

There's an apparatus for that

On Tiqqun's "This is not a Program".

Anonymous

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Once again saying they are the opposite of things in italics, once again rupturing with things, once again universalizing bourgeois French intellectualism, once again referencing their own concepts to generate the illusion of importance (à la Bob Avakian). Again all this: sex, action, excitement, big words, petty leftist squabbling (and it's new!).

To begin with, the book is premised on the notion that we need to scrap the idea of class, a notion only possible from the same position that waxes political over the pressing concerns of alienation at "the dinner party". Historical conflict now apparently bears striking resemblance to the way liberalism envisions it: on the terms of the universal abstract individual. "When the host is no longer a portion of the society- the bourgeoisie – but the society as such, the society as power, and when, therefore, we find ourselves fighting not against classical tyrannies but against biopolitical democracies, we know that every weapon, just like every strategy, must be reinvented."

From here we generate an ontology whose individual is the bloom, whose class is the imaginary party, both of which are postulated as managing all these ruptures not within a historical framework, but as "a negation that comes from the outside". Ironic that they agree here with Negri (the subject of a large portion of the books scoffing) whose paranoid reading of the Grundrisse¹ postulates that the proletariat should operate outside of the dialectic. Trying to negate dialectic as a whole is a premise that assumes one could negate and surpass it; it would fall into it the very moment it is destroyed. In concrete terms, a historical period affects the people that live in it. If you are in France you probably speak French, go through French institutions, or experience marginalization and systematic abuse by those who do; there is a political and an ethical circumstance. There is no metaphysical location beyond time and outside of reality: the mystified analogy might sound extreme, but it doesn't translate into the sensible world. Negri's first solution to accomplish this external assault was to simply not work (which sounds remarkably like a strike...). This "refusal to play a part" strategy assumes the role one plays in society is voluntary—one chooses to work as they choose to experience violence based on gender or race. Organizing around embodied and real experiences of systemic violence seems to me not only like a meaningful way to organize, but actually possible, unlike the idea that people can just dip

¹Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse; Negri, Antonio

out into this content-less anomaly that the invisible party is apparently constructed of. Whatever they think they are, Leibniz was wrong, and there is no unassimilated monad, and thus the invisible party is not “heterogeneous to biopolitical formation”, even if it is only supposed to exist only in motions of pure external opposition. “Violence delirium and madness” are all categories that capitalism is perfectly willing to assimilate; they have mad houses, jails, and pills to do so. “Ruining equivalence” is not a revolutionary strategy, anymore than deconstruction is a revolutionary philosophy. Absconding equivalence doesn’t mean one destroys all equivalence, because then everything would be equal in its non-equivalence and would run into some insurrectionary version of Russell’s paradox. The author continues: “...accepting ourselves as such, as a Black Block, an imaginary party, or something else, would be the end of us. For the imaginary party [I hope somebody else noticed the joke here] is but the form of pure singularity”, a.k.a. they are a “complete abstraction”: ... my thoughts exactly. The claim that the author’s royal We represents “the fact that contradiction exists at all” is about as humorous as it is lofty.

“Class against class actually means classes against non-class”. Post-modernism’s trope of using the remainder against the general is implemented in an attempt to define people who don’t fall into a traditional class bracket. Somehow the fact that ambiguous class positions are true of some peoples experience annihilates the fact that there is a growing number of poor, and there are those that are profiting off them. It is fair to critique some rigid ideological conception that only the people working in manufacture constitute the proletariat, but I think it is also fair to say there is a huge lower class, that is increasingly less fluid, and there is a (dwindling) group of people that profit off of expropriated labour. There is an antagonism here that no remainder will erase, and no bourgeois thinker can theorize away. Not even the dictatorship of the petite bourgeoisie in its Stalinist manifestation can erase this antagonism. “What is ultimately at stake is no longer the abstraction of surplus value, but control” is an interesting thesis that just happens to be invalidated by every economic statistic indicating the insane wealth being generated by a decreasing number of people that is especially pertinent given issues of neo-liberalism and austerity. It is troubling to me to have an analysis that glosses over this, given the extreme relevance to what is happening all over the world. I am not claiming we can boil down all conflict into two categories, but trying to elaborate that this hypothesized complete dispersal leaves just one.

“Dressing up what is hostile to the system of representation in the guise of the “negative”, “protest”, the “rebel” is simply a tactic that the system uses to bring within its plane of inconsistency the positivity it lacks.” Though the authors themselves are guilty of this multiple times, it also happens to be the way capitalism sustains itself by projecting artificial threats like “the terrorist”, so that it can mop them up and keep its people thinking they are protecting their safety. Having an abstract non-identity as a basis of resistance is a very easy way to allow the state to simply project whatever image they want, and thus assimilate despite claims to “heterogeneity”. Also, I wonder about how this is possible given their claim that “The unique thing about Empire is that it has expanded its colonization over the whole of existence and over all that exists”? All this talk of non-identity based struggle is seems extremely more complex than it is made out to be: they say a worker should abscond his role as worker, the woman from her role as woman (as if gender roles are only enforced by personal choice). Despite the fact that everyone is supposed to revoke their roles, they are revoking their roles from those positions. The person who would abandon their role as a woman (even if this were as simple as they make it out to be) would not be equivalent to the person who forfeits their role as a worker. And I hope that I am not the

only one to read this and think that there are multiple forms of oppression that cannot be unified into this mystical singular antithesis. The people who seriously believe this is true are taking the position that people don't experience violence based on class, gender, or race. The argument relies on a caricature of feminism and Marxism, on exploiting the annoyance and difficulties of revolutionary struggles, and validating the urge to ignore suffering and only engage in politics for the sake of personal valorization.

Perhaps they could offer some sort of ends to justify these means, but their depiction of this seems even more grim: "We are not looking for a better alternative world to come, but in virtue of what we have already confirmed through experimentation, in virtue of the radical irreconcilability between empire and this experimentation, of which war is a part". The conflict is an end in itself, as we will see in the most comical portion of the text in which the hero discusses his idea about being a really cool warrior. Despite juvenile assertions like "We refuse to play the game"!, the state uses coercive violence to enact its will: it isn't a choice or some kind of strategy to interact with it from inside this, it is reality. If we are talking about these ideas as a strategy, what point is there to employing them without the intention to win? This is perhaps the most absurd version of reformism to have crept out of the bowels of the intelligentsia, but it is not too different from the reformist jargon of the early 1900's. The reactionary neo-Kantian Bernstein's statement that "The movement is everything, the ultimate goal is nothing", sounds nearly identical to this modern faux revolutionary rhetoric. Spontaneous action without any desire to really take power is the strategy of reformism. This doesn't mean that the position I am arguing for is the opposite thing: namely that we can create some static utopia. Dynamism and difference are a part of living that we have to recognize will never be totally eliminated, but the interplay is something we need to identify and theorize specifically without these collapsing discourses.

The main point of the author seems to be that the rich can be cool revolutionaries too. In terms of class: "Empire need only play one against the other, the civilized modernity of the trendy, against the retrograde barbarism of the poor", the problem is "no more than the hostile environment opposing us at every turn". The cornered bourgeois intellectual uses cheap rhetoric to try and reintegrate himself onto the revolutionary side (without renouncing or even accounting for his privilege) by using words like us as if we are moved in tandem, and poses this mechanic territory free of actors as the opposition. The argument is aimed at not holding the rich accountable for the creation of poverty, or for perpetuating this anomalous "Empire": the only enemies are apparently the Zapatistas, workers, and feminists. It is strategic for the author's self-validation to argue for this anonymous de-subjugated character, and as such should at least make us suspect.

I want people to really imagine this more than likely French professor sitting down and writing about how he is a war-machine. Imagine this same person writing: "Every war-machine is by nature a society, a society without a state; but under empire, given its obsidional status, another determination has to be added. It is a society of a particular kind: a warrior society." The great warrior bourgeois professor, who "exists only in combat", "Condemned to be alone"... "his solitude is at once his salvation, and his damnation". This could easily be the opening to Steven Seagal movie, but sadly this is the theory that people allegedly advocating for revolutionary anti-capitalism are following. "The subversive counter-society must, we must recognize the prestige connected to the exploits of every warrior, of every combatant organization"[my emphasis], "such is the defense mechanism primitive society erects". These are the words of someone who has clearly never been involved in real combat, or experienced real violence. Violence is absolutely necessary to revolutionary struggle, and as such should be treated with the extreme severity it entails.

This blatant uncritical vision of some action movie version of revolutionary violence is in no way helpful. Not to mention this is the same war-machine that later says that shoplifting is sometimes “Too much for [him]... so [he] pays”. When the author eventually goes into depth about shoplifting and skipping tickets, one can smell the pungent aroma of Crimethinc... (I want to repeat this more explicitly: Tiqqun is crimethinc. in French.)

Regardless of whether or not I am correct in my assumption that we are dealing with a white, bourgeois, French professor, the argument of the text is unmistakably theorized from such a position. This is hardly speculative as race is never addressed (despite the current imperatives to do so in France²), gender only mocked, and the canonical reference is exclusively white European males.

The rejection of subjectivity posited as a liberatory movement, as “presence itself is INHUMAN”, in reality condones the action of Empire. Radical removal of subjectivity is the methodology of capital, though Tiqqun argues the opposite. The technological methodology pushes increasing methods of alienation, of technological disembodiment that threaten the existence of subjectivity. Regardless of the mystical destabilization championed as a disruption of an “economy of presence”, the prevalence of disembodied forms of communication and socialization threaten material interaction, the last bastion of possibility for a revolutionary movement. The problem is that “self” no longer references the user; identity as such now incorporates a virtual abstraction, a constructed appearance that comes to condition material experience. Socially any event comes as fodder for virtual (dis)embodiment, real scenarios are photographed and captured to provide content for a virtual mode of experience which leeches, and reinterprets the event. Events become reified in the immaterial world as a grid of photographs. The threat to our bodies is removal and qualification by capitalist commodities like our facebook personas; the most radical acceptance of consumer culture is to “think of yourself as a product.”³ The threat to presence is the threat against material embodied interaction, and the interactions that give meaning to life under capitalist despotism. I also find the claim that “metaphysical grammar compels us” to a “covert position” which makes it “...increasingly difficult to make ‘an intellectual’ of those who think, ‘a wage earner’ of those who work...” is morbidly pedantic, perhaps nearly as much as the “...language police [who] would ensure that every sentence carries with it its own guarantee of scientificity.” Perhaps they could learn something from the first chapter of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit (which they reference here): that it is impossible to theorize from or into a position that exists outside of a historical and political context, ones relationship is always mediated, despite the employment of obscurantist language that tries to mask the subject.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the text is the total restructuring of the history of Italy in 1977 to meet the author’s ideology, one of pure spontaneity and radical desubjectivity that transcends the political. There was numerous amazing underground work being done by dedicated Marxist/Leninist groups for years building up to the events, as well as massive strike activity. Susanna Ronconi (who kneecapped business students, committed armed robberies to fund the revolutionary activity, and plotted to assassinate government officials) does not fall into the selective appropriation with which they characterize the left. This re-framing of history is dangerous, as well as anachronistic. Further contesting the ‘spontaneous’ characterization of ‘77, the book Shoot the Women First describes the situation in Italy leading up to ’77: ☒“Around 250

²<http://france-for-visitors.com/society/racism-in-france.html>

³Midatlantic edition, Spring 2011

revolutionary groups were formed encompassing every political persuasion from Troyskism to Anarchism”.⁴

There is certainly some wisdom in the text, it is true that were being driven to experience “a world devoid of qualities”, that capitalist hegemony strips away the life and colour of reality, “a world which has become foreign, precisely, in each of its details”. However, the solution is not then to adapt the atomistic dispersal, nor to bind as an abstract amorphous entity. The solution is an embodied, affective, and collectivist drive. Tiqqun ironically tries very hard to create a subject position, one that is the antithesis to all the things that very well might have annoyed the reader about leftists or their straw-man “activists”. However, like the humanists of enlightenment, their whole critique is empty husk of a response whose content is derived only from this antithesis. A dialectic consideration is useful to unpack this formulation, to prevent annoyance and ego from reifying a position that ends up mirroring the mistakes of what one it critiquing.

Late capitalism tries its best to put everything in terms of individualism, to support forced isolation that dissuades people from organizing around common experiences, to depoliticize everything... I am interested in those people coming together, discussing the ways capitalist society treats them as black, as poor, as a women, as trans-persons: fucking terribly. I want to hold the people that make this structure responsible. Power is certainly more complex than Marxism initially thought, but that doesn't negate all collective effort, or eliminate the responsibility of the bourgeoisie, it only means we need to build communities that unify while accepting and not flattening, or folding in, the extreme differences of subjective positions. This is of course incredibly complicated in practice, but that is precisely why we need to start moving in such a direction. It seems like these glossy and militant diatribes rope people in with intellectual-sounding mystification, but we should avoid buying into the hype.

“The boredom that people are running away from merely mirrors the process of running away, that started long before.” –Adorno: Vandals

⁴Shoot the Women First; Macdonald, Eileen (pg.173)

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