2]

<https://www.athene.antenna.nl/ARCHIEF/NR08-Parlement/Pitkin-REPRESENTATION.html>

[3] Simone Weil: *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, New York Review of Books 2013, p.15

[4] Op. Cit. 3

[5] Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, Penguin Books 1990, pp215-282

[6]

<https://freedomnews.org.uk/venezuela-state-power-when-the-left-is-the-problem/>

[7]

<https://new-compass.net/articles/will-disordered-always-rule-us>

[8] Interviewed for the series Τόποι Ζωής (Topoi Zois) of the Greek National Television ERT3 (available online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zmzJxIw2GM>)

[9] Cornelius Castoriadis: *The Castoriadis Reader* (ed. David Ames Curtis), Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1997, p.41

[10]

<https://roarmag.org/essays/autonomy-revolution-movements-democracy-capitalism/>

[11] Simone Weil: *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, New York Review of Books 2013, p.43

[12]

<https://newrepublic.com/article/144592/trump-creating-propaganda-state>

[13] <https://isj.org.uk/latin-america-new-left-governments/>

[14] Cornelius Castoriadis: *Figures of the Thinkable*, Stanford University Press 2007, p.124

[15] Jacques Ranciere: *Hatred of Democracy*, Verso 2014

---

# Ecological Thinking and the Crisis of the Earth

John Clark\*

## Facing the Crisis

If a visitor from another galaxy were sent to Earth to report on the latest news here, it seems rather obvious what the alien observer would take back to the home planet. Our extraterrestrial investigator would certainly report that our planet is going through one of the six periods of mass extinction and biodiversity loss in its entire four and half billion-year history, and that other major disruptions in the biosphere are interacting to cause a major crisis for life on Earth.

In short, the big story from Planet Earth would be that we have entered a period of **massive planetary death**. In fact, among the many names that have been suggested for the emerging era or epoch of life on Earth, the most precisely appropriate would be the ***Necrocene***, the “new era of death.”[1] Strangely, this rather shocking news is met with either denial or disavowal among the members of our own species, who are living in the very midst of this crisis. The deniers among us simply reject the clear evidence of global ecological crisis. The disavowers, on the other hand, accept the truth of the evidence but fail to undertake actions that are even vaguely

proportional to the gravity of our predicament.

Information on the severity of the ecological crisis has hardly been a well-kept secret. For example, researchers at the Stockholm Resilience Centre and their colleagues have in recent years formulated a conception of “planetary boundaries” defining the limits in various areas beyond which there is likelihood of ecological disaster. They summarized their findings in three concise articles that are readily available to the public.[2] The authors concluded that “transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change within continental- to planetary-scale systems.”[3]

The boundaries were identified as lying in the areas of climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, biogeochemical nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, global freshwater use, rate of biodiversity loss, land-system change, chemical pollution, and atmospheric aerosol loading. They found that at least three boundaries had already been passed and that most others are in danger of being transgressed soon. In the most recent article, the authors concluded that “two core boundaries—climate change and biosphere integrity—have been identified, each of which has the potential on its own to drive the Earth system into a new state should they be substantially and persistently transgressed.”[4]

It is not only scientists who have sounded the alarm about ecological crisis in rather clear and not uncertain terms. Recently, *The Guardian*, a major British newspaper, announced the gravity of the biodiversity crisis in almost alarmist language, saying that the “biological annihilation’ of wildlife in recent decades means a sixth mass extinction in Earth’s history is under way” and that “it threatens the survival of human civilization, with just a short window of time in which to act.”[5]

Yet, this seemingly inflammatory article was not at the top of the stories for the day, and if one reads the numerous readers' replies to it, one finds very little sense of direction about how to respond to this developing global catastrophe. Furthermore, such news somehow quickly fades from the popular consciousness. One might therefore conclude that there is simply not enough good "environmental thinking" going on in today's world. It might seem that the public is just not prepared to understand adequately the meaning of global ecological crisis, and is therefore incapable of facing it with full seriousness. Thus, there are injunctions that we need to work harder on creating good environmental education so that the public can engage in more effective environmental thinking.

Granted, this would be a very good thing. However, one of the problems with conventional ideas of "environmental thinking" or even "ecological thinking" is that it assumes that correct thinking will in itself have a significant transformative effect, or more to the point, the kind of effect that will be necessary in order to avoid disaster. For example, it is thought to be crucial that climate deniers be convinced that anthropogenic climate change really exists. This is not at all a bad idea, but it almost inevitably ignores the fact that that the vast majority of *non-deniers* are in a state of *disavowal*, and that reformed deniers are highly likely to join the ranks of these disavowers. The disavowers are willing to admit that a problem exists, and may get certain satisfactions out of being on "the right side of history," and perhaps even from engaging in various beneficial activities that reduce greenhouse gasses. However, they are not willing to consider, and then actually work diligently for, the kind of deep, fundamental changes in society that will be necessary to change the ecocidal course of history.

A basic problem for the problematic of "better environmental thinking" is that the needed transformation cannot result from

abstract thought and the understanding of concepts, but can only come from engaged thinking that is an integral part of an engaged participation in transformative social ecological processes. We need therefore to consider how such engagement might begin to take place. But first, we might consider further the implications of our modes of thinking.

*Part of the problem with the appeal to "environmental thinking" is the very idea of the "environment".*

The dominant conception of "the environment" assumes a certain practical ontology. According to this ontology, there is a world that consists of individual egos surrounded by "environments," and societies that consist of collections of separate egos, surrounded in turn by larger "environments." This prevailing conception of the environment is an expression of the binary subject-object thinking that is built into to the dominant social ideology. Meanings are social, not merely individual. Thus, even when this ontology is not consciously intended, or when it is even abstractly rejected, such a problematic reinforces the pervasive hierarchical dualism that is the deep ideology of civilization. Given such problems, explicitly *ecological* thinking is a great advance over *environmental* thinking.

The term "ecology," derives from the Greek terms *oikos* and *logos*. It is concerned with the *logos*, or underlying meaning, truth, and way of the *oikos*, the local, regional, or planetary household. In its emphasis on the *oikos*, ecological thinking replaces both the egocentric and the anthropocentric perspective with the perspective of the larger ecological whole. This is a whole that is never a completed or closed totality, but rather a whole that is always in a process of becoming whole. The ecological whole is an ever-becoming-one that is also an ever-becoming-many, a dynamic unity-in-diversity.

Ecological thinking is inspired by the quest for the social-ecological equivalent of what Hegel called the “concrete universal,” the universal that must always be expressed through the particular and the singular, the regional and the local, the communal and the personal. This implies that we need to contemplate how we fit into the planetary dialectic of developing parts and wholes. Our question here is how we might begin to develop a thought and practice that is in accord with such a truly social-ecological perspective, and that will open a clear pathway out of our planetary crisis.

## **Finding the Way**

Though it cannot be developed in any detail in this introductory discussion, the answer that seems most promising is that we begin to create a well-grounded and multi-dimensional social and political base for the regeneration of human community and the community of life on Earth. This means reorganizing our social world into networks of awakened and caring transformational communities that are dedicated to undertaking whatever actions are necessary to put an end to the Necrocene and initiate a new era characterized by the flourishing of life on Earth. We might call such a new era the ***Eleutherocene*** – the era of a liberated humanity and a liberated nature.

In this endeavor, we can find inspiration in the ancient Buddhist concept of Appamāda. “Appamāda” is a Pali word (“Apramada” in Sanskrit) that conveys the ideas of both “mindfulness” and “care.” The practice of Appamāda implies that we must be awakened to the world and all the beings around us, and that in such an awakened state we become capable of responding to and caring for them effectively. In this, it has much in common with concepts in contemporary feminist, and especially ecofeminist, care ethics, which rejects the patriarchal model of an abstract ethics of principles in favor of an approach that non-dualistically

recognizes the inseparability of moral rationality, moral sensibility, and moral imagination.[6] It affirms that what we need more than anything is neither environmental thinking, which takes us in the wrong direction, nor even ecological thinking, which takes us only part of the way, but an *ethos* of Appamāda that pervades and shapes both our everyday practice and our social institutions. The practice of care involves attention to the truth of all beings, acceptance of the way of all beings, and responsiveness to the needs of all beings. It also implies engagement in the personal, social, and political practice that is necessary to establish mindful care for all beings in our purview and for the Earth itself as our overriding priority.

Such an outlook of attentiveness, acceptance and responsiveness helps us discover what we might call the “Four Noble Truths about the Earth.”[7] These truths are that the Earth is suffering, there is a cause of the Earth’s suffering, there is a cure to the Earth’s suffering, and there is a way to achieve the cure to the Earth’s suffering.[8] As in the case of the ancient Noble Truths, we find that our craving is the cause of all this suffering. This craving has a transhistorical element, but develops to differing degrees and takes on different qualities in different historical contexts. So, in order to cure our own suffering and that of the Earth, we must come to an understanding of the very particular, historically conditioned, nature of the craving that causes it. We all have knowledge of its nature at some level. If we cannot express it consciously, we do so through our symptoms and our defense mechanism. However, to authentically confront our predicament we must develop a clear, fully-conscious awareness of its nature, and the ways that it causes the suffering of the Earth, the suffering of a myriad of other living beings on Earth, the suffering of billions of other human beings, and our own personal suffering. We must understand, for example, how the craving that causes of the suffering of the billion human beings who live in a world of

absolute poverty also causes the suffering of another billion who live in an affluent world of nihilistic egoism.

We must, moreover, understand that the craving that causes so much suffering has, in turn, a cause of its own. This cause is the world in which most of us live, which is best described as the late capitalist society of mass consumption. It is this society, as a powerfully functioning yet self-contradictory social whole, that generates a certain form of selfhood that is inclined to obsessive desires, powerful addictions, and sick attachments. As Jason Moore has aptly stated it, the crisis we are facing is above all “capitalogenic,”[9] though this should not lead us to neglect the degree to which it is simultaneously “statogenic” and “patriarchogenic.” There is an entire system of production that depends on the generation of such craving to operate successfully (at least in the pre-catastrophic short term). There is an entire system of consumption that feeds such craving. There is an entire culture of consumption that socializes us into believing that a world of obsessive craving is the only one possible, or, if we do not believe that this is true, socializes us into resigning ourselves in practice to the inevitability of that world, and to living our lives as if it were true.

As in the case of the ancient Noble Truths, the cure to the suffering is not merely knowing the cause of the disease, or even knowing that the cause must be removed. The teaching was that the cure can only be carried out through following the Way, which was called the Noble Eightfold Path. There was no onefold, twofold or threefold path. The cure was not effected by choosing one or more forms of practice that appealed most to one personally, or that seemed to be leading generally in the right direction, or that might “hopefully” have some kind of mysterious “snowball effect.” This would be succumbing to mere whim or superstition. The path consisted of all the forms of practice that were necessary to carry out the radical transformation that was needed. The promise was that if the

path is followed “another world is possible.”

## How is this World Possible?

So, we are in need of another world—another world that we find in many ways by returning in a more awakened and compassionate way to this one. However, the means by which “another world” might be actualized (the Way) has not been given enough of the kind of diligent thought that is inseparable from effective social practice. “Another world is possible” becomes mere abstract escapist ideology unless it is expressed through transformative action that is not only prophetically “pre-figurative,” but also immediately “figurative.” Such action announces the arrival of another world and shows us the very “face” of that other world, here and now. It is in an important sense “world-making,” for no world ever exists, including the present one, except by unceasing, moment-to-moment efforts on the part of all its inhabitants to make that world.

But it is also in a very important sense *openness* to the world and to its common Logos, in opposition to the privatized or “idiotic”[10] *logoi* that are egoically generated artifacts. “Another world is possible” in part because that other world is a creative possibility. But another world is also possible because that other world has existed and still endures in the midst of the present one. We must therefore give much thought to the questions of *how the present social world is possible*, and *how it can be made impossible*. This means that we need to undertake a thorough inquiry into the major spheres of social determination that are the grounds of possibility of any world, either actually-existing or imagined.

There are four spheres of determination that are essential to the analysis of how social reality is generated, how it is maintained, and how it might be transformed. These spheres are the social institutional structure, the social ideology, the social imaginary, and the social ethos.[11]

Since there is a dialectical relationship between these spheres, they should not be thought of as discrete realms. For example, no social institutional structure is conceivable without reference to the social ethos, since structures embody, in part, structures of social practice. Thus, mass media as an institutional structure is inseparable from forms of concrete social practice that make use of and are in turn deeply conditioned by mass media technologies.

Similarly, no social imaginary signification is conceivable apart from its relation to social ideology, since images in many ways reflect and interact with concepts. For example, the imaginary signification "rugged individualist" reflects and interacts with moral injunctions about the virtues of "hard work" and "self-reliance" that form part of the social ideology. Very significantly, the megastructures of the society of advanced consumer capitalism, the technobureaucratic militaristic state, and the technological megamachine all immediately generate awe-inspiring images of power and wealth. In short, the spheres of determination are theoretical constructs or systemic abstractions that are useful in analyzing a social whole that consists of constellations of phenomena that interact dialectically and are internally related.

It will perhaps be helpful to summarize the nature of these four interrelated spheres of social determination. The social institutional sphere consists of the objective and external structures of social determination (when abstracted from the simultaneously internal-external and objective-subjective social whole). It includes, notably, the structure of capital and its various sectors, the structure of the state apparatus, and the structure of the technological and bureaucratic systems. It includes the external, formal structure of social practices, and the material infrastructure, since institutions consist not merely of structural principles, but of the actual structuration of material resources in accord with such

principles.

The other three spheres are the internal and subjective realms of social determination (given all the qualifications just mentioned). It is important that we not look upon the relation between the "objective" institutional sphere and the three "subjective" spheres as a "base-superstructure" relationship, but rather one of mutual determination and internal relation. Thus, perhaps paradoxically, the "external" is *internally* related to the "internal."

The second sphere of social determination consists of the social ethos. "Ethos" is used in the sense of the constellation of social practices that constitute a way of life. Ethos is the sphere of social psychological reality. It can only be understood through a very specific analysis of everyday life and all the habits, practices, gestures, and rituals that it entails. Ethos consists of the way that we live and enact the social and cultural world in which we live, and which lives in and through us. The common weakness of counter-ideologies to which many give lip-service, and in which some believe very deeply, results from the fact that they abstractly theorize that "another world is possible," but the adherents proclaim and legislate through their everyday lives, through their immersion in the dominant social ethos, that "this world is inevitable."

The third sphere of social determination is the realm of the social imaginary. This is the sphere of the society's or community's collective fantasy life. It is the realm of the "fundamental fantasy," a self-image that is much more highly invested with psychic energy than any mere "self-concept," and which is a central determinant in the life of each person. The social imaginary includes socially-conditioned images of self, other, society, and nature. It encompasses the images of power, success, heroism, and personal gratification expressed in the prevailing myths and paradigmatic narratives of the community and culture. The study of the social imaginary

explores the social dimensions of desire and demand. Because social imaginary significations are so intimately related to our quest for meaning, and, in the contemporary world, for self-justification, they are invested with intense levels of psychic energy. Much as in the case of the social ethos, this sphere has been generally neglected not only in mainstream social theory, but also in most leftist and radical social thought.

Finally, the fourth sphere of social determination is the realm of social ideology. A social ideology can mean simply a system of ideas that is socially significant and contains a greater or lesser degree of truth and value to the society. However, in the critical sense, an ideology is a system of ideas that purports to be an objective depiction of reality, but, in fact, constitutes a systematic distortion of reality on behalf of some particularistic interest or some system of differential power. Though we might be tempted to say that we need to replace the dominant institutional structure, social imaginary, social ethos and social ideology with new liberatory ones, in the case of ideology it would be better to say that we aim to replace all social ideology with a new form of ecological and communitarian reason (thus, restoring the common Logos).

What is important for liberatory social transformation is an understanding of the ways in which the spheres of social determination interact dialectically to create a social world. Among the major goals of the project of a dialectical social ecology are the following: to theorize adequately, and in a historically and empirically-grounded manner, the spheres of social determination as spheres of dialectical mutual determination; to explore the ways in which the interaction between these spheres of social determination shapes the nature of the social whole; to explain the ways in which many elements of these spheres also contradict and subvert one another, and thus to point the way toward possibilities beyond

the existing social world; and to demonstrate the relation between the modes of functioning and the dynamic movement and transformation of these spheres and the social ecological crisis of humanity and the Earth.

*\*John Clark is a native of the Island of New Orleans, where his family has lived for twelve generations. He is Professor Emeritus at Loyola University, where he was formerly Gregory F. Curtin Distinguished Professor of Humane Letters and the Professions, Professor of Philosophy, and a member of the Environment Program. He is Coordinator of La Terre Institute for Community and Ecology. Its programs are aimed at social and ecological regeneration and the creation of a cooperative, non-dominating earth community. He also works with the Institute for the Radical Imagination in New York. Author of many books. His interests include dialectical thought, ecological philosophy, environmental ethics, anarchist and libertarian thought, the social imaginary, cultural critique, Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, and the crisis of humanity and the Earth. An archive of about three hundred of his texts can be found at <https://loyno.academia.edu/JohnClark>. He has long been active in the radical ecology and communitarian anarchist movements, and is a member of the Education Workers' Union of the Industrial Workers of the World.*

*\*\*This text is a revised version of an article written for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the Journal of Environmental Thought and Education (Japan).*

---

## **Notes:**

[1] This would focus quite logically on the fact that the current "new era of death" follows an era called the "Cenozoic," meaning the "new era of life." The current era is

a radical break with the Cenozoic, but is continuous with the developments in the brief epoch called the “Holocene” (meaning the “entirely recent”).

[2] Johan Rockström et al. “A Safe Operating Space for Humanity,” in *Nature* 461 (Sept. 2009): 472 –75. Johan Rockström et al. “Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity,” in *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009), online at <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/>; and a recent update, Will Stefens et al., “Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet” in *Science* (13 Feb 2015): Vol. 347, No. 6223 (Feb. 13, 2015); online at <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855.full>, in which there is a new focus on five planetary boundaries that have “strong regional operating scales.” The delineation of areas in which boundaries are located was also revised slightly.

[3] Rockström et al. (2009)

[4] Stefens et al. (2015)

[5] Damian Carrington, “Earth’s sixth mass extinction event under way, scientists warn,” in *The Guardian* (July 10, 2017); online at <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/10/earths-sixth-mass-extinction-event-already-underway-scientists-warn>.

[6] The most advanced form is materialist ecofeminism, which situates the ethical most explicitly in real-world practice and everyday life. It shows that the most significant sphere of ethical practice today, and our model in many ways for social-ecological transformation, remains the caring labor of women and indigenous people around the world. See Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* (London: Zed Books, 1997); new edition forthcoming.

[7] “Truth” should not be taken in the sense of “object of belief,” but rather in the sense of a “truth-process” that encompasses both understanding and engagement.

[8] By “suffering” is meant damage to the good of a being and interference with the flourishing of that being. Suffering is manifested in all dimensions of a being’s existence. The ancient teaching pointed out that the subjective manifestation of suffering is a feeling of pervasive dissatisfaction with the world. Accordingly, the Earth’s objective suffering is manifested subjectively (within the Earth’s self-conscious dimensions or “organs of consciousness”) through an ethos of anxiety and depression and through a nihilistic sensibility and ideology.

[9] See, for example, Jason W. Moore, “The Myth of the ‘Human Enterprise’: The Anthropos and Capitalogenic Change” on *World-Ecological Imaginations: Power and Production in the Web of Life* (Oct. 30, 2016); online at <https://jasonwmoore.wordpress.com/2016/10/30/the-myth-of-the-human-enterprise-the-anthropos-and-capitalogenic-change/>.

[10] From the Greek *idiōtēs*, a private person.

[11] See John P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). The conceptualization of “four spheres” of social determination seems the most useful theoretically. Yet, there are, of course, valid alternative conceptualizations of a social topology of such spheres. The social imaginary as discussed here encompasses the Lacanian imaginary and symbolic orders (or “registers”). Some theoretical advantages would be gained and some lost by dividing the sphere of the social imaginary into two spheres in a Lacanian manner. Furthermore, there are, of course, other useful social topologies, such as a topology of fields, that are not discussed here, but which may further deepen and enrich the analysis.

[12] This story is summarized concisely in Clive Ponting, "Destruction and Survival" in *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), pp. 67-86, though perhaps no one has summarized it more succinctly than the anarchist Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in his poem "Ozymandias."

[13] As subsequent discussions will show, we find powerful evidence of progress in this direction in the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, in the Democratic Autonomy movement in Rojava, and in indigenous movements in Bolivia and elsewhere.

[14] To revise and ecologize further a famous formulation of Marx that was restated in a more visionary form by Herbert Marcuse in his concept of the "liberation of nature." See Karl Marx, "Private Property and Labor" in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm>, and Herbert Marcuse, "Nature and Revolution" in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 59-78.

[15] We would thus achieve the kind of ecological sensibility expressed in Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme's *The Universe Story From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York: Harper, 1994), but the rebirth would also entail creating the material and social-ecological basis for such a sensibility to prevail historically.

---

# The Pastoral Politics Of Facebook

Alexandros Schismenos

A cloud is haunting the world, the Internet cloud.

When, on February 1848, the Communist Manifesto by K. Marx and Fr. Engels was published, the labor movement, especially in England, where the incendiary book was printed, already had an experience of decades of struggle and had already created self-organized democratic structures of self-education and collective action. The two radical writers recognized a "spectre" that haunted Europe in the activity of social movements, the rise of radical politics and the insurrectional dynamics that, in the same year, 1848, gave birth to the revolutionary surge called "The People's Spring" that shook the foundations of European political authorities. The Communist Manifesto did not create this movement, but it was part of this movement, an attempt to incorporate the new revolutionary imaginary significations into a new normative schema, in terms of a "scientific" philosophy of history with a messianic aspiration, which claimed the ability to predict the future of social-historical dynamics, effectively obscuring the social-historical. Carl Von Clausewitz noted that strategic manuals always come after the end of the battle[2]. But is this also the case with political manuals?

If we consider the Communist Manifesto as an archetypal example, we can see it as a rather distorting mirror, where the activities of its contemporary social movements were refracted through the lens of theory on the temporal horizon of history and, beyond that, on the transcendent horizon of eternity. From this transcendent, ultimate, immovable, imaginary horizon, within which human creativity is reduced to "the laws of history", theory derives its normative character.

In this way, the Communist Manifesto became an authority in itself, a set of principles for political action, the beginning of a new causal chain of motives, intentions, and planning that cannot be understood without reference to it. Prior to Das Kapital and in anticipation of Das Kapital, the Communist Manifesto obtained, by imposing a revision of the past in terms of a prophetic confidence proclaimed in the present before the future, the paralyzing force of a sacred document.

On February 2017, another manifesto was released, which at first seems to have nothing in common with the Marxist document. It was the Facebook Manifesto, written by the creator and founder of the dominant social network, the young multi-millionaire Mark Zuckerberg.

Unlike the Communist Manifesto, the Markian Manifesto (let's call it like the Gospel) did not have a problem of distribution nor printing costs. It was not addressed to the working class, or to some local / regional society, but to the whole of humanity directly. There was no restriction of distribution or reproduction, since it was shared with 1.9 billion people / users of the medium. It does not threaten the ruling elites or the ruling class, at least explicitly. It did not come out of the streets and the people nor does it refer to the streets and the people, but from the highest peak of the social pyramid, some Manhattan penthouse. It is not going to be banned, nor is it going to be transformed into a sacred document.

Yet, in essence, it is inspired by similar motives, namely the imposition of a normative schema on a diverse new social phenomenon, in order to reshape it into a political instrument. Like the Communist Manifesto, it uses descriptive terms in a regulative manner and refers these regulations to a necessity abstractly attributed to history. Like the Communist Manifesto, it aspires to start, through regulation and central planning, new social processes and actively influence the

dynamics of social relations. And to transform, to put it schematically, the social interactions of active people into the political capital of a collective organization, in our case, Facebook.

Is it worth taking such a move seriously? Zuckerberg is neither Marx, nor Engels, and Facebook is not a movement, but digital media have proven and prove every day, at least since the global crisis of 2008 , that they are tools of unpredictable political influence. The current president of the United States, D.J. Trump, said on March 16, 2017 that if there was no Twitter, he would not have been elected and it is possible that the same medium will bring his downfall as well.

But besides the ridiculousness, the admission that the most powerful political seat in the world can be hijacked with a series of nonsense in 140 characters has its own significance. Traditional systemic political mechanisms were the last to understand, after the Trump election and amidst a cyber war in which U.S. institutions are under attack by espionage, leaks and revelations, the fact that we live in the digital era. We understood it during the December 2008 riots in Greece, when rebellious students were communicating via SMS, but it was understood worldwide in 2011, during the Occupy World Movement and the Arab Spring, social outbursts that spread through the Internet. What we called an ontological revolution[3], is the creation of a new ontological field for the projection of social imaginary significations, for the dissemination of knowledge, for the reconstruction of the individual self-image and the formation of imaginary communities. The digital world expands in every social field, through individual activity diffused on a quasi-universal level, and constitutes a virtual social sphere, a digital magma of visualized significations associated with reality in terms of information transmissibility and user interconnectivity.

As the traditional forms of political representation and identity politics collapse, new social imaginary

identifications emerge on the Internet, which, under the schema of cinematic nostalgia[4], are formulated not in reference to social reality but to virtual constellations of figurative symbols, where truth values are relative, where falsification and verification are not valid, since propagation time has been shortened so much that each independent information becomes a quasi-undifferentiated element in a continuous information flow. Not only is communication time condensing, but the space of information dissemination expands indefinitely, as much as the possibility of global instantaneous dispersion is realized.

The metaphysics of Cyberspace consists in the fact that while this space seems infinite as it expands from within in proportion to the creation of web pages, it is also a space without extent, without distance. We have the dual invention of a spatial time where the past is constantly present and a chronological space where extent and distance is absent.

The global temporality that is formed in and through the Internet is at the same time synchronic and diachronic, but not in accordance to social time, which is essentially local. Direct accessibility flattens the critical significance of information within a continuous flow, where information sets can be articulated into pseudo-narratives, and where it is the quantity of information that ultimately constitutes a quality of meaning, however absurd. The fundamental properties of the Internet, speed and condensation express precisely this principle of expansion through contraction.

Without a common criterion of value or truth, which, in the non-digital world, is offered, at least partially, by the social-historical reality and the real limitations imposed by society as the "objective" (in the sense that it transcends subjectivities) world and by the "objective world" itself as nature, the only criterion of value remaining is popularity.

At the same time, every marginal idea, either radical and

liberating or reactionary and obscurantist, shares now an ability of propagation, previously limited to the dominant discourse, so that every individual or group share, at least in theory, the same potential public audience, that is, the whole of digital humanity. Without proof of validity, validity is gained and lost through the flow of information itself, contrary to what happened when the dissemination of information depended on the validity of the source. New funding tools, such as crowdfunding, available on the "visible" public surface of the Internet, offer opportunities to projects that would be hopeless. This visible public surface seems unlimited in range but is limited in scope, as a small part of the whole Internet, under which the invisible areas of the Deep and Dark Web lie.

This situation offers countless possibilities for worldwide spreading of "fake news", multiplying their influence in accordance to the disintegration of traditional institutions. As one should expect, the digital time of information flow quickly drew the political time of decision-making to its immediate and momentary pace, since information has a power of authority. But now it is not the legitimate or verified information which allow established authorities to plan for the future, nor the distorted information of the official propaganda mechanisms which allow authorities to manipulate the present, but information itself as a form of authority, information itself as a mechanism of regulation or deregulation, diffused to all points of the horizon, reconstructing the past and deregulating the future. It does not seem so important anymore to correlate information with some external reality if information can shape realities, creating alternative narratives.

As we know, social-historical temporality is always open to interpretations, since the social-historical is the field of every interpretation, and that makes the past as fragile as the future, conditioned by the present.

In the social media, time, if measured by information, is never crystallized to an inaccessible past, but the past is constantly present. Facebook recently introduced a "legacy" function that allows friends and relatives to manage, to inherit, the Facebook profiles of their recently deceased. Each user can appoint a friend as his/her page manager in case he/she dies, and if this fashion expands, in the immediate future, each user may become a memory bank himself/herself, a cloud of dead avatars around the star of the living user. At the same time, however, this living user, guardian and heir of the future, of an entire digital ancestral community, may see his/her digital influence multiply accordingly, since he/she will be the guardian of the most lasting memory invented by humanity, the digital profile. Which, being composed by fragments of the user's self-image and his/her interaction with other users, constitutes both a self-exposition and self-concealment, a self-reconstruction not limited by the body and the directness of actual human presence.

Multi-billion social media companies exploit a new kind of capital, the communication of the users themselves. Facebook now has a vast net worth capital, but it does not depend on the production of a product or the participation in an investment but on the activity of its users. Use value is exchange value in this field and the product, which is communication itself, is provided by the user. The product is the user himself, since profit is essentially generated by inter-subjective communication. This capital is inherently profitable, as its surplus value is net worth value, generated not by the exploitation of overwork, that is, the exploitation of the working part of individual time, but by the exploitation of recreation, that is, the exploitation of the "free" part of individual time. If all users decided to abstain from the medium, Facebook would collapse together with its net worth capital. The ability of the medium to generate profit equals the ability of the medium to generate communication, that is, the ability of the medium to form a

community, a capacity that depends on each user individually, since Internet communities are imaginary communities of subjective identification, i.e. fragile. These imaginary communities cannot fully integrate the person. This makes every imaginary digital community fragile, but with strong penetrative dynamics, circulating from the private space to the public without the risk involved in any personal physical participation in the physical public space.

On Facebook everything is recorded, while face-to-face conversations are not. But Facebook users are much more prone to misunderstandings, pompous opinions and insults than they would be in a face-to-face confrontation. It seems that the instinct of danger is primarily physical, or ultimately, that we are more ashamed before the presence of the others than before our face mirrored on the screen.

Let's go back to the Markian manifesto, which was duly noted in the U.S. where social media were used to "crush" politics. Let us simply point out that this would not have been possible without the devaluation of traditional political institutions and norms. As it would not have been possible without the globalization of the economy, the expansion of the doctrine of growth, and the sense of a social and moral degradation that irreparably weakened the "tradition of authority" of modernity.

The founder of Facebook seeks to fill the power vacuum that opens up beneath the broken bridges between authority institutions and social reality, in a more modern manner than the strategy used by Trump and the alt (ernative) far right. He sees the medium as an instrument for substituting the institution and proposes to complete the colonization of institutions by digital media, replacing the institution with the instrument, re-defining politics in terms of digital communication.

His manifesto[5] begins as follows: "To our community. On our

journey to connect the world, we often discuss products we're building and updates on our business. Today I want to focus on the most important question of all: are we building the world we all want?"

He goes to present his own, simplistic, philosophy of History, which is a story of communication. "History is the story of how we've learned to come together in ever greater numbers – from tribes to cities to nations. At each step, we built social infrastructure like communities, media and governments to empower us to achieve things we couldn't on our own."

Let's briefly examine this point. First of all, the historical hierarchy that Zuckerberg proposes, placing the community first, the medium of communication after, the government at the end, is the schema of a simplistic metaphysics of history as progress. But this reveals his ambition. He addresses an existing community as the owner of the dominant medium clearly aspiring to governance: Facebook's upgrade to an institution of social association and co-ordination of social action alongside and beyond traditional institutions.

Hence the correlation of community, media, and government under the class of things that help us achieve things that we could not achieve "alone".

To which community is the manifesto addressed? What does "our community" mean? Obviously it means Facebook users in total. But is this community similar to the community, let's say, of newspaper readers? Obviously not. Because newspapers offer content not produced by the public itself but by journalists who are (supposedly) judged by public opinion in the public domain and must provide evidence to support the facts, so that newspapers (supposedly) constitute an essential part of modern public space and public time without taking up or replacing public space and public time.

However, social media have no content, but just a function.

The content is created by the user of the function without the need of evidence, the content is given by the users, the public audience themselves are the authors and the readers. So every imaginary digital community is both private and public at the same time, and every user is both an individual and a member of the community in an indeterminate manner, while the only criterion is not deliberation, but popularity. Thus, the essential part of public consultation that (supposedly) newspapers serve, that is, keeping the public informed and authorities checked, is further degraded.

Therefore, the Facebook user community, defined as the set of social media users, is a community of functional, tautological identification, without any specific moral or political or cultural content. It is therefore a community that is potentially universal in the most trivial sense. Potentially, but not actively.

Zuckerberg understands that and tries to take advantage of the situation by equating Facebook's community to the global community. "In times like these, the most important thing we at Facebook can do is develop the social infrastructure to give people the power to build a global community that works for all of us.", he declares. That is, through Facebook, Zuckerberg aspires to reshape the existing global digital community into a political global digital community, a community that works in common for common purposes. But we have already noticed that the absence of common goals, beyond the common purpose of promoting individual purposes through a universal communication tool, is what makes the Facebook community a global, if trivial, one.

Let us also notice that this community, defined as a global community, seems to exceed and overlap every society by reversing the classical distinction between community (Gemeinschaft), defined by common ethics and customs, and society (Gesellschaft), defined by impersonal institutions.

Does Zuckerberg's proposal provide any place for a digital democracy? It should be clear from the above that no. How does he visualize the social infrastructure he will offer? He introduces new features in Facebook software that will allow the creation of "meaningful groups" around social and political demands in particular regions. The application will connect people who are interested in related issues and live in a particular area, around a common goal, aspiring to link these imaginary communities to their local territorial terrain. So, of course, it localizes activity inversely, as this function also works as a classification and identification of regions. The members of such a community are certified as residents of a region, ex post.

And of course, these local digital meaningful communities are organized not around some collectivity, but around a personality, since the individual is the only inalienable element and the vector of the essential dynamic of the medium. This person is called the "leader" and acts as a user / node around whom the regional community is formed within the expanded global user community. As we can see, the dominant oligarchical schema of political representation is kept intact, and Facebook paves the way for the campaigns of the political "leaders" of the future.

Facebook, a private digital communications company, a privately-owned company that does not generate nor create anything, explicitly aspires to become the model of the political institution of the future. Zuckerberg aspires to regulate the uncontrolled activity of trolls, false news, information and chatting for the explicit purpose of controlling the uncontrolled actual political and social movements by integrating them into a regulatory model of digital communication. In a peculiar manner, he combines Alexander Hamilton's centralist governance programme with Jurgen Habermas' communicative democracy project.

Let us not fall into the trap of Zuckerberg, who wants to

further exploit social media communication in order to create a form of governance under a single company, which, like the Catholic clergy and the Communist party before, displays the abusive claim that it represents mankind.

So let's not laugh at the initial parallelism of the Communist Manifesto with the Facebook Manifesto. It is better to see how the latter intersects with central political issues that emerge in the struggle for free public space and space on a global horizon. That is,

(a) the issue of political representation and democratic deliberation, which Zuckerberg degrades to a technical and functional procedure.

1. b) the issue of the commons that Zuckerberg obscures, by defending the means of communication itself but not the right to free communication.
2. c) The issue of the institution of the political community that Zuckerberg identifies with the community of Facebook users, that is, the community that he himself, like another baron, exploits for his own personal profit.

In other words, the result of the Zuckerberg Habermasian-Hamiltonian hybrid would not create a global digital democracy, (a global "digital democracy" is an obscure idea in itself, since democracy requires the actual presence of the individual and roots in locality) as he declares, but some global digital neo-feudalism with himself on the throne, corresponding to the global economic neo-feudalism. Perhaps Zuckerberg's Manifesto will become a historical joke, as opposed the Communist Manifesto. However, they share the same ambition, the ambition to regulate the future, and both texts can be classified in the tradition of pastoral politics.

[1] This article was originally published in Greek, in the

Kaboom journal (issue 2, May 2017). See also:  
<https://kaboomzine.gr/kaboom-2-contents/>

[2] C. Von Clausewitz, Vom Krieg, III, Strategie, 72

[3]

<https://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/socrates/article/view/146>

[4]

<https://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/socrates/article/view/109>

[5]<https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/building-global-community/10154544292806634/>

---

# Direct Democracy, Social Ecology and Public Time

**Alexandros Schismenos**

One could argue that since the dawn of modernity, humanity is in a situation of constant crisis. Today, however, we find ourselves amidst a nexus of crises, economic crisis, political crisis, ecological and anthropological crisis, while the human environments' very existence is threatened. The privatization of public space, under the false identification of public and state, transforms social geography and the public architecture of life. We also witness the end of national politics under the grid of transnational networks of power, combined with a revival of nationalistic rhetoric as a means of manipulating populations.

In our attempt to clarify this broader and more diverse

crisis, this crisis of significations which we experience at the beginning of the 21st century, it may be useful to delimit, schematically, some areas of its manifestation, while the globalization of power and market mechanisms spreads the net of bureaucratic capitalism across the globe and stretches it to its limits, internally and externally.

Internally, because the system waives the requirement to provide a coherent meaning for the populations it dominates, deregulating the processes necessary for social cohesion, which also ensured the psychical internalization of the norms and the purposes of the system by the majority.

Externally, because the system itself, which was never actually controlled or regulated, is unable to fulfill both its general purpose (which is inherently irrational and incomplete), namely the unlimited dominance of rationalistic control and capital growth, and the specific interests of the semi-clustered groups, elites and coalitions that make up the power network of globalized bureaucratic capitalism, a fraction of which was revealed via the Panama papers.

Above all, the system meets the natural limit, the exhaustion of the available resources, both environmental and human. Besides its unlimited ambition, there is a destruction limit on the brink of which we walk blindfolded, the brink of natural disaster, environmental disaster, social disaster, and even nuclear disaster. The whole range of nightmares and dystopias stand like potential realities before us.

The most recent and visible aspect of the multifaceted crisis of significations is the economic crisis that apparently began in 2008 with the bust of the mortgage bubble in the United States, a bubble whose creation, however, must be placed at least in the 1970s, the era of the oil crisis of OPEC (1973), of the total surrender of the once strong North American trade unions, and the beginning of Reagan-Thatcher's 'conservative counter-revolution'

The main feature of this 'conservative revolution' was the triumph of closed interest groups that promoted the most predatory and aggressive doctrine of capitalism, the extreme neoliberalism of the Chicago School and Milton Friedman. This meant that State authorities swiftly and voluntarily abolished the financial regulation tools that formally kept multinational private capital into check. It also meant the adoption of the "Shock Doctrine", as described by Naomi Klein, for the subjugation of societies and the dismantlement of organized labor.

At the same time, it meant the privatization of public space, which, strengthened by the consummation of personal time, led to a rapid psychological internalization of the significations of consumerism and market individualism, starting an age, as Castoriadis labeled it, of insignificance. The emergence of huge megacities smothered the urban public space under a network of commercial zones and the basis of societal cohesion, the spirit of community, withered away. When community between people vanishes, the communal bond between nature and society is shattered.

The dawn of the 21st century was marked by the rupture of the bubble and the violent overcoming of insignificance, by the implementation of neoliberal policies on a supranational level, by the ascending of international financial organizations to a central decision-making level, the violent dissolution of local communities and the expansion of the privatization of public space and personal time. But this attack was also met with successive revolts, the awakening of a universality of solidarity and resistance, the creation of imaginary communities and the spreading of the concept of the commons via and beyond the Internet, the breaking of borders and the dynamic struggle for real political democracy. Nothing ensures the outcome of social conflicts, but certainly these are now carried out on multiple levels and globally, while what is at stake is the future itself, in the most

comprehensive sense, the existence of a future.

Another crisis that began with the dawn of industrial capitalism and the creation of the mass-production machine is the environmental crisis, the ecological crisis, the effects of which are already evident in an emphatic way, although strong interests are trying to disguise them. It is now explicit and clear that the planet has natural limits, and that the degree of exploitation has already exceeded the renewal capacities of various ecosystems. There is no need to argue here for what everyone now knows and witnesses in the perturbation of natural processes, extreme meteorological phenomena and the mass extinction of species.

Scientists have now attributed the name "Anthropocene" to a period beginning with the Industrial Revolution and extending to the undefined future, elevating modern human activity to the level of geological forces.

These two types of crisis, economic and ecological, constitute a broader crisis of growth. In the sense that the imaginary signification of unlimited growth tends to make a desert of the human environment itself, and in the sense that it seeks to dominate the totality of society, accelerating desertification in both the natural and the cultural dimension. However, the full implementation of the growth doctrine seems to be hindered by three main factors:

- The exhaustion of natural resources.
- The collective resistance of communities and the psychic resistance of individuals who create new, global networks of sociality at a time when traditional institutions are being dismantled.
- The fundamental contradiction within capitalism itself, which objectifies people whilst its function is based precisely on the exploitation of human ingenuity.

To the extent that the economic motivation of unlimited growth and profitability remains the dominant imaginary signification, the tension between the system's pursuits and the rapid self-destruction brought about by their achievement is at the same time a field of constant reproduction of the crisis.

The privatization of urban public space, which began under the false identification of the public and the state, changed the social geography and the public architecture of the city. Capital cities were transformed into vast population-rich hubs, with energy demands greater than their own countries, while the inner space and time of the city is divided into three distinct and isolated zones, which hold amongst them external exploitative relations. The mansions of the dominant elite, the small and medium-sized blocks of flats and offices of the majority, and the ghetto jungles of marginalized minorities. A vast network of markets and malls divide and at the same time connect those isolated zones under the circulation of products.

*While the cities expand, public space and time, the foundations of community and the conditions for democracy are narrowing, leaving the cities hollow as hives of private cells where circulation replaces community.*

Looking more carefully, we can distinguish, both at a microsocial and at a macro-social level, the deep erosion and irreversible decline of four dominant metaphysical positions that constitute the ideological foundations of modernity and the imaginary axioms of the modern worldview.

By 'metaphysical position' we mean the philosophical, ideological and psychological stance of treating general descriptive terms as actual, self-contained beings. The use of general descriptive terms, such as "humanity", for example, is a necessity of linguistic consistency, but their

hypostatization is the metaphysical leap of traditional ontology. All four modern metaphysical positions are generalizations of generic terms, configurations of imaginary persons or beings with a single will and conscience, to which the origin of the established authorities is attributed.

We will call them Metaphysics of the Nation, Metaphysics of History, Metaphysics of the Subject and Metaphysics of Reason. They are a nexus of nuclear imaginary meanings and ideological props of the instituted social imaginary that have risen as granite certainties but now deflate like balloons.

As we know, the nation-state has relied on the metaphysical idea of a common will, a national will, a substitute for the living people by the imaginary entity of a 'nation' with, supposedly, a single will, single interests and a single "destiny".

The metaphysics of the Nation has been the dominant paradigm of established political authority in the modern world. Ethnocratic bureaucracies, founded on a single, official language and education according to the standards of industrial production, have proved to be excellent matrices for the reproduction of capitalist imaginary significations through the emotional investment of individuals to the ideal of a national homogeneous organization of social life. The state fortified this Nation-metaphysics with a series of unifying institutional structures. Integrative education structures, unifying military structures, unified social benefits structures, the implementation of which followed the practices of ethnic cleansing and regional genocide.

Today, the abandonment by the state, not only of financial regulations, but also of social functions and services, deprives it of any social rooting. As a result, while there is still a dominant national propaganda in every social field, from entertainment to politics, the real strength of the nation-state is declining. But as the metaphysics of Nation

collapses, the metaphysics of History follows, because the whole dominant national narrative was based on the metaphysics of a "historical mission" on a trajectory of unlimited growth.

This affects a further fluidization of borders, as the distinction between what is considered interior and what is considered exterior liquidates, while war fronts multiply. The very form of modern warfare and "anti-terrorist" campaigns raises new borders within societies, within cities, among neighborhoods, across countries.

At the same time, the shaking of the metaphysics of the Nation also shakes the politics of representative republics, revealing again the existing divide of interests and sentiments between society and the state. The recent Trumpian degradation of U.S. politics signifies something, by signifying the nothing, the representative void.

We live in the first period in history when the urban population has exceeded the rural, but the city, as a political and social entity and unity, is being dismantled. It is being rebuilt into a set of segregated functions, as regards both public space and public time. Likewise, personal time is sliced into distinct occupations defined by production or consumption, and the individual is transformed into a cluster of functions.

The emergence of the Internet and the expansion of social media have brought a new field of projection and reconstruction of the public and personal identity with infinite possibilities. The digital person, at the same time fragmentary but also a multiplicity of representations of the natural person, brings forth a new problematic of the individual's relation to himself and to society. It offers a world-wide surface for the reflection, projection and recreation of personal preferences and views, in a completely de-corporalized and virtual manner. On one hand, it seems to provide the ground for a deeper personal fragmentation and

isolation.

On the other hand, the Internet, as a means of direct and simultaneous global communication, has displayed liberating capabilities, by disseminating knowledge, socializing research, communicating societies, overcoming censorship, overcoming ethnic and cultural exclusions. It has become a tool for widespread solidarity and the emergency of new social movements, as well as an instrument of widespread control.

On the Internet, the user is at the same time invulnerable and vulnerable, indifferent as a digital self that is materially detached from his physical existence, vulnerable as a physical/psychical subjectivity with a social identity embedded in the broader social environment.

Let us not forget that the digital self is a patchwork of images, preferences, comments, trends and contacts, a conscious reconstruction of the individual projected on a virtual global public horizon. The social cohesion of the subject's image, formerly dependent on the natural presence of the individual, dissolves within the digital multiplicity of pseudo-personas. Thus, traditional metaphysics loses its original foundation, the social significance of the individual's consistency as a singular actual personality.

We will observe that of these four metaphysical positions, the metaphysics of the Nation and the metaphysics of history refer to the public and the collective. They attempt to answer the question of who we are. They have to do with the community's position within time and the relationship of the community with time. Where we are, when we are.

The metaphysics of the Subject and the metaphysics of Reason refer to the individual and the private. They attempt to answer the question of who I am. They have to do with the person's position towards the world and the relationship of the individual with the world. What is human and what is

worldly.

The metaphysics of the Nation and the metaphysics of Reason refer to identity placed out of time, do not include time, they display imaginary eternal identities.

The metaphysics of the Subject and the metaphysics of History refer to temporal identity, include time and have to do with causality and succession, constituting imaginary causation chains.

What is happening is that a series of certainties that informed the dominant modern worldview have collapsed. Together, a series of false separations and identifications crumbles. It is the false distinction between a lonely person and an impersonal society. It is the false identification of the State with Power, the principle that someone else will always decide for society, which is actually challenged by the efforts for local direct democracy, by autonomous networks and societies that now seek self-government, facing the most violent repression, with the most powerful means, in the most fierce world conflict in history.

As we experience the decline of the national, locality is linked with globality. We are both local and global. Everything that happens locally is projected globally, and what is displayed globally is diffused locally. There is no detached place.

On the opposite side, against every manifestation of the crisis, new possibilities open, new significations emerge, the values of solidarity and community are revived on a broader scale and in a radical political context, the project of direct democracy.

What we have seen in the years following the dawn of the 21st century is a multifaceted resistance of societies. A resistance not formulated in terms of electoral representation, but in terms of autonomy, positive search for

a new meaning in invented communal forms of life. The refutation of sovereign institutions becomes even more obvious, by the positive activity of social movements, by the emergence of primary institutions of direct democracy, social solidarity and local self-government, to some extent.

So, we find the crisis of the metaphysics of the Nation manifested as a crisis of representation and identity, with a revival of nationalistic rhetoric. Against this, social movements are organized in terms of direct democracy and global communication. Global networks of solidarity challenge the validity of official borders, forming nodes of free social spaces and free collectives that challenge the jurisdiction of the state.

We have seen the crisis of the metaphysics of history, which manifests itself as the doctrine of the "end of history", as a crisis of the association of social time with subjective temporality, a crisis of the relation to the past and the future, a loss of the future and a leveling of the past. Against this, social struggles and social movements create new forms of free public time and an opening to a common future. A new sense of relation to the environment, social and natural, through the experience of local struggles for the environment, from Dakota, USA to Halkidiki, Greece, provides the seed for a new *sensus communis* and a new sense of common good and humanity.

So, we see the emergence of social movements unrelated to the traditional trade unions or parties, which do not seek the implementation of a ready-made plan of another society but create a new open field of free public space and time and, as Jacques Ranciere might say, constitute another world and another history, a world and a history of emancipation. Such is the Zapatista movement, and parts of the liberation movement in Rojava but also urban grassroots movements in Western cities.

These are movements without leaders, movements that seem fragmented, but which allow the free networking and complementarity on many fields and places within the broader socio-historical, precisely because they have a common project and create a common meaning. And this is self-government.

*It is self-government without authoritative power, without representation, without rulers, without delegations. Direct democracy.*

And that indicates a different answer both to the crisis of the Ethnocratic state and political representation, and to the identity crisis of the individual, who finds it difficult to identify with national state mechanisms, as was the case, not because propaganda is not sufficient, nor because there is access to the experience of a wider world, but because these mechanisms themselves have been exposed to signify nothing. What they are is empty automations deprived of their original meaning and their old vision.

The social movements that emerge redefine private and public relations, in the sense that they create a free public space, which does not belong to private capital neither to the state. And a free public time of social interaction and political decision, like the Nuit Debut movement symbolically expressed by the creation of a prolonged March.

But the social background of modern human existence, the urban landscape of megacities is a problem in itself. The modern city is not an ancient democratic polis, but, as Aristotle would claim, Babylon. Modern collectivities create, within the urban network, new free social spaces, like Nosotros in Athens or Micropolis in Thessaloniki, that can become seeds of new forms of life, but their existence, being against the dominant paradigm, faces tremendous pressure and is dependent on their opening to the broader society.

Democratic ecological collectivities must create institutions

of education and communication, institutions with cohesive political activity on a wider socio-historical field. Free social spaces are forms that already go beyond collegiality by the action of which they are created.

We may perhaps schematically designate four moments to the political time of autonomous collectivities. They all involve and presuppose a public conflict with established authorities.

The first moment, when the collectivity opens up to society involves the initial creation of a broader social environment. The creation of free social spaces seems to be the limit of this moment. If this limit is not exceeded through the connection with the broader society, beyond collegiality, free social spaces become self-referential and sooner or later collapse internally.

If the limit is exceeded, then we proceed to the next moment, which can only occur within society, that is, beyond the collective, since the activity of the collectivity exceeds the collectivity itself. It involves the co-creation of networks of solidarity, communication and action, local, regional and global and the creation of free open public spaces. It means the creation of a limited public space and time of communication and a limited public space and time of political decision.

*The opening of free public space presupposes a break with state and capitalist mechanisms.*

It is a first step. The second step is explicit self-determination, institution-building through direct democracy and public deliberation, in order to realize autonomy in terms of social functions and a complete rupture with the state.

We can imagine explicit self-determination if we consider a self-sufficient local network that is not subjected to state or capitalist jurisdiction and taxation. It constitutes a

fundamental division between free communities and the state, but is not an autonomous society still. It means the establishment of a complete public space and time of free communication but a limited public space and time of political decision.

In order for social autonomy to be realized, society must have the power to explicitly re-create its central institutions, namely politics, justice, education in a democratic and equalitarian manner. The people, as free individuals, must be able to establish laws by means of open, equalitarian public deliberation, with the establishment of direct democracy. This presupposes the abolishment of the state and the subordination of economy to democratic politics. But it also presupposes the psychical transformation of the individual, to an autonomous, reflective and deliberative subjectivity. It presupposes a democratic education which cannot be separated by the experience of direct democracy in practice, through the praxis of autonomy. It also means establishing a complete public space and time of free communication and a complete public space and time of political decision and action.

This is the challenge that communities and societies face today, under the threat of disaster, for the future remains as always, an open future for societies to create.

---

\*Paper presented at the TRISE (Trasnational Institute for Social Ecology) Conference, held in Thessaloniki, on September 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> 2017.