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Statement of Purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–2,500 words, but longer pieces will also be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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Egypt, or, history's invidious comparisons: 1979, 1789, and 1848

Chris Cutrone

THE UPRISING IN EGYPT, which followed soon after the toppling of the old regime in Tunisia, succeeded in bringing down Hosni Mubarak on February 11, the 32nd anniversary to the day of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Already, before this timely coincidence, comparisons between the Iranian Revolution and the revolts gripping the Arab world had started to be made. But other historical similarities offered themselves: the various "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Central Asian states and Lebanon in recent years, and the collapse of Communism in the Soviet bloc and beyond (the former Yugoslavia) starting with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Behind these revolutions on the pattern of 1989 stood the event of which the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Behind these revolutions on the pattern of 1989 stood the event of which 1989 itself had been the bicentennial, the great French Revolution of 1789. The Bastille is to be stormed again, anew. Who would not welcome this?

A more pessimistic, if no less invidious comparison offered itself, especially prior to Mubarak's ouster: the equally dramatic but failed Green Movement in the election crisis in Iran that marked 30 years of the Islamic Revolution in 2009.[1] Just as the Green Movement posed the question of reforming the Islamic Republic, events in Egypt have raised the specter of authoritarianism continuing, despite everything, albeit without Mubarak as tyrant. Indeed, comparisons of Egypt with Iran in both 1979 and 2009 are telling in several different respects. To be sure, the emancipatory prospects in Egypt today are even more remote than in Iran in either 1979 or 2009. If there is a more fruitful comparison to be made it is with Iran not in 1979 but in 2009.

The destruction of the Left, historically, has been naturalized more completely in present-day Egypt than it had been in Iran by 1979. Going back to the 1950s, because of Nasserism's subordination and suppression of the Left, the strongest opposition movement in Egypt today is the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a longer history and is much stronger than Khomeini-style Islamism had been in Iran on the eve of the Islamic Revolution. While the Khomeinite Islamic Republic has destroyed the Left more completely in Iran since 1979, it is also the case that the reform movement in the Islamic Republic has had a longer history of organization—almost 20 years now—than the opposition in Egypt has at present. The prospects for organized reform, in other words, ran deeper in Iran at the moment of the Green Movement election crisis in 2009 than is the case in Egypt today. This poses both more radical possibilities and dangers for Egypt than in Iran two years ago. The Green Movement could beat a retreat in the face of defeat in ways that the unfolding crisis in Egypt might not be so controlled. But this spiraling out of control that has raised much greater radical prospects in Egypt, as opposed to Iran in 2009, may prove to be the case at least as much for ill as for good. The military has been able to come to the rescue of the state in Egypt, and this has been met with joy not angry disappointment. What links both eruptions of democratic discontent, in Iran and Egypt, then, is their authoritarian outcome.

Putting aside the rather superficial narratives that emphasize how events in Egypt and Tunisia disprove the supposed intractability and lack of "democratic" spirit in the Arab or Muslim world—as if this needed proving—we must nevertheless ask about the legacy of the history of the Left—its defeats and failures—that condition present possibilities. The history of the Left, both locally and globally, and reaching back for generations, is important, perhaps not so much for the obvious reasons—a relative lack of "democratic institutions" in one or another part of the world, or indeed globally today, by contrast with the past—as that it raises the question of history *per se*. What resources does *history* provide to the present? For the comparisons—however invidious—with the situation in and for Egypt are all *historical* in nature. So the question of history and its effects presses for consideration. Whether one approaches the matter of historical precedence with hope or anxiety, still there is the question of how appropriate to the present any reach for such precedence may truly be. Like any event, the massive popular uprising in Egypt is in important ways *unprecedented* and *new*. This is its power. It demands its moment in the sun and refuses all comparisons, insisting upon its *sui generis* character, which it cannot be denied, even if it is not yet fully revealed.[2] What impresses itself is how much this moment will be allowed to realize itself—to make its departure from previous history. Or, conversely, how it will be drawn back into and subsumed by history's inexorable force. Why should we care about history, when emancipation makes its attempt at escaping its dead hand? How is the unfolding present *already history*?

Beneath the elation—if not euphoria—of the international Left at the popular overthrow of Mubarak is the fundamental ambiguity and so radical ambivalence of democratic revolution in our time. But this has been so not only since 1979 or 1989, but since 1789. However, unlike the French Revolution of 1789, whatever its tortured career and the opposed judgments about it, democratic revolutions since then have been dogged by the specter of *failure*. One thing that cannot be said of 1789 is that it failed, however ambiguous was its success. Yet a repressed, largely unknown, and importantly failed moment has haunted the history of modern revolutions: the event that prompted Marx's famous phrase about history "weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living": 1848. "The Spring of the Nations" in 1848, that is, the revolutions in France, Germany, and beyond, has completely escaped the imagination of present considerations of the moment of democratic revolution. This present absence is itself quite revealing, and needs to be addressed. For it may be that the comparison with 1848 is the most obscure but important of all.

For Marxism, 1848 is the canon of failure. What once made Marxism—whose founding political statement was 1848's *Communist Manifesto*—such an important force in the world was its awareness of the *problem* of 1848; or, why 1789 has kept repeating itself over and over in modern history, but *without success*. The converse of the *Manifesto*'s rousing call to action, to treat history as the "history of class struggles," was Marx's *writing the history of his present moment*, the culminating climax and failure of the 1848 Revolution in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.[3] But these two of Marx's most widely quoted writings were documents of both promise and defeat.

What made the 1848 Revolution so important to Marx and subsequent Marxism was the light that it shed on the history of the bourgeois revolution. 1848 was both the last of the classical bourgeois revolutions and the

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Gamal Abdel Nasser during the 1956 Suez Crisis.

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Francis Bacon, *Figure with Meat*, oil on canvas 129.2 x 121.9 cm, 1954.

all things as they would present themselves from the perspective of redemption"—a perspective from which, as he developed the idea, "the question of the reality or unreality of redemption hardly matters."[3] And it is very much something else to suppose that we are in a position to redeem anything whatsoever.

CM: I am curious whether the idea of the recognition of disillusionment as illusion, which you say is so important to Adorno, has a correlative in his aesthetics? Earlier on, when you were talking about technique, I noticed you mentioned notes and words along with plastic and glass.

RHK: Just as Adorno thinks that enlightenment is capable of criticizing its own limits, in his aesthetics he thinks that art, to be art, must be the making of what is more than can be made. Art, as he understood it, tests the thesis that subjectivity potentially transcends itself by way of subjectivity, and not by its abrogation. That is, the artist isn't a pythian vessel. But insofar as Adorno wrote that radical art—art that in any way means to be art—needs to be "things of which we cannot say what they are," he simultaneously asserts a making that is capable of escaping its own intention. You're in art school, right, Chris?

CM: Right.

RHK: Well, if you become an artist you have the experience of someone stopping by the studio, poking a head through the door and wanting to know, "Did you *really* make that?" If you haven't had that experience by the time you're in your twenties, you can stop paying rent on the studio. Artists are, and have always been, keyed to making the unmakeable; the muse is obsolete, but all the same *sine qua non*. A friend from many years ago, Jim Tate, a poet, said that he wrote poetry to ensure "that it could still happen." That's what it's about. Who would bother with art, unless it exceeded what was made? In his letters, van Gogh writes to his brother, Theo, that he had no idea how he made his paintings; he was sure that he didn't know how to make them. It is worth thinking, all the same, that the artist writing those letters was a nominalist technician if there ever was one, building every painting up out of three or four gestures, wet on wet. It is, literally, an inconceivable mastery, and in these terms one's sense that no one could have made those paintings is not utterly delusive; and it wasn't for van Gogh, either. Do you know Francis Bacon's phrase, wanting his work to be a "Sahara of the appearances"?

Bacon meant that he wanted to produce a likeness by way of an absolute unlikeness. That would be an act of recognition in the movement across the absolute distances of shifting sands in which vision returns to the beholder as an intention by way of what has entirely relinquished intention. That is the unmakeable thing he needed to make.

CM: Adorno says that, doesn't he, in his aesthetics, when he writes that art doesn't imitate nature, it imitates cloud dramas?

RHK: Yes. That movement at a standstill could be a movement in clouds or sands.

CM: Do you like Bacon's work?

RHK: The early works, much more than the later ones. But even when the painting isn't where my imagination can go, what he could make is astonishing. Bacon was finally so overwhelmed by his desperation to make what exceeded him that he could only bring that amorphousness back by way of an inflicted and thematically narrow intentional articulation. I wasn't surprised when one of his paintings ended up in a Batman movie.

CM: Was that a psychological matter for Bacon?

RHK: That must be an aspect of it. But it is much more a problem of where art went, and where it is now. Up until modern art, artists could get away with imitating the unmakeable: rhyme schemes, for instance, imitate the unmakeable—that's a transparently painful conceit now. Art became radically modern when it had no choice but to demand of itself the veridically unmakeable, no longer its illusion, and found itself facing an impossible task. Dance became break neck gymnastics in response. "Found art" capitulated in front of the problem of the unmade and hoped to surrogate the untouched for the untouchable. That's the level of the problem that compelled Bacon.

CM: Photography certainly taps the unintentional.

RHK: Yes, it does. But what makes photography so difficult is that it so easily wins the unintentional while paying so heavily for it in its inability to engage the constructive powers of the eye on which the capacity for exceeding appearances depends.

CM: Wouldn't Marx say that art that claims to produce the unmakeable is the manufacture of a fetish?

RHK: I'd say that Marx's admiration for the "work hardened bodies" of the proletariat is a fetish.

CM: That is an opaque answer. What do you mean?

RHK: I mean a number of things, including that Marx's critique of labor did not go deep enough. It is there in his writings, but you can understand why Adorno concluded that Marx wanted to make the world into a labor camp: the Soviet Union wasn't only a misunderstanding of Marx. So, I mean that, but I mean at the same time that of course art is a fetish, but the worst of life is not what leaves labor behind, even if it's just pretending. No doubt, setting up the made as the unmade is a fetish. But, all the same, if disillusionment is an illusion, then humans are considerably more interesting than the self-certain sobriety that interprets artworks by tracing them back to their maker's intentions or, with greater socio-economic sophistication, to the historical interests of the moment in which they originated, as if that's so smart and informative. The doctrine of interest itself needs to be demystified, in political representation as in art. Those cloud dramas are no less the voice of nature. The entire history of art—and this is very clear now—is nothing but the development of techniques for potentiating intention as the intentionless; the piano keyboard serves for nothing else. If the history of art could be written, that history of techniques of the unmakeable would be its history. What is at stake is distinct from mystical effusion in that the accomplishment is not by way of abolishing subjectivity, but by way of subjectivity; you can think of van Gogh's nominalism, which we've discussed a little, or you can think of what Hegel called the "extinguishing of the subject in the object." This is an activity that leaves the artist behind like a heap of ash, an experience that can be hard to survive without all the braggadocio that goes on over in places like the art gulch in Chelsea. Making the unmakeable is what raises every important question about the nature of aesthetic form. Adorno's apothegm is to the point here, that it is in art, if nowhere else, that "origin is the goal."

CM: There is enough to talk about here that we might as well go back to the very beginning of our conversation. Why was it, when I asked you what you've wanted to do with Adorno's work over several decades that you answered with what you called the idea of praxis, of making reality break in on the mind that masters it? That does not, to be honest, seem like much of an answer. Did you lose track of the question?

RHK: I hope not. I try to hold the whole conversation in mind at once, which is pretty hopeless, I'm sure. I mean to keep track; I know I was keeping track then. But the truth of it is, I'm more interested in what keeps coming back to us more than I think in terms, as you suggest, of our going back to anything, now or later, whether to the beginning of our conversation or elsewhere, as if there's an origin at one end of the dusty road of time and, in the other direction, tomorrow is already busy taking shape. That image implies a spatialized, kinetic idea of time. What we have gone back to in this conversation is what has come to get us. Thinking in these terms makes sense in light of Freud's concept of regression, as the need to deal with what is still to be solved, what's nagging at us, what's right here in our bones as elements of those splintering forces that are by no means located somewhere back at a spatialized beginning that we sometimes visit, or don't, as, for instance, when we were talking about what makes a window shatter under its own tinsel forces in terms of immanent criticism. By the way, that's just as much the concept of time inside Adorno's notion of those cloud dramas: A concept of time that developed in opposition to the idea of a primordial, primitive origin at the beginning of all things. Without the

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development of that idea of time, we wouldn't have had Freud or Adorno, let alone Virginia Woolf or Joyce.

CM: Does this involve what I remember you writing, I think, in the introduction to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, about thinking by means of an enjambment of thought? Enjambment as opposed to argumentation?

RHK: Yes, argumentation as *modus operandi*—the proudly hard-headed passion for "getting it" vs. "not getting it," "right judgments" vs. "your wrong judgments"—is spuriously philosophical. It is an appeal to the authority of origin, not as the goal, but at the beginning of all things. It's not that logic is a matter of indifference, on the contrary, but its putative necessity is a strong-arm fraud, inextricable from the fraud of historical necessity. The problem of critical historical thought, by contrast, is—and I don't think there is any other content to the whole of Adorno's oeuvre—how to dissolve the illusion of this necessity we have woven for ourselves. I'm not saying that truth is a flip of the coin or that making mash out of the idea of truth would do us any good. Thinking is a search for binding, if however transient, insight; indirection is essential to it, enjambment is its crisis. Adorno called that enjambment, parataxis. As a technique, this can be just as full of nonsense as the syllogism. But thinking must feel its way along, so to speak. And when the issue is the consideration of Adorno's work—and this isn't exactly a special case—this consideration not least of all involves recognizing where his work gives indications that it is no longer binding or meaningful; where what is fleeting in insight turns out to be more than an axiom about its fleetingness.

CM: What does that actually mean, then, in considering Adorno's writings?

RHK: It means reading with an eye to perceiving where the text surrenders its importance, as if the words themselves are insisting that "it can no longer be said like this." That isn't a measure of relevance or irrelevance; it is the emergence of one aspect of its own nonidentity with itself. History is taking its own measure. Recognizing these moments, I want to repeat—if its not too much trouble for us to keep track of all of our conversation while we're talking—is obviously not an act of redemption. But it is a *salvaging* labor in which critical subjectivity possibly becomes the ability of the old to long for the new. This approach is not altogether different from listening with a compositional ear to music and noticing that the music itself indicates that it can no longer be composed.

CM: That is part of Adorno's theory of composition, is it not? And you are saying that considering Adorno's work in this way aims at making it break in on the mind that masters it?

RHK: I suppose. But with the caveat that conceptual labor is not art, in which case it acquires something akin to the sound of Heidegger enthused with his inamorata—the sheep of the fields. Arty criticism, criticism that claims to be art, criticism plus sheep, criticism plus adjectives, fails art and fails criticism.

CM: Does this not conflate criticism and philosophy? But, in any case, there is certainly a lot of art in Adorno's writing.

RHK: There is. And, in German at least, his writing certainly has its own sound, and that sound, a distinct voice, is often discussed. But that sound is not the achievement of being arty. What is involved, again, is a matter of that *diffidence* that we were discussing earlier, though here that diffidence is somewhat differently focused. A way of condensing the issue of the relation of philosophy and art in Adorno's work is to think of Wallace Stevens writing that the "poem is the cry of its occasion/part of the *res* itself and not about it."[4] Modern poetry and a radically modern philosophy that wants to settle for nothing less than the thing itself, converge in an opposition in which, as Adorno put it in *Aesthetic Theory*, art only has it—that is, the "cry of its occasion"—because it can't say it; and philosophy can say it, only because it does not have it. That is, incidentally, one way of stating why aesthetics is the middle point of Adorno's work.

CM: If Adorno's thesis describes the relation of philosophy to art, then there must be another side to this, right? The obverse. Because in the phrase you quote from Stevens, he seems to be claiming to "say it" in a way that Adorno's maxim would seem to prohibit.

RHK: Good point, It is true that art can pretend to be philosophy, as much as the reverse. But, you know, in the poem where Stevens writes that line, I think it's in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," he is using concepts in opposition to the illusory surface of the poem—he might as well use sand paper on the poem's illusory surface—as an act of abstraction. It's similar to how Zola could introduce in a novel a long inventory list of the contents of a department store; that's roughing up the illusory surface of art as well. It is part of art resisting art in an effort to remain art. Conceptual art wants to do that too, of course. And of course this can backfire and usually does.

CM: Well, if we are just looking around for the moment, I am curious to ask you, since you brought up the sound of philosophy and also mentioned Heidegger: Does Heidegger have a sound, a voice?

RHK: In German, Heidegger has the voice of what you might expect in a letter you would get at sleep-away-camp from grandma. Juxtapose "being at sleep-away-camp" with "being-in-the world" and an English monoglot starts to hone in on the sound of Heidegger in German without needing to study the grammar. If English translation didn't provide Heidegger's phrases with a densely arcane professionalism, as if it were a technical language, while he is being so down-home, it would be much less difficult to understand his work for what it is. I don't see how people put up with it. Its content is death and imagination as nothingness. Habermas's notion of communicative action is no less obtuse to libido than Dasein, but at least it can read a newspaper without disgracing itself with inauthenticity. There is not a lot to go on there. Adorno's *Jargon of Authenticity* at points froths at the lips, but the general credulousness for Heidegger is much more disturbing.

CM: We've ended up in a discussion of style.

RHK: I suspect we've been talking about style in various ways all along, whether about parataxis and argumentation, or in what I was saying a bit ago about examining Adorno's work for where it falters. That involves an eye for style. Another way to put it is to say that one has to be prepared to tap on words—in this case Adorno's words—with the hammer that Nietzsche bequeathed to the philosophical temperament for tapping. And if one isn't prepared, one might as well spin out concepts in those vast, argumentative sheets one reads everywhere, whether about the critique of the constitutive subject or the disintegration of "emphatic experience," or "immanent critique," but as a parody. Then theory is just "theory" dressed up in the critique of the constitutive subject. But really it is nothing else than its assertion. I say "dressed up" because in the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx wrote that fashion is a synonym for relations of production.

CM: "Theory" becomes an assertion of the given relations of production?

RHK: I think so. As I said, there's a lot of that to read.

CM: You're critical of theory?

RHK: Theory is critical of theory, wouldn't you suppose?

CM: Could you give an instance of the kind of tapping you think is worthwhile? Are you referring to what you have written about the idea of the primitive? Is that an instance of what you mean by "tapping"?

RHK: Yes. Open any few pages of Adorno's writings and you'll notice that of all the comments that concern the "primitive," in one way or another, whether the "primitive" itself, or the "savage", the "barbaric", the "archaic", "*prima philosophia*," or of "regression" to the barbaric, none communicate what they did twenty years ago, let alone at the moment they were written, when barbarism had just blown through the front door. Open, for instance, *Minima Moralia*, which is here in front of us: I'm here on p. 226, read about "the affinity of culture to savagery," and see how that comes up on the nervous system, as Francis Bacon would say. See if it means anything at all. Then start turning pages in any direction in the book and throughout the whole of Adorno's writings, and you will notice that we don't exactly know what Adorno is talking about or what the "primitive" amounts to. We may even feel a kind of antagonism toward Adorno, as if he were making the distinction at our expense. We want to raise our hand in class and demand, "What do *you* mean by *primitive*?"

CM: Is that something about the idea of the *primitive* exclusively in Adorno?

RHK: No. Read anywhere in the literature of the 1940s, for instance (I'm busy with that because I'm putting together a selection of essays from the *Journal of Social Research*, the journal, that Adorno and Horkheimer published in the 1930s and 1940s), and you will find throughout phrases concerning barbarism and the primitive by many writers, "It is the thesis of this book that the two [society and the military] are inseparably connected both with each other and with a third thing, barbarism." That insight, or, in any case, the possibility of that insight was once protean. I am referring to a review written by Karl Korsch, which was highly critical of the book and of the writer I quote, but not of the possibility of differentiating barbarism.

CM: If we can go back (the word "back" has started to sound a bit different) to the issue of relevance, why not say that the words "barbarism," or "the primitive" aren't *relevant* anymore?

RHK: Because it may be that the fashion of barbarism—fashion in the sense we were discussing earlier, the way Marx develops it in the *1844 Manuscripts*—has absorbed the differentiation of the primitive. And to think in terms of relevance, which would mean dropping the now obscure appellation, *irrelevant*, would only amount to becoming a fellow traveler.

CM: This is indeed important—*Platypus* has often argued that society is in the midst of "regression." What is the implication of the kind of tapping you're doing here for this thesis?

RHK: There is a group of implications, including that it's approximately hopeless going around asserting that society is in the midst of "regression," let alone in the primitive or the barbaric. It does not mean anything at all. The words are not even leaden; they are a matter of indifference, especially if stating them doesn't include the insights that they most importantly contain and one is only participating in a kind of amnesia. The faltering differentiation has to be expressed in the self-consciousness of the statement of what is faltering.

CM: Is that indifference to the differentiation of the primitive a matter of the "banality of evil"?

RHK: The "banality of evil" is itself a tad banal, don't you think? We didn't get used to evil. Moral impulses didn't wear out, they were overwhelmed by superior imperatives—that's Hobsbawm's point—imperatives that the newspapers most regularly present as the primacy of the financial, but that are much more deeply evidence of the coming extinction of the liberal state. It's what we see in Obama encouraging the members of congress at the recent State of the Union speech this January to break party lines and sit together. The obliging congress members did not give evidence of good will toward men but of the national disintegration of party allegiance, of lucidly oppositional politics and of representational government under the weight of the social whole. That "sit-along" has much less to do with affirming the spirit of compromise—a good thing, which Obama has changed into the spirit of capitulation—than with the supplanting of the sovereignty of the people by something considerably closer to consumer sov-

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An Egyptian military officer cheered on by demonstrators in Cairo.

first of the socialist revolutions that have marked the modern, bourgeois era. Henceforth, the fates of liberalism and socialism have been indissolubly tied—even if their connection has been extremely fraught. Liberalism could not do without socialism, nor socialism without liberalism. Every democratic revolution since 1848 has faced this two-fold task—and has, without exception, foundered on the shoals of its contradictions. Marxism was the attempt to transcend the antinomy of individual and collective freedom—or of liberalism and socialism in "social democracy"—to realize both, by transcending both. Marx and Engels emblazoned this demand in their *Manifesto* with the slogan of "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need!," which was to be realized in the "freedom of each" as the "precondition for the freedom of all." Importantly, Marx and Engels were the originators of neither of these catchphrases for what "communism" meant. The twin fates of liberalism and socialism after 1848 have shared in the failure of this Marxist vision for emancipation.[4]

What explains the undemocratic outcomes of democratic revolution in the modern era? Certainly one can take only so much comfort in Thomas Jefferson's saying that a revolution every generation or so is a good thing—as if frequent revolutions are necessary to restore democracy. Or, if so, the reasons for this must still be explained, beyond "corruption," the perennial complaint of the subaltern. Whence does this recurrent "corruption" of the democratic moment spring? And why does it manifest itself so much more dramatically at some times than others? Perhaps revolution is not always such an unambiguously good thing. Especially if, as Marx put it, it threatens to be the "first time as tragedy" and the "second time as farce." What comes of revolution if it is taken to be *fate*? There is nothing so "revolutionary" as *capital itself*.

The 1848 Revolution had secured universal suffrage and established the 2nd Republic in France, but at the price, wryly observed by Marx, of bringing an authoritarian demagogue, Louis Bonaparte (Napoleon's nephew), to power—to the horror of liberal democratic sentiment at the time—as its first elected President, promising to "save society." It is because Bonaparte overthrew the 2nd Republic and established a 20-year 2nd Empire that followed at the end of his term as President less than four years later that the massacre of the workers in June 1848 did not become forgotten as a historical footnote and regarded as merely a bump in the road of democracy, for it came to presage the authoritarian repression of society that followed, in which members of the bourgeoisie became subject to the same treatment first meted out to the rebellious workers. Marxists used the term "Bonapartism" to describe this phenomenon of suppression of democracy with popular assent, which has repeated itself so consistently in history after 1848—for instance in "Nasserism" in Egypt and other forms of Arab nationalism (the so-called "Arab Revolution") in the 1950s–1960s. Such Orwellian reality of all subsequent history has its beginning, with Marx, in 1848. The soldier held aloft triumphantly on the shoulders of democratic demonstrators in the streets of Cairo already wears the mask of Bonaparte—not the greater but the lesser. For such turns of modern revolution, after 1848, do not vouchsafe progress, however dubiously, but rather wager its foolhardy chances, mocking them. As Horkheimer put it in the 1920s, after the ebbing of the failed world revolutionary wave of 1917–1919, "As long as it is not victorious, the revolution is no good."[5] So, the question becomes, what would be the conditions for true *victory*? What success *can* we aspire to win?

Marx attempted to capture this problem in his demand that the revolution "take its poetry from the future" rather than the past. But if this is more than the banal statement it appears at first glance to be, then it raises a rather obscure difficulty: In what way can present revolution draw upon the emancipatory energy of the *future*? And Marx's dedicated follower Walter Benjamin's caveat echoes closely behind, that faith in the future sapped the strength of the revolution, which, Benjamin wrote, needed to be "nourished with the image of enslaved ancestors rather than liberated grandchildren."[6] But we may need *both* imaginations—of emancipation and redemption—today. The question is, how so?

Marx and the history of Marxism still speak, even if their voices are drowned out in the clamoring din of the present. In history after 1848, Marx understood a world—the present—caught between past and future. Marx's term for this *historical* world, "capital," refers to the radical ambivalence of the present: its being already past, accumulating all of history and annexing the future, continually crowding the moment off stage; and its constant liquidation of that history, the incessant consumption of the moment in light of a future that never arrives. Past and future seem to recede infinitely beyond the horizons of a present that is as perpetual as it is empty and futile, trapped, static but constantly in motion. So we resign ourselves to the present's eternal passing and recurrence, in which "everything changes" and yet "remains the same."

Egyptians may be driven today by the specter of enslaved ancestry, provoked by the force of what Benjamin described as the "hatred" and spirit of "self-sacrifice" necessary to make a bid for history. But they are also certainly prompted, as Benjamin put it, to "activate the emergence brake" on the "locomotive" of history that would otherwise condemn posterity.[7] They may be motivated not only to redeem past sacrifice but to prevent future loss that could yet be rendered unnecessary. It is not that Mubarak's rule became too long or old, but

Hosni Mubarak and his son Gamal cast their votes in the last Egyptian election.

that it threatened to become indefinite—the leering face of the son—that provoked the demand for its end, precisely at the risk of the present. "I don't care if I die," the sentiment widely expressed around Tahrir Square, is the signal moment to which Benjamin's philosophy of history attends: to bring time to a halt. But such resolve expresses the *will to live*, although *not* merely to continue life unchanged.

The problem we must face is that the imagination of emancipation—which defines the "Left" as such[8]—is today divided between the desperation of wishing for the unprecedented new and desiring for return to the missed moments of opportunity, the potential embodied in past attempts, however failed: attempts at both the *escape from* and the *redemption of* history. 1789, 1848, 1871, 1917, 1979, 1989: they will not return—thank God! But we mourn them nonetheless. What was lost with them? Perhaps nothing. An emancipated future beckons; however, it eludes our grasp, outrunning us in the onrush of time. "Time waits for no one." The future grants no refuge. There is no peace, not even of the graveyard. As Benjamin put it, "Even the dead are not safe." But history remains. It may be unavoidable—as much as the future is. So the question is, what are we going to do with it? If we are trapped between past and future, perhaps we will not be crushed but can bring them together and galvanize their force even more powerfully in the present: we are pulverized all the more surely for trying to slip the vise. Past failures may dispirit, and bewildering, dystopic futures may threaten. Or, history and utopia can both be enlisted to the aid of the present. If only.

"What now?," Egypt asks us. We do not ask it. This question should be posed, not as it is wont, as a hope or a fear, but as a task, however exclaimed or whispered. It is not to be answered with exuberance or resignation, but determination: the resolution that not only are we, inevitably, history, but the future will be. | **P**

1. See Danny Postel, Kaveh Ehsani, Maziar Behrooz, and Chris Cutrone, "30 Years of the Islamic Revolution in Iran," *Platypus Review* 20 (February 2010), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2010/02/18/30-years-of-the-islamic-revolution-in-iran/>. See also my "Failure of the Islamic Revolution: The Nature of the Present Crisis in Iran," *Platypus Review* 14 (August 2009), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2009/08/24/the-failure-of-the-islamic-revolution/>.
2. See Hamid Dabashi, "The False Anxiety of Influence," *Al Jazeera* English, February 12, 2011. Available online at <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/02/201121215216318526.html>.
3. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Originally published in 1852. Available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>.
4. See my "Marxist Hypothesis," *Platypus Review* 29 (November 2010), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2010/11/06/the-marxist-hypothesis-a-response-to-alain-badous-communist-hypothesis/>.
5. Max Horkheimer, "A Discussion about Revolution," in *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–31 & 1950–69* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 39.
6. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 260.
7. Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History'," in *Selected Writings* vol. 4 1938–40 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 402.
8. See Leszek Kolakowski, "The Concept of the Left," in *The New Left Reader*, ed. Carl Oglesby (New York: Grove, 1969), 144–158.

Interview, continued from page 3

ereignty: the selection of the best product qua representative while disregarding party affiliation. The "banality of evil" doesn't cover much of this.

CM: There would be a lot to say about this. But I don't want to lose track of the general point of our discussion of the problem of contemporary praxis so far as what's at stake in making sense of Adorno's work. Have you been saying that what is needed is to develop the self-consciousness of a faltering differentiation?

RHK: That's it. The issue is the faltering differentiation of the primitive and of the context of concepts in which it is located. Adorno's thinking altogether revolves around the development of insight into the primitive. Or, we could put this the other way around, by focusing on the disappearance of the differentiation of the *radically new*, here in the land of the perpetual "rethink." The radically new, which artists, especially composers, sought in their work in the early 20th century as the "air of another planet," developed reciprocally with the insight into the primitive, when the primitive became the impulse of the new. But listen to the phrase,"the air of another planet," and what there is to hear is that it speaks more appositely to the imminently unlivable air of this "planet".

CM: It is as fruitless to invoke the increasingly "primitive" situation of the United States as it would be to urge people to seek the "new"?

RHK: The demand for the "new" probably sounds even more feeble and absurd than invoking insight into the "primitive," don't you think?

CM: We are suddenly out of time, and there is so much more to consider here. But, I must ask you something that has kept coming back to me throughout our discussion today, from almost the first moment. You said (I'm taking you by your own words now) that the problem of "making reality break in on the mind that masters it" is the one *praxis*. Whether it really is the one praxis, I don't know. But, what you call *praxis*, I would call *theory*. Haven't you confused theory and praxis?

RHK: This is some sense of humor, bringing us to the close on a question that would need another day to sort out at all. But what you've brought up is something I repeatedly try to state to myself: theory is praxis insofar as thinking has entered the world of objects. Meaning that, as a capacity of subjectivity, it has escaped the claustrum of means/ends reasoning, what Hegel would have called subjective spirit, and has engaged the unmakeable. | **P**

1. See J.M. Bernstein, Lydia Goehr, Gregg Horowitz, and Chris Cutrone, "The relevance of critical theory to art today," *Platypus Review* 31 (January 2011), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2011/01/01/the-relevance-of-critical-theory-to-art-today/>.
2. Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 177.
3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (New York: Verso, 2005), 247.
4. Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 473.

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a mythical charge to the demand to return to the villages of one's ancestors, and prepares the ground for Islamist rackets such as Hamas, who apart from the odd bits of welfare have nothing to offer but *jihad* on Israel. The perspective of moderate Palestinian nationalism amounts to nothing more than the autonomous administration of squalor. But the "communist" friends of Israel have made peace with the society that engenders such conditions on the following terms: "To a society to which hunger is no reason for production, suffering cannot be sufficient grounds for solidarity." | **P**

Translated by B. D. Mayer

1. Moishe Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust'," *New German Critique* 19 (Winter 1980): 103.
2. Initiative Sozialistisches Forum, "Communism and Israel," *Platypus Review* 28 (October 2010), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2010/10/08/communism-and-israel/>. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from this text.
3. Translator's note: It is perhaps worthy of remark that in the translation of "Communism and Israel" that appeared in *Platypus Review* 28, this phrase was rendered as 'the armed attempt to reach communism alive'—the genitive *der Juden*, "of the Jews," that appears in the original was silently omitted.
4. Ulrike Meinhof, "Drei Freunde Israels," *konkret* 7 (1967). Reprinted in Ulrike Meinhof, *Die Würde des Menschen ist antastbar* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1995).
5. If the Platypus Historians Group aims to oppose both Israeli and Palestinian nationalism, it could not have sought out a worse authority than Lenin. Always opportunists, the Bolsheviks courted the national movements in Asia for tactical reasons all the more desperately the worse the revolution was doing in the West. The 'Congress Of The Peoples Of The East' in Baku in 1920 served as an indication of this tendency. In an attempt to curry favor with Islam, Zinoviev and Radek even called for a "holy war" against western imperialism. See Platypus Historians Group, "Catastrophe, Historical Memory and the Left: 60 Years of Israel-Palestine," *Platypus Review* 5 (May 2008), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2008/05/01/catastrophe-historical-memory-and-the-left-60-years-of-israel-palestine/>.
6. Translator's Note: This article renders the German "Antisemitismus" as "antisemitism," without a hyphen or a capital *s*, primarily because the hyphen and the capital *s* imply that there exists something called "Semitism" or "Semites," to which the antisemites are opposed.
7. Both quotations appear in Thomas Haury, "Zur Logik des bundesdeutschen Antizionimus," in *Vom Antizionismus zum Antisemitismus*, by Léon Poliakov (Freiburg: Ça Ira Verlag, 1992): 125. Available online at <http://schoenistdasnicht.blogsport.de/2007/12/01/thomas-haury-zur-logik-des-bundesdeutschen-antizionismus/>.
8. Quoted in Martin Kloke, "Antisemitismus in der deutschen Linken: Ein Blick in die Früzeit der APO," <http://www.digberlin.de/PDFUPLOAD/apo_antisemitismus_tribuene1_06.pdf>.
9. Wolfgang Pohrt, "Entlastung für Auschwitz," in *Kreisverkehr, Wendepunkt: Uber die Wechseljahre der Nation und die Linke im Widerstreit der Gefuhle* (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1984): 14.
10. Joachim Bruhn, "Jede Kritik am Staat Israel ist antisemitisch," interview by T-34, <http://www.isf-freiburg.org/isf/beitraege/pdf/bruhn-kritik.israel.pdf>

Platypus presents: Lessons from the history of Marxism

Left Forum
Pace University New York City
March 18 – 20

Bourgeois Revolution: from Marx's point of view

Saturday, March 19 | 10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | room W603A

James Vaughn
University of Texas at Austin

Richard Rubin
The Platypus Affliated Society

Spencer Leonard
University of Chicago

Jeremy Cohan (chair)
New York University

Lenin's Marxism

Saturday, March 19 | 12:00 p.m. – 1:50 p.m. | room W607

Chris Cutrone
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
The Platypus Affiliated Society

Paul Le Blanc
LaRoche College

Lars T. Lih
Independent researcher

Ian Morrison (chair)
University of Chicago

The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg

Saturday, March 19 | 12:00 p.m. – 1:50 p.m. | room W606

Greg Gabrellas
University of Chicago, The Platypus Affiliated Society

Stephen Eric Bronner
Rutgers University

Ben Shepard (chair)
The Platypus Affiliated Society

Lukács's Marxism

Saturday, March 19 | 3:00 p.m. – 4:50 p.m. | room W607

Jeremy Cohan
New York University, The Platypus Affiliated Society

Marco Torres
University of Chicago, The Platypus Affiliated Society

Neil Larsen
University of California at Davis

Timothy Bewes
Brown University

Timothy Hall
University of East London, U.K.

Chris Cutrone (chair)
School of the Art Institute of Chicago,
The Platypus Affiliated Society

A schedule of all Left Forum panels can be found online at http://www.leftforum.org/panels/2011-approved-panels

Aesthetics in Protests

Saturday, March 19 | 3:00 p.m. – 4:50 p.m. | room E330

Chris Mansour
Parsons School of Design,
The Platypus Affiliated Society

Jamie Keesling
491

Laurel Whitney
Yes Men

Marc Herbst
Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, Reclaim the Streets

Stephen Duncombe
New York University

Debating Alain Badiou's "Politics of Emancipation"

Saturday, March 19 | 5:00 p.m. – 6:50 p.m | room W615

Bruno Bosteels
Cornell University

Chris Cutrone
The Platypus Affiliated Society,
School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Nayi Duniya
Demarcations Journal

Saul Thomas
University of Chicago

Trotsky's Marxism

Saturday, March 19 | 5:00 p.m. – 6:50 p.m | room W607

Ian Morrison
University of Chicago, The Platypus Affiliated Society

Jason Wright
International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT)

Spencer Leonard
University of Chicago, The Platypus Affiliated Society

Susan Williams
Freedom Socialist Party

Marx and Engels's Marxism

Sponsored by the *Platypus Review*

Sunday, March 20 | 10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. | room W603A

Benjamin Blumberg
University of Chicago

Nathan Smith
University of Chicago

Pam Nogales
New York University

Richard Rubin
The Platypus Affiated Society

Tana Forrester (chair)
University of Chicago

Praxis, theory, and the unmakeable: An interview with Robert Hullot-Kentor

Chris Mansour

On February 19, 2011, Chris Mansour of Platypus interviewed Robert Hullot-Kentor, noted Adorno translator and author of Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno. *What follows is an edited transcript of the interview.*

Chris Mansour: For several decades you have been translating and interpreting the relevance of Adorno's thought for us. In your most recent essays, however, it seems you have mostly wanted to save Adorno's ideas from appropriation by the postmodern and contemporary canon, which you claim have done "immense damage" to his insights. What kind of disservices have been done to Adorno's work from his time to ours, and what exactly do you think needs to be redeemed?

Robert Hullot-Kentor: You say, "immense damage." That rings a bell somewhere—Adorno, or no Adorno. But, as to helping to discern Adorno's "relevance" to this day and age, relevance has never been relevant to my mind; "relevance" is a measure of irrelevance. The moment is plenty relevant to itself if we can figure out how to locate its—*our*—own thinking, its—*our*—own words. And whatever "immense damage" we now inhabit, I doubt those canons you cite—postmodern or contemporary canons—would hurt a fly, or Adorno. There aren't canons to struggle with, not since more than half a century ago when they were already rags. The current situation is narrow, blinded and constrained, and awash, all at once, but it is not polarized in the fixed fashion that invoking the idea of a "canon" wants to imagine. Getting wound up about the danger to life and limb of the canon is for English departments so preoccupied teaching students to write credible business memos that the faculty can't be interested in literature anymore.

The problem for critical thought, now, is *how to make reality break in on the mind that masters it*. For what we are involved in, that's the one praxis. And the puzzle of this praxis is shaped in realizing that while reality must be made to break in on the mind, that can't occur in the model of tossing a stone through a window; the window must shatter under its own fissuring tinsel pressures, from within, as a violence against the violence. It differs from being mere violence as an act in which reality has been made humanly commensurable, without this commensurability of experience in any way pretending that reality itself is human. We are considering a capacity for experience.

CM: There is much to say here, but maybe we can work our way back to it from my first question to you, I was asking what you think needs to be redeemed in Adorno's work.

RHK: Redeemed? Nothing. I mean...us? You don't mind if we go a bit word by word here? Well, I don't think that we are in a position to *redeem* anything. I doubt we can redeem Adorno's work, and definitely not if we pose that question to ourselves in terms of his own thinking, if that's what we're in part curious about in this conversation. Come to think of it, at that conference you organized for *Platypus* at the New School a couple of months ago on Critical Theory,[1] didn't something come up about Adorno and religion?

CM: Yes, momentarily, there was a discussion critical of Adorno's relation to the sacred.

RHK: So maybe it is worth mentioning—since in a way you also broach the question, perhaps from the other direction—that Adorno's thinking, if I can half quote him here, touches at every point on a theological element (no less than does Beckett's), but only by way of the most extreme diffidence to what his work lives from. That tense diffidence (that's his word for it) is implicit to any critique of enlightenment that actually is a capacity of enlightenment. The self-critique of enlightenment, at its extreme, by way of its own sober reasoning, amounts to the insight that its disillusionment, its ability to vanquish every last ghost in the machine, is itself the production of an illusion as a credulousness of its own mastery. This thought, which, maybe you know, has a vast antiquity, doesn't confirm the supposedly plump, ultramontane comforts of belief or an urge to bend at the knees. As enlightenment, and not simply citing antiquity's maxim of humility, it is as much a critique of theology, which, Adorno thought, has never once been extricated from the powers that be.

CM: Was Adorno a believer?

RHK: Adorno was not among the faithful, the skeptical, or the agnostic in the *Que sais-je?* tradition. But I do think of him in the tradition that begins in the 15th century with Cusanus—the Cusa—who in many ways marks the decisive point in the secularization of theological reasoning in aesthetics. I am not saying Adorno was Cusanus, but he did pursue the experience of thought's dependence on its object both in his materialism and, inextricably from that materialism, in his theses on metaphysics. By this measure, the gods, the many, many gods, must be a whole lot more interesting than what Feuerbach thought he might find in them as the sum total of alienated human essence.

Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe in the Campagna*, oil on canvas 164 x 206 cm, 1787.

It would be superstitious to think that human making is limited in what it makes only to what it has made, as Vico perhaps thought. An obvious, palpable clue here, in terms of technique, is that we can only do with things what can be done with them. One can only do with glass what can be done with glass, with plastic what can be done with plastic; one can only do with each and every word and with each and every note, as well, what can be done with each of them, and so on. It takes imagination to recognize that reality is not raw material, as something we can concoct however we see fit. But, with regard to imagination, it is even more important to say that there is only imagination in the experience of that recognition. Wallace Stevens—who, as you know, is always as much on my mind as are Adorno and Nabokov—had many ways of saying this: His "necessary angel," which bears interesting comparison with Benjamin on Klee's *Angelus Novus*—is the necessary angel of reality without which there is no imagination. Or, as Stevens otherwise put it, "Reality is the only genius."[2] To comprehend the same thing, Adorno had the idea of "exact fantasy" from Goethe. In these terms, the Prometheus of labor shrinks but he also gets a whole lot more interesting, as do those deities lounging right this moment out in that Hindu temple in Queens.

CM: You are talking about the critique of constitutive subjectivity?

RHK: Yes. The *philosophem*—the recognition of disillusionment as an uttermost illusion—is another formulation of the critique of constitutive subjectivity as a capacity of subjectivity to spring its own trap. It is not categorically different from Marx's critique of the Gotha Program that labor is by no means the source of value.

CM: In this idea of the recognition of disillusion as illusion, are you saying that religion and irreligion converge?

RHK: In Adorno's thinking, they do. It is one thing, as he put it in the "Finale" to *Minima Moralia,* to "contemplate

"Interview" continues on page 3

German psycho: A reply to the Initiative Sozialistisches Forum

Felix Baum

MOISHE POSTONE ONCE REMARKED about the German left: "No western Left was as philo-Semitic and pro-Zionist prior to 1967. Probably none subsequently identified so strongly with the Palestinian cause. What was termed 'anti-Zionism' was in fact so emotionally and psychically charged that it went far beyond the bounds of a political and social critique of Zionism."[1] Postone's diagnosis, that the Israeli-Arab conflict served as a projection-screen for the psychological needs of the German left, is just as valid for the new political current which, since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in autumn 2000, has come to identify itself completely with the state of Israel.

Why the twisted psychological state of the German left should be of interest to anyone who is not forced by geographical proximity into direct confrontation with it is known only to the *Platypus Review*, which has published one of its most surreal excrescences—for there is no other possible interpretation of the text—"Communism and Israel."[2] The idea that anti-colonial movements such as the Vietnamese Stalinists under Ho Chi Minh stood for universal emancipation, rather than being harbingers of the state-capitalist modernization of their societies, was shared by the Left, Old and New, the world over. This was ideology in the strict sense: it had a foundation in reality and could thus be criticized. In contrast, only German leftists could come to the conclusion that Ariel Sharon represents a triumvirate of Lenin, Durruti, and Walter Benjamin, and maintain that Israel is a sort of "dictatorship of the proletariat," an "armed attempt by the Jews to reach communism while still alive."[3] This is not ideology but delusion, and, as such, it can be analyzed, but no longer criticized. Its psychological driving force is a macabre desire for the "revenge for the dead" attributed to Sharon's politics—as if the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were a retirement home for the SS. Those who stand behind these politics often compensate for their impotence in Germany by identifying with the Israeli military. This perspective is an expression of the unfulfilled wish to settle scores with those Nazis who were sent not to prison or to the gallows, but to the heights of public office.

As Postone mentions, the German left after 1945 was initially pro-Israel. The awareness of living in the land of the perpetrators was formative; feelings of guilt and the need to represent a "better Germany" determined its relationship to the Jewish state. Socialist youth organizations demanded the opening of diplomatic relations with Israel, which the West German government, out of concern for the traditionally strong German-Arab relations, delayed until 1965. Young idealistic Germans travelled to Israel with organizations such as Action Reconciliation Service for Peace and volunteered on Kibbutzim. Israel was seen not only as the survivors' state, but also as a pioneer state with socialist characteristics. The Kibbutzim were idealized and a blind eye was turned to the exclusion of the Palestinians.

The Six-Day War of 1967 shook the Left out of its stupor and brought about an abrupt shift to an anti-Israel position. The very marginal (and illegal) KPD had of course already followed the Soviet Union's change in the early 1950s, which after initially supporting Israel thought that the Arab states would make better allies. The New Left, composed primarily of students, responded by providing a mirror image of dominant opinion in Germany, which was suddenly enthusiastic for Israel's military conquests. Ulrike Meinhof, at the time still a columnist for the influential left-wing magazine *konkret*, described this climate aptly: "The success and relentlessness of the Israeli advances inspired bloodlust; theories of blitzkrieg ran wild; after 25 years, the BILD [a right-wing tabloid] finally won the battle of Stalingrad in Sinai."[4]

Meanwhile, as in most other western countries, the majority of the New Left fell prey to the myth of anti-colonial revolution. This implied a clear-cut distinction between friend and enemy in the Middle East, a romanticization of Palestinian nationalism, and a demonization of Israel. A crude anti-imperialism was in full display, primarily by the pro-China, Marxist-Leninist "K-Gruppen"—which had about a 100,000 people file through their ranks during the 1970s—but also by elements of the so-called "non-dogmatic" left. The Leninist commitment to "the right of national self-determination" that had asserted itself in the workers' movement against Rosa Luxemburg's categorical anti-nationalism evolved into an all-encompassing worldview that posed the conflict between imperialism and the "oppressed peoples" as the key to world revolution.[5]

The affinity of this worldview with modern antisemitism is obvious.[6] It understands the capitalist mode of production not as an impersonal force of domination but tends towards a conspiracy theory. It does not offer any critique of production but castigates the "parasitic character" of imperialism, which is primarily associated with finance capital. The nation is not understood as a compulsory form that is to be abolished, but naturalized and placed in opposition to imperialism. The traditions and the simple, industrious life of "the people" are held up in opposition to "cosmopolitanism" and the "artificial," "decadent" culture of the West. So-called revolutionary leftists seriously debated whether the Jews were a people (*Volk*) and hence entitled to found a nation-state. No one recognized that rather than the state being an expression of the allegedly natural category of the nation, the nation is in fact a historical product of the state. This form of anti-Zionism thus had more in common with the ideology of blood and soil than with any materialist critique of the Israeli state. The imagery used by the Palestine solidarity movement was rooted in the kitsch idea of a "Palestinian people" closely connected to the soil, while Jewish Israelis—the "Zionists"—often appeared similar to the Jews in the caricatures from *Der Stürmer*. Israel was portrayed by the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands–Roter Morgen* not as a bourgeois state under compulsion, but as "the most bloodthirsty and power-hungry bastion against the people," and for the *Autonome Nahostgruppe Hamburg*, Zionism was considerably more than a national movement of Jews, namely "the enemy of humankind."[7]

This left-wing nationalism, inspired by Stalin and Mao, was bound up with the urge to present the Israelis as the ghosts of the Nazis. This was certainly an international phenomenon, as the widespread talk of "Zionazis" shows. On the other hand, this tendency was particularly pronounced within the Left in Germany, where it served the purposes of public exoneration. In 1969, the group Schwarze Ratten (Tupamaros West Berlin) that emerged from the anarchist subculture quite deliberately chose the date of November 9—the anniversary of the Reichspogromnacht of 1938—to vandalize monuments commemorating the persecution of the Jews, and to plant a bomb in a Jewish community building. In their communiqué, they asserted that Israel was "historically illegitimate" and that "Jews expelled by fascism have themselves become fascists, who in collaboration with the American people wish to erase the Palestinian people." For the Maoist KPD, the Zionists were "the Nazis of our time," and talk of the "Holocaust of the Palestinians" or of the "Final Solution of the Palestinian Question" was commonplace. All means were allowed in resistance to this so-called new fascism. When the Palestinian unit Black September carried out an attack on the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in 1972, Meinhof, by this time incarcerated as a member of the Red Army Faction, celebrated this as a "courageous action ... against Zionist soldiers who were appearing as athletes in Munich."[8] And, in what was probably the most explicit expression of this policy, in 1976, a unit from the "Revolutionary Cells" together with the Palestinian PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) hijacked a French passenger aircraft and flew it to Entebbe in Uganda, in order to secure the release of political prisoners; the 80 Israeli passengers and 20 French Jews were held hostage, the other passengers set free.

While a blanket equation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism is untenable, it is no less true that the two became indistinguishable in large sections of the German left after 1967. Guided by the critical theory of Marx and Adorno, a much smaller part of the Left began to criticize this form of anti-Zionism in the 1970s. Its insights, initially confined to the margins, became more widespread with the bankruptcy of both Eastern state socialism and armed struggle in the West, and in the context of post-reunification Germany. Unlike the pro-Israel left of today, these critics of the prevailing form of German left-wing anti-Zionism knew that it is logically impossible to reject Palestinian nationalism while offering an apology for Israeli nationalism. Wolfgang Pohrt, a student of Adorno, once remarked, "There is no reason to assume that the Palestinians, if they were victorious, would behave differently from the Israelis. However, there is also no reason to expect the Palestinians to take from the bombarding of their refugee camps by the Israeli air force a different lesson from that which the Jews who founded Israel had taken: that one must expel and persecute, if one does not wish to be expelled and persecuted."[9]

It is ironic that the new pro-Israel left does not weaken anti-imperialist ideology and its antisemitic excrescences, but strengthens them. For years, when anti-imperialists complained indignantly that criticizing Israel constituted a taboo, it was a transparently defensive argument. The pro-Israel left has made this lie true: "All criticism of the state of Israel is antisemitic."[10] Confused young "anti-fascists" now wear t-shirts on which they pledge themselves to the IDF and Israeli flags adorn some leftists' living rooms. The old anti-imperialist defensive assertion that whoever is attacking left-wing antisemitism is in fact only an apologist for Israel has received a certain foundation in truth.

Only beyond the ideological schema of leftist ideologies that mirror one another can the conflict in the Middle East be grasped as part of the existing global misery. What condemns the vast majority of Palestinians to poverty in their existence is, to an extent, superfluous and devalued labor-power, a fate they share with millions of slum-dwellers the world over and one that would hardly be altered by founding a Palestinian state. Historically, Palestinians were proletarianized by Israel, which separated them from the land, but because Labor Zionism did not want to integrate them as wage-laborers any more than the Arab states were apparently capable of doing, for generations hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees have scraped together a wretched existence in Arab camps, dependent on the charity of international aid organizations. The retreat of secular promises for the future gives

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