

N° 26 - Five Years



ARTS OF THE WORKING CLASS

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the New Jailers?**
Petra Molnar

خون، گل، مهمانی
اس. پریزد

Daniel Falb

After the Clamor of Defeat

(A Simple Language version of this text is featured in *Arts of the Working Class*, Issue 26; the text is based on a talk for the lecture series “On being Wrong,” Zeppelin University, March 2023)

Last summer I realized my adult life had been a chain of political disappointments:

- effectless student protest in Kassel, Germany, against the Gulf War 1991
- violent suppression of ‘anti-globalization’ protests in Seattle 1999 and Genoa 2001 and subsequent dispersal of the movement
- effectless mass protests against the Afghanistan War 2001 and the Iraq War 2003
- deterioration of the rule of law post-9/11
- 2007ff. financial crisis and effectless 2011 Occupy Wallstreet protest
- in the 2010s, the Oxfam reports on the 1% and their globe-spanning system of tax evasion (Panama Papers, 2016)
- 2016 election of Donald Trump and Brexit referendum
- realization that decarbonization will come too late to avoid major climate disruption despite 2012 Paris Agreement and 2019 Greta mass protests
- pandemic totalitarianism, nationalism, and incompetence
- today, the Ukraine war
- tomorrow, the conflict between the U.S. and the new Chinese empire.

Is there an end to this?

Part of my realization was that there is not – this kind of stuff will repeat until I close my eyes one last time in the 2050s.

Why is this happening?

That's one thing.

The other is: Why do I even experience this series of events and circumstances – randomly assembled, after all, by my own idiosyncratic perception – as ‘disappointments’? In what sense are these ‘my’ defeats (I am affected by them very differently and often in no direct way at all)? And why do they lead to a generalized disgruntlement, at times a downright clamor of defeat, resounding in the whole of my existence?

I'd say:

These are my defeats, and there is this clamor, because and insofar as I am a leftist.

I am not alone with my feelings. Think of Mark Fisher (*Ghosts of My Life*, 2014), in reference of Franko Berardi (*After the Future*, 2011). Think of Wendy Brown (“Against Left Melancholia”, 1999), in reference of Stuart Hall (*The Hard Road to Renewal*, 1988). Think of Marcuse grappling with the New Left (“The Failure of the New Left?”, 1979).

But last summer I took a note:

“I am sick of being disappointed – I am just stopping.”

For there is something fishy about perpetual defeat, something fake. It's too monochrome. There must be something wrong with a mindset, a political software, if it generates a monotonous clamor. That is the kind of ‘being wrong’ that applies to me and that is what I'll try to think about.

Fisher and Berardi reference the loss of future.

“But when I say ‘future,’ [...] I am thinking of the psychological perception, which emerged in the cultural situation of progressive modernity, the cultural expectations that were fabricated during the long period of modern civilization, reaching a peak in the years after the Second World War. Those expectations were shaped in the conceptual frameworks of an ever progressing development [...]. My generation grew up in the high point of this mythological temporalization, and it is very difficult, maybe impossible, to get rid of them, and look at reality without these kind of cultural eyeglasses.” (Berardi, *After the Future*, 13)

There is a genealogy to these glasses.

Berardi points to the 19th century (Hegel, Marx), and this is correct but underestimates their historical depth. In his tome *Meaning in History* (1949), Karl Löwith argues that “[modern] philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in fulfilment and that it ends with the secularization of its eschatological pattern.” (2) Löwith recognizes the pattern in Marx’s idea of a ‘realm of freedom,’ i.e., of a “supreme community of communist character: a Kingdom of God, without God and on earth, which is the ultimate goal and ideal of Marx’s historical messianism.” (51)

These are the glasses that Berardi cannot take off.

This is the software – a pure fiction of creationist origin – that creates the clamor in my head.

It does not fit the structure of the world.

The fiction of left ‘failure’ is the fiction of the so-called theodicy ‘problem’ – the question of how evil can happen in the world if there is a God.

But there is no ‘problem’.

There is no God and the world is not made for humans. History is not ordered toward the living. Supposing it is, is a faith one has to give up in order for the disappointment to disappear.

Then it disappears in an instant.

The suffering of people connected with every single one of the events listed at the beginning, does not thereby also disappear; it is merely stripped of the overtones of metaphysical frustration, now standing there naked.

What does the world look like then?

(A)

My thinking revolves around an evolutionary imaginary to come.

Socio-cultural evolution is a shaky paradigm, and virtually no political thought has hailed from it.

If it is a right description of the world, that's untenable.

I'll turn to Peter Turchin's work.

Turchin interprets statehood and social complexity as products of processes of socio-cultural – not biological – evolution. Evolutionary theory understands biological but also social forms via the logics and requirements of their transgenerational survival. Specifically, Turchin is concerned with how, in the aftermath of the Neolithic Revolution (the transition to agriculture and sedentarism that began about 11,000 years ago), the first states and empires were able to come about as social forms.

His thinks a particular evolutionary game was required – perpetual warfare:

“[V]ital institutions, such as bureaucracies and organized religion, and constraints that compel a ruling elite to promote the common good, are all costly. How could these institutions come about in spite of such costs? The theory of cultural multilevel selection says that this evolution is only possible when societies compete against each other, so that those lacking the right institutions fail. The costly institutions of complex societies manage to spread and propagate because the societies that possess them destroy those that don't.” (Peter Turchin, *Ultrasociety*, 19f.)

Hence the evolutionary emergence, over time, of what I'd like to call the Neolithic Estate: agrarian-based societies with large populations and high social complexity – i.e., intensive social cooperation and division of labor, but also deep social stratification and centralized violence –, characterized by their capacity for war (ideologically and materially) and operating imperially in a 'international' environment.

Obvious dangers include

- abuse of centralized violence
- escalation of inequality and elite corruption
- war propensity

– exploitation of ‘international’ inequality.

These have accompanied the history of statehood since its inception – from archaic states through early advanced civilizations, etc. (*Contra* Graeber/Wengrow, who believe things “started to go wrong” at some imaginary later point they’re unable to point to.) Recalling my litany from the beginning, the events that ‘disappointed’ me still fall into these categories.

Suspicious:

We have awakened as living beings in a *longue durée*, a long present of the Neolithic Estate and lead our lives there.

Its temporality has nothing to do with the future vector of modern philosophy of history: it is cyclical (cf. Turchin/Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*, 2009).

5000 years in, the Estate is not at its end – to the contrary, it has become universal only in the modern era (colonial history).

It is insanely robust – withstands all Anthropocene exponentialities (cf. Turchin, *Ages of Discord*, 2016) and every coming AI ‘singularity’.

The Neolithic Estate is the future.

At the same time, it is old – a heritage.

A heritage whose *shape* is owed to nothing but survival.

It is *empty* – has no other ‘content’ than its having survived.

The propensity for war, inequality, kleptocracy etc., have no ‘function’ – they are functionless for the living and harmful to them –; they are there not *because* they would have any function, but because they have survived.

They are evolutionary hazardous waste that history has deposited in our present in the form of the Neolithic Estate.

Reformulate our political task as

TOXIC WASTE MANAGEMENT

**IN THE LONG PRESENT
OF THE NEOLITHIC ESTATE.**

The toxicity of the state form must be managed for an unforeseeable time like hazardous waste, like nuclear waste with a half-life of infinity.

Sometimes this works better, sometimes worse. Only forward it does not go – cyclical time.

Eschatological fulfillment —> toxic waste management: one potential component of a new political software after the clamor of defeat.

(B)

There is a bigger picture of which the above is a fragment.

We now understand the principle, the mechanism better, but what is the landscape in which it is operative?

300.000 years of human evolution, 70.000 years of human migrations.

That's the canvas for the neolithic revolution to start 11.000 years ago; for the Neolithic Estate to emerge.

Who's the protagonist in that landscape?

The human world population.

The world population is the *bearer* of the Neolithic Estate – it develops it, grows into it; the Estate takes possession of it, articulates it in certain ways.

On the other hand, it is a figure of withdrawal and desertion – thinking ourselves through the world population withdraws our bodies from any state, even from the one course of history observable by us – as I once put it in a poem:

„In how many of 1000 runs

of the colonization of the world by Homo sapiens

would there have been e.g. 'Germans', 'Proto-Germanic,'

even the 'German' language?

'...'

Exactly.

In none."

I.e., the one run we witness is much rarer than 1 in 1000. Instead of ours, other people, in a different run, would much more likely have been born:

"And yet there are people living there.

Other people.

WE ARE THESE [OTHER] PEOPLE."

We are already these other people – the ones who were born instead.

By this gesture of ultimate self-decentering, the poem *ascribes us* to the world population – to the figure which unites the sum of all possible runs of history in itself. For it is *the same in every run*, it remains – as the pre-individual ground of all individuations – one and the same being, no matter which of its possible biographies/histories it happens to actualize. Viewed reproductively, the world population is a single-cellular organism – an ovum of the mitochondrial 'Eve' – dividing itself for 300.000 years now (cf. August Weisman).

It is a concrete being.

Pre-individual, it is *mystical* to us.

Facing it =

ATHEIST RELIGION OF WORLD POPULATION.

We desperately need its political power:

„The mystical presence of world population is a corrosive acid.

All nationalizations and ethnicizations of the bodies of the world population, all nationalizations and (Fortune 500) privatizations of the Earth, its habitats and mineral resources, it makes visible and revisable as precarious and temporary projects – by way of the namelessness to which it restores our bodies, and the concrete story it tells of their emergence from the pre-individual ground and its ‘thickness’.” (Daniel Falb, *Mystique der Weltbevölkerung*) –

That’s all I’ve got.

In the search for a new political software, we found two potential components.

Maybe they allow us to be less wrong – but are we also more right now?

No.

‘Being wrong’ only goes so far in a world where ‘being’ escapes human categories and values. You can be wrong only to the degree that your being is contained in a human context where such valuations are in place. As we have seen, however, our institutions are full of evolutionary debris and the human world population is not human.

Instead of putting us into a position of being right, the new political software connects us to these inhumanities – to better calibrate our relation to what continues to rule us and continuously brings us forth.



