

A Nightmare on the Brains of the Living

Repeating the Past and Imagining a Future

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ABSTRACT In a historical situation characterised by crisis, wars and widespread protests the question of the relationship between past Left-revolutionary endeavours and present political challenges is of utmost importance for the possibility of mounting an anti-systemic challenge to capitalism. T. J. Clark's essay 'For a Left with No Future' argues that the future-oriented stance of the 19th and 20th Century Left turned the Left into a disastrous *doppelgänger* of capitalist modernity causing havoc and death instead of being a genuine opposition to capitalism. The great refusals have to be replaced with a 'modest' and more 'realistic' approach, Clark argues, enabling the Left to understand the human propensity to violence and therefore engaging in a kind of anti-war activism. This article rejects Clark's analysis and tries to save the revolutionary perspective Clark is trying to get rid of arguing that it is indeed the Left that we have to bury. Juxtaposing Clark's argument with a reading of Michèle Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' made as part of the 1963 Situationist exhibition 'Destruction of RSG-6' the article attempts to contribute to the re-formulation of a contemporary revolutionary position on the basis of the breakdown of the programmatic Left.

KEY WORDS Defeat, The Left, Revolution, Avant-garde, T. J. Clark, Situationist International

The horror is that for the first time we live in a world in which we can no longer imagine a better one.

– Theodor W. Adorno¹

In his 2012 article 'For a Left with No Future', published in *New Left Review*, art historian and Left critic T. J. Clark engages in a critique of the European Left's avant-gardism, its century-long ideals of progress, redemption, and emancipated futures.² According to Clark, the Left has long – always? – been indebted to a problematic notion of the future, resulting in a preoccupation with 'fantastical predictions about capitalism's coming to an end'.³ The Left has been imagining a whole arsenal of different endings, envisioning coming insurrections capable of sweeping capitalism away in an all-out revolution or seeking signs of the soon-to-come crisis, a point of no return that destroys the capitalist mode of production and sets free the enchained workers. Beginnings as well as endings, of course: the various beginnings of the many and diverse Socialisms or Communisms, from the production of a new world courtesy of heavy industry and tractors – 'All efforts to attain the goal of eight

million tonnes of grain' – to a return to a blissful (primitive) Communist Eden or the introduction of the notorious 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in its different guises, some more militarised than others. We are familiar with the images and representations that range intellectually from Marx' 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner' to Gramsci's Fordist fantasies to Hardt and Negri's ever-creative and networked multitude that has already rendered capital's dialectical mediation obsolete. These representations may differ. To state the obvious: There is quite a difference between the Soviet 'utopia of production', as Buck-Morss calls it, and the Parisian students' desire to reveal a beach beneath the pavement in May '68. Yet they all, according to Clark, share the same avant-garde-modernist tonality, the same language of infinite possibility, the sense of a future to be realised, a present to be overcome.⁴ Clark seeks to break free from these visions of progress or crisis. 'Leaving behind, that is, in the whole grain and frame of its self-conception, the last afterthoughts and images of the avant-garde.'⁵ This is not only because these visions turned out to be prone to extremely violent political practices in the period from 1917 to 1989 and never mounted a real challenge to capitalism anyway but also because they prevent the Left from coming to terms with the present situation of defeat. The Left must wake up from the 20th Century Clark writes, must bid farewell to its grandiose programmes and radical schemes. The Left is clinging to the remains of apocalyptic imagery. As Clark puts it, 'Left politics is immobilized, it seems to me, at the level of theory and therefore of practice, by the idea that it should spend its time turning over the entrails of the present for signs of catastrophe and salvation'.⁶

As the title of his article makes clear, Clark is seeking to distance himself from what he perceives to be the overriding theme and tonality – *Stimmung* – of a Left obsessed with the future or strangely seduced by the possibilities of modernity and totally blind to its extreme consequences. According to Clark, the Left has been simultaneously strangely mesmerised and repulsed by capitalism and the possibilities it brings into being. And he is right, of course. Take Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, where they sing praises to the bourgeoisie's destruction of previous forms of solidarity and modes of production all the while promising and hoping that the proletariat will realise what the bourgeoisie has been unable to accomplish.⁷ The Left has been fascinated by such images and painted endless versions over the last two centuries. The Left so often turned out to be a horrid inversion of capital's own modernising terror, part and parcel of the capitalist modernity it half-opposed, half-embodied. The Left failed,

always ended up defeating itself and stood every time, when it came down to it, too close to the worldview of its opponent, capitalism. The need to accelerate the destruction of capitalism has been a steady feature in Left thinking and practice, to a point where the Left turned out to be a realisation of the nightmare of the new world in which people became material to be moulded and given form. Focusing on the end, the means declined in importance, and the glorious future ended up legitimising one horror after another. The Left ended up negating the brute fact of existence, forgetting that this world is the only one we will ever have.

Clark's critique is in many senses right on the money. But in an odd doubling of his own critique of the Left's inability to see nuances – Left, Socialism, Communism, the terms tend to flow together in sweeping judgments – Clark takes no prisoners, and his conclusions are stark, bordering on hard anti-Communist totalitarianism: The path to Socialism was a single enormous tragedy, from the Gulags to the Killing Fields. The Left's grandiose schemes and gigantic programmes paved the way for unfathomable terror. Apocalyptic Left and apocalyptic Right thus converge in Clark's analysis: 'Socialism became National Socialism, Communism became Stalinism, modernity morphed into crisis and crash.'⁸ 'A false future', Clark calls it. Instead, Clark opts for what he, following Nietzsche, terms 'the most modest, most moderate, of materialisms'⁹ in the form of a substitution of most of Marxism with a highly selective and particular mix of Weber, Nietzsche, and other conservative thinkers and theoreticians of tragedy. Clark conceptualises this as a move away from the avant-gardist obsession with everything young and rebellious towards a 'mature' and 'grown-up' (these are Clark's words) politics that can comprehend and hold at bay the human drive to violence. The Left's utopian orientation has been tragically blind to or even fostered the deep-seated 'human propensity to violence', Clark writes. He builds part of his attack on the Left's emancipatory (read: violent) politics on a quasi-anthropological argument about human nature's inherent drive to violence and 'the horror and danger built into human affairs', referencing Walter Burkert's thrilling *Homo Necans*.¹⁰ The Left has failed to realise that violence is a constant presence in human life.

After 'the Century of Violence', the Left must rebuild itself in order to prevent 'the tiger [of violence and war] from charging out', Clark writes, urging the Left to recognise the presence of violence in all human endeavour. Clark recognises that there was no final cause to explain the barbarism of 'the age of human smoke', as he terms the 20th Century, invoking – or out-doing – Mark Mazower's already gloomy *Dark Continent*. Clark

wishes for the Left to modulate its notion of human possibility and history into something he calls 'a tragic key'. Give up the idea that the revolution will somehow resolve the contradictions of the past and the present. This is the 'moderation' he seeks: leaving the extremes and giving up on optimism. Nietzsche's 'pessimism of strength': a sense of the limits to human affairs, a pessimism that is also a pragmatism, a politics without illusions, truly pessimistic and worldly. Finally, Clark calls for an understanding that the revolution will not be the realisation of a historical logic, for a realist Left that renounces all-or-nothing visions of building a new world. This is a downscaling of the project of the Left or a substitution of its radical utopianism with a tragic pessimism more in tune with modernity's horror. Finally, he asks for the realisation that there will be no peace, that we are faced with the prospect of permanent war.

So Clark wants the Left in the capitalist heartland to give up on the future in favour of the present, give up on grand revolutionary ideals in favour of a quieter, more concrete and 'actual' approach, ditching the visions and idioms of futurity, the otherworldliness that is part and parcel of the revolutionary project. He seeks a politics of moderation, a politics of small steps: 'It [...] is wrong to assume that moderation in politics, if we mean by this a politics of small steps, bleak wisdom, concrete proposals, disdain for grand promises, a sense of the hardness of even the least 'improvement', is not revolutionary – assuming this last word has any descriptive force left'.¹¹

Clark is absolutely right: From Marx to Diamat, we find problematic notions of the historical development that was no doubt put into practice in highly unfortunate ways or legitimised brutal regimes. But does this mean that we must give up on the idea of revolution? For that ultimately seems to be Clark's solution to the problem: renouncing the revolution. That is the meaning of the attempt to keep the Left but give up on the future. Clark is giving up on radical change as this has shown itself to be a straight road to Hell on earth, but he wishes to preserve and reform the Left. Preserving the Left but renouncing the revolution?

In so many ways, I feel that Clark is right in engaging in a ruthless critique of the euro-modernist Left and its future-oriented stance. His intervention is a hugely important contribution to the necessary critique of the assumptions and premises of radical political practice and the rhetoric of the European Left today. Clark wants to do away with both wishful thinking à la post-*autonomia's* ideas of the multitude as well as automatic notions of capital's decadence, and there is clearly much in Clark's attempt to substitute a Leftist critical theory with a Leftist tragic theory that is nec-

essary and convincing. And yet I nevertheless remain somewhat sceptical. Clark seems willing to let go of an awful lot in his attempt to revise the Left. And I am not sure he is bidding farewell to the right things.

Although there is, of course, a reference to punk in the title of his article, Clark quickly moves from punk to resignation, from Sex Pistols to Nietzsche. The Left must put adolescence behind itself, Clark argues. But does a lack of programmes mean giving up on the critique of the capitalist system and turning inward, contemplating old prints, and reading laments of failed revolts? Fighting the eternal present of the spectacle by returning to a cultural heritage that promises contact with a lost world (Clark urges his readers to substitute reading *The Coming Insurrection* with Christopher Hill's *The Experience of Defeat*) looks a lot like the reverse image of 'the present age of ardent, fetishistic "memorialism"'.¹² Could a farewell to programmes not mean an engagement in radical self-critique, as has been the case many times before? As Clark has himself shown in an earlier rebuttal to Fred Jameson and Perry Anderson, the present conditions of impossibility were already a cultural fact much earlier in the 20th Century and confronted Luxemburg, Korsch, Debord, etc. with tremendous challenges in their own times.¹³ The ending has been going on for quite a while now, we might say. In this sense, the Left has been without a future for a long time. That is the challenge, in a way: How can we engage in an all-inclusive critique of capitalist society without formulating visions of a much better tomorrow and without plans for how to run the capitalist economy differently (as the Social Democratic and Leninist Left sought in vain to accomplish). That was already the task that revolutionaries like Naville, Bataille, Benjamin, and later Jorn and Debord set for themselves: a total transformation of everyday life. That was previously the task of this kind of 'dark Marxism'. The solution is not giving up on the anti-capitalist struggle, as Clark seems to be proposing. The solution, it seems to me, is giving up on the Left, ditching the identity and the project of the Left: not downscaling and turning backwards but upping the ante in order to create a different future.

Clark is, quite simply, operating against the wrong opposition, and it might just be time to exit the closed interiors of the political struggle of Right and Left. It is time to move beyond democracy as we know it. Political democracy and the whole Left-Right debacle make little sense when we are dealing with the question of revolution (and counter-revolution). The Left-Right opposition has from the very start distorted the potentials of the revolutionary break. A revolution is simply a confrontation of a different nature than the political conflicts between Right and Left.

The revolution is the production of communism, i.e. a real break with the bourgeois nation-state and a complete abolishment of capitalist social relations (wage, money, etc.). The Left has, of course, throughout the 20th Century made reference to the revolution: Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Guevarists, and New Leftists have used the term, but so have Fascists and Islamists. And we all know the mechanism of political democracy in which Right-Left opposition is a key ingredient to preventing any kind of radical change, balancing out the apparent struggle between Right and Left parties mediating the class struggle and keeping it confined to the nation-state.

The Left-Right political spectrum is a huge problem for the revolutionary perspective and makes no sense. It never did. Clark's text testifies to that. This became particularly clear when the European social democratic parties turned neoliberal, but it was fairly clear already to Luxemburg in 1914 and Debord in the 1960s. Clark seems on the cusp of realising this in his text ('Left, then, is a term denoting an absence') yet he prefers to retain the term, emptying it of all revolutionary content.¹⁴ But we need to get rid of it, get rid of the Left.

In daily life, we pretend to know what the distinction between Right and Left means when, in fact, it has no logical signification whatsoever. The historical origin of the distinction between 'Left' and 'Right' goes back to September 1789 when a Parisian paper first used it to describe opposed fractions in the National Assembly. The opponents of the monarchy gathered to the left of the president's chair in the Assembly, and the king's supporters gathered to the right. Traditionally, the place of honour in the *Assemblée* was to the right of the president, and this place belonged to the aristocracy. The division of the political sphere into Left and Right thus came into being: The Right were the ones who wished to maintain the status quo while the Left were the ones in favour of change. If the National Assembly had been arranged the other way around, we would be labelling Luxemburg, Bordiga, Rühle, and Gorter 'ultra-Rightists'. The way in which the Left-Right division is used distorts capitalist society and creates political sympathies based on unconscious political reflexes alone. The actual political effect of this dichotomy in Western Europe is more often than not a very surprising equal division between those voting Left and Right. This is not the effect of a corresponding uniformity in the social constitution of these states; it is instead caused by the manifestation of the Left-Right model's purely mathematical logic. The figure produces a polarisation of the population, which cuts across social groupings. The population is split into two more-or-less equal political

groups, which are by definition opposed to one another. The polarisation inherent in the Left-Right dichotomy 'naturally' privileges the centre and political compromise. The problem is, of course, that the capitalist mode of production is anything but moderate! It is radical in the sense of going to the core of things. Life in the most basic sense – people and the biosphere – is being threatened by the logic of capital accumulation. The solution ought to be as radical (the negation of the capitalist system), definitely not moderate, as Clarks argues.

The Left-Right dichotomy to which Clark subscribes actually prevents the development of this radical project. Within the Left-Right political spectrum, radicalism and the revolutionary perspective take the form of 'extremism', which is loaded with negative associations and portrayed as blind passion and terror: 'Pol Pot', Clark writes. People on the Left are thus afraid to go to the extreme, to step outside the normal cosy political spectrum and end up standing alone. The abolition of the capitalist system is thus abandoned. The revolutionary perspective – the overcoming of capitalism as the abolition of wage labour and the state – disappears. The fear of extremism functions as a deterrent to thinking matters through. The result is that 'the Left' guarantees the continuation of current 'political' thinking. Therefore, the important distinction is not between Left and Right but between being for or against the revolution as the abolition of capitalism.

When we are dealing with the revolution, we are dealing with a philosophical and anthropological matter related to promise. This is not because we must somehow raise hopes but instead because it is necessary to instil trust that the revolution is better than decadence and decline.

But the necessary working-through of the Left does not take place as Clark prefers to lump together everything from Stalinism to ultra-Leftism as instances of an avant-gardist Left. Clark should readjust his aim: It is less the avant-garde than the Left that is the problem. It is time to leave behind the project and identity of the Left altogether. Unfortunately Clark never goes this far, preferring instead to critique what he considers the damaging avant-gardist dimension of the revolutionary project. But the inability to engage in a critique of the Left while dismissing the revolutionary perspective means that Clark ends up promoting a kind of nihilistic Left-leaning conservatism in which he warns about the continued presence of violence and war. The critique of the disastrous consequences of revolutionary transgression comes dangerously close to an anti-totalitarian position that has characterised the fight for another world as violently excessive and doomed to failure

ever since the Russian Revolution. Clark is on the brink of joining an odd choir of reaction in which he sits uncomfortably alongside the likes of not only Jacob L. Talmon and Hannah Arendt but also François Furet, Martin Malia, and André Glucksmann.¹⁵ These are strange bedfellows for a former Situationist.¹⁶

In the present situation, ditching the distinction between reform and revolution comes across as somewhat strange. No doubt, the Arab revolts and the movements of the square have proved incapable of setting off a successful global wave of revolutionary protest and have met with serious opposition here and there, yet they nevertheless constitute the most important resistance to the present capitalist system in the past 40 years. Failure to recognise the potential in the recent upswing in protests, strikes, and demonstrations gives Clark's text a peculiar semi-aristocratic tonality resembling that of his friend/enemy Perry Anderson, who also withdrew decades ago to a kind of intellectual Olympus from which he could dismiss any and all protests: 'Oh dear, the natives are restless.' By foregoing distinctions between revolution and reformism as well as the distinction between revolution and counter-revolution, Clark risks ending up not only with no future but, more importantly, with no revolutionary position from which to engage in any kind of meaningful critique of capitalism besides a moralising lament of its hollowing out of the human.

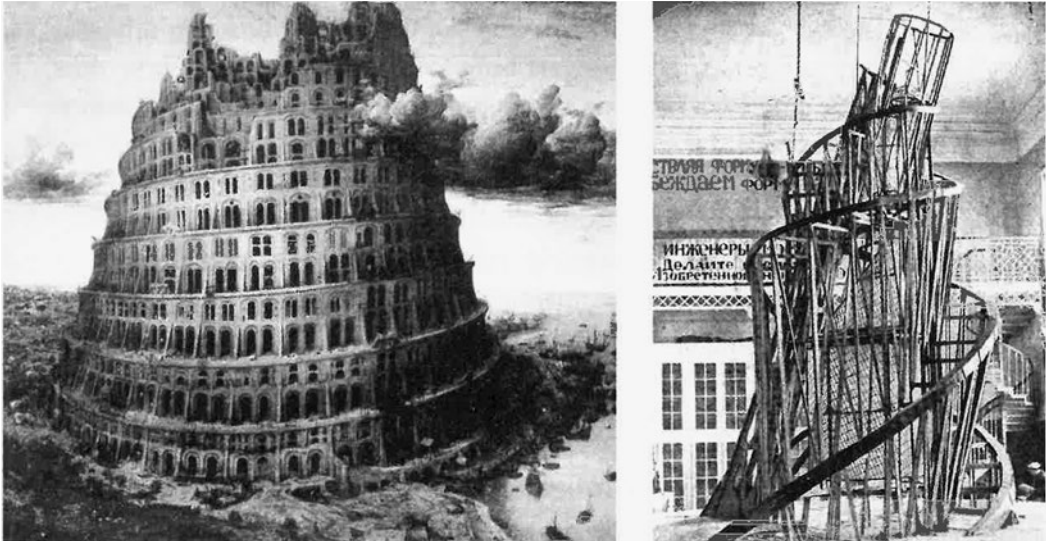
Part of the problem with Clark's analysis is precisely his move away from a Marxist framework towards a Weberian one in which capital is replaced by modernity as an iron cage and in which the vocabulary centres on the emptying out of meaning, with disenchantment – rather than the accumulation of capital – becoming the central process of modernity.¹⁷ As Clark has abandoned the critique of political economy, he is left with a language of loss and privation. We are stuck with a gloomy, quasi-sociological account of the destruction of some prior world of communal values and life forms as a result of rationalisation and disenchantment.

This also results from his dismissal of what he sees as attempts to pinpoint any single reason behind the horrors of the 20th Century. The tragic perspective 'allows us *not* to see a shape or logic [...] to the last hundred years'.¹⁸ There is thus no attempt to find a cause for the chaos. We should give up trying to give shape or form the catastrophe. The Left will inevitably end up empty handed. It is impossible to revert the process or take control of it without further escalating the destruction. That is Clark's verdict. No escape, no compensation but instead a wasteland of meaninglessness. Revolutionary programmes and tragic formlessness become inseparable. Nina Power has aptly described this as a kind of

'Left Burkeanism' (no more future, no more bold novelty, and no more dramatic metaphysical principles).¹⁹

In the end, Clark's project resembles a disillusioned post-revolutionary enterprise, left with nothing but melancholic reformism bordering on the reactionary. It is quite telling that he urges the Greek Left to come up with a 'persuasive' plan for how to proceed, 'a year-by-year vision of what would be involved in taking "the Argentine Road"'.²⁰ But that would no doubt only amount to yet another attempt at relative surplus production, which has nothing to do with revolution and an abolition of capital but would just represent state-capitalism anno 2015. The trajectory of SYRIZA, not yet clear when Clark wrote his text, is unfortunately very revealing for such a strategy. Despite its 'anti-authoritarian' rhetoric, SYRIZA has quickly shown itself to be a pillar of the system, protecting the interests of capital and contributing to the preservation of the authority of the bourgeois state. This might be described as Leftist, but it is the Left of capital.

Clark's necessary critique of the euro-modernist Left stops short and foregoes the possibility of leaving the Left in favour of a problematic return to a politics of 'small steps', disconnected from any idea of an anti-capitalist movement. His vivid description of the total breakdown of the Left is in many regards spot on, but the attempt to abandon Marxism in favour of some kind of tragic Weber/Nietzsche-inspired position goes terribly wrong. Clark rightly points to the strange fact that reformism no longer seems possible, that in the capitalist heartland, reformist demands today almost take on the form of impossible revolutionary demands, but he fails to historicise the reasons for this, preferring instead to advocate a 'moderate' and 'grown-up' reformist project along the lines of the Committee of 100. But it is not because the reformist Left has somehow become revolutionary or because the distinction no longer matters; it is instead because the reformist position is no longer possible. The conditions of possibility for a reformist Social Democratic and reformist Leninist strategy have simply withered away. The restructuring of the global capitalist economy that has taken place over the past 40 years – the outsourcing to Southeast Asia and parts of Africa thanks to new technologies (computers and containers, hand-in-hand), the smashing of previous strongholds of militant working class resistance, and the introduction of credit and rise of finance capital – has effectively pulled the carpet from under the particular working class composition that made these models possible in the first place. That is the real meaning of the 'no future' phrase: A whole generation of people across the globe have become redundant to capital, and the euro-modernist working class movement's project of taking over the apparatus of production no



T.J. Clark's juxtaposition of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 'The Tower of Babel' (c. 1565) and Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (1919–20). *New Left Review*, no. 74 (2012), p. 57.

longer makes sense. We are living through a transformation in people's relationship to exploitation, tending towards the exclusion of more and more people from the extraction of surplus value, hollowing out the 'programmatic' and reformist Left politics of the 20th Century.²¹ Workers across the globe are confronted by an objective limit to which their class belonging has somehow become external and can no longer constitute a point of departure for a political project. That is why reformism is no longer possible. The class struggle has taken on a new form and can no longer be a 'making of the working class'. The era of the Left, the period in which the European and USA working class could somehow engage in struggle within the capitalist system, is thus quickly coming to an end. As Clark himself puts it, 'If the past decade isn't proof of that there are no circumstances capable of reviving the Left in its 19th and 20th century form. Then what would proof be like?'²² Indeed. Let it go, there is nothing left of the Left. But that does not mean the revolutionary perspective has disappeared. The revolution will not be and in fact never was 'Leftist'; time will tell if it will make sense to call it 'Socialist' or 'Communist'.

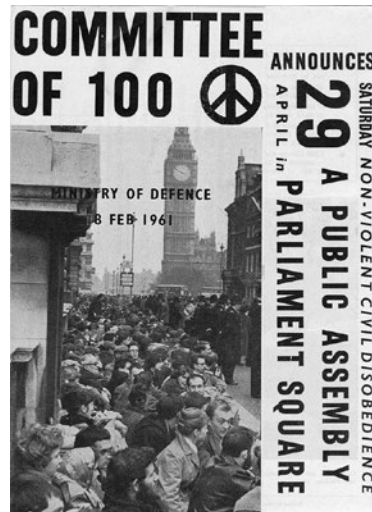
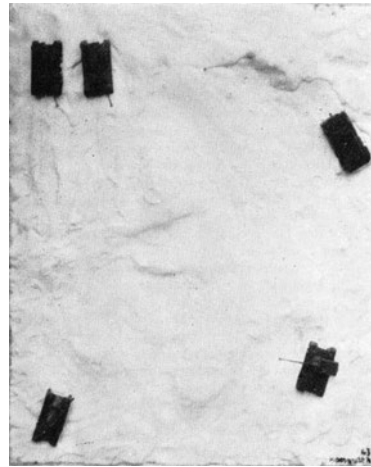
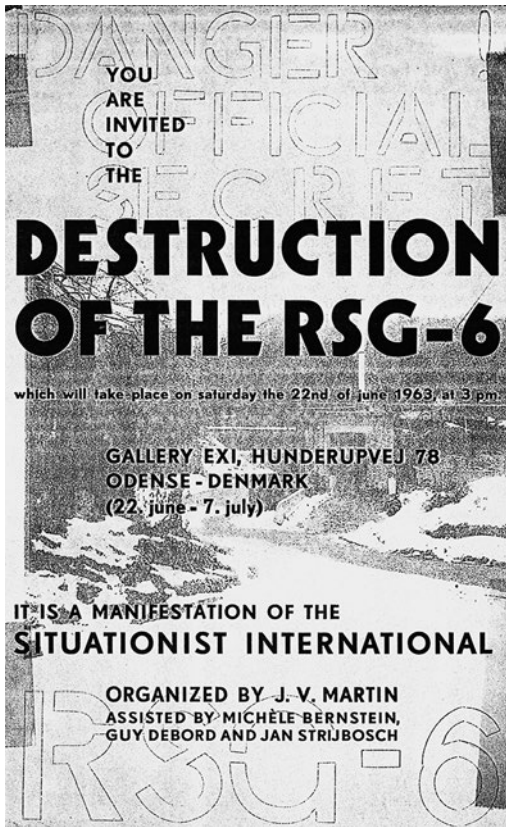
A New Beginning

In 1963, the Situationist Michèle Bernstein made a series of paintings titled 'Victories of the Proletariat' in which she engaged in a kind of counter-factual history painting, imagining that the Paris Commune and the Spanish Republicans had won. What if the proletariat had indeed prevailed in 1871 in Paris, Bernstein asked? Had been able to hold the French army at bay and had finally seized the National Bank? If the experiment had not ended after 72 days but had been allowed to develop and expand? Or if the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist workers had managed to defend the revolution against domestic and international counter-revolution and even extend it, had actually won the Spanish Civil War and beaten Franco as well as the Stalinist and Social Democratic forces that not only undermined but eliminated POUM and the other revolutionary groups and parties? Whereas Clark takes leave of imagining a different future and prefers to engage in a backward-looking non-utopian reformist activity, thereby creating a kind of retracted 'political' space, Bernstein was engaged in imagining a communist future through a different past.

Bernstein's paintings were part of a strange exhibition in which the Situationist International sought to engage in a tricky and complicated endeavour of reconnecting a new revolutionary offensive with past failed revolutionary experiments. By imagining a past that could have been different, they sought to imagine a different future, a non-capitalist and communist future. They sought to imagine the end of the spectacle.

'Victories of the Proletariat' was part of an exhibition titled 'Destruction of RSG-6', which took place in a small squat in Odense in Denmark, called *Huset* (The House). The squat was the headquarters of the local CND and was a hangout for a large group of rebellious Danish youths and self-proclaimed socialists who were critical of both the booming Western capitalist societies, with their new commodity-based identities, and the Soviet party dictatorship. The youths were trying to find an alternative position beyond the self-confirming binarity of the Cold War, and they engaged in a series of activities, including campaigning against the rising Danish tourism to Franco's Spain.

The squat was thus an ideal setting in a Scandinavian context for the Situationists, who needed to counter the Bauhaus Situationist movement run by the former member of the Situationist International Jørgen Nash, who was busy staging provocative stunts that both outraged and entertained the Scandinavian public. The Situationists had to make sure people knew Nash was not a Situationist and did not express the project of the Situationist International, which was not some kind of ludic



The Situationist International, invitation to the 'Destruction of RSG-6' manifestation at Galerie Exi, Odense, 1963.

Michèle Bernstein: 'Victoire des Républicains Espagnols' (Victory of the Spanish Republicans), 1963. The painting was part of the 'Destruction of RSG-6' manifestation staged by the Situationist International at Galerie Exi, Odense.

The Committee of 100, leaflet announcing a sit down demonstration for nuclear disarmament in front of the Ministry of Defense, 18 February, 1961.

here-and-now art activism but instead a comprehensive revolutionary critique of capitalist society and its means of control and domination including the state, wage labour, and money. The Situationists' use of the small gallery in the basement of the squat in Odense was risky business, and they sought in various ways to make explicit their indifference to dominant aesthetic standards and highlight their dismissal of the art world. 'Destruction of RSG-6' was not an ordinary art exhibition but was conceived of as a revolutionary use of an occupied territory: According to Bernstein, Debord, and the Situationists, the art world now functioned as a safety valve through which seemingly critical gestures were exhibited to little or no effect. The individual artwork could only express a formal pseudo-liberty, and it was thus necessary to leave art behind.

According to the Situationists, who subscribed to a Hegelian-Marxist reading of history in which the proletariat was the historical subject that placed pressure on the world and especially on the way the world was to be interpreted, historical development had made artwork obsolete. Art was destined to either fuse with established tastes, which the Situationists termed 'recuperation', or art would be left behind in favour of an expanded artistic critique outside the institution of art. It was simply no longer possible to create individual works of art with an individual signature and author. In order to be true to the genuinely transgressive nature of modern art from Rimbaud to Breton, one therefore had to ditch not only the cultural establishment but also the role of the artist as well foregoing the writing of poetry and making of paintings in favour of overcoming art. In Hegelian terms, art had to be suppressed and realised in revolutionary theory and practice. This is the kind of all-or-nothing approach with which Clark has difficulties. When confronted with the overwhelming defeat of the Left, he prefers to hold onto the few remaining spaces of resistance. For the Situationists, on the other hand, this amounts to complete surrender.

The Situationist position on art had become especially clear during heated debates within the Situations vanguard in 1961 and 1962, when more or less all artists left or were expelled from the group and when it was decided to label all artworks made by Situationists 'anti-Situationist'.²³ The event in Odense was thus not an art exhibition in any ordinary sense but was intended to be what the Situationists termed a 'manifestation' in which they would use the gallery in the squat's cellar to clarify the Situationist analysis of the historical situation and to intervene in an ongoing discussion regarding the threat of nuclear war and the way the threat was being used by the ruling elites in Western society.²⁴

One and a half months prior to the opening of 'Destruction of RSG-6', British anti-war activists had revealed secret plans to hide the British government in case of war. They had discovered and revealed the existence of a series of secret bunkers where officials were to seek shelter in the event of nuclear attack.²⁵ The Situationists had already analysed this politics of fear in articles in their journal *Internationale situationniste*, critiquing how the threat of nuclear war was being used both to reduce politics to a question of being against a dangerous Communist Soviet Union (and thus unquestionably for the West and its leaders) as well as to create a whole new series of nuclear war commodities, such as the family shelter.²⁶ The function of the accelerating Cold War nuclear arms race was to deter not the enemy but the state's own population, the Situationists argued, trying to convince the CND movement that was gaining momentum at this time in a number of Western European countries to expand its critique beyond the threat of annihilation. The real risk was the silencing of critique. It was important to connect the anti-nuclear position to a radical critique of capitalism; retaining the spectre of annihilation would only serve the interests of the existing political economic forces. The Situationists argued that any kind of limited anti-war stance, like the one Clark is now advocating, was not enough.

The manifestation in Odense was thus a continuation of this critique, combining it with a critique of modern art's inability to come up with anything new, i.e. Nash's silly pseudo-critique. In order to confront the audience with the bleak future of a nuclear war (the threat of nuclear annihilation), the Situationists transformed one room of the exhibition into a shelter with plank beds and sirens. This was risky business as it was dangerously close to subscribing to the politics of fear that the Situationists were critiquing. It was an experiment in testing the ruling representations, trying to subvert them, and using them in an attempt to present the Situationists' analysis. In order to move beyond the doom and passivity of the shelter, the audience was led into a next room in which they were meant to become active participants in a critique of the politics of fear. In this room, the Situationists had hung a series of targets with photos of politicians attached, enabling the audience to react by firing air guns at the leaders of the Cold War: Kennedy, Khrushchev, Adenauer, de Gaulle, etc. The manifestation also included a series of small slogan paintings by Debord with phrases from the revolutionary tradition like *Réalisation de la philosophie* (The Realisation of Philosophy) and *Abolition du travail aliénée* (Abolition of Alienated Labour), the last written across a painting by the former Situationist member Pinot Gallizio, putting the painting to

use as a blotting pad for quick propaganda scribbles. The artwork was to be deployed in the struggle against the new means of control of commodity society. If Debord's small word-paintings (termed 'Directives') in catchphrases outlined the contours of the Situationist International's project, the Danish member and individual responsible for setting up the exhibition, J.V. Martin, contributed with a further dramatisation of the doom-ridden prospect of the present world. In a series of large paintings termed *Termonukleare kartografier* (Thermonuclear Cartographies), Martin painted maps depicting the world after the outbreak of a third world war: 'På anden dagen siger de, der vil være 82 megalig' (On the second day, they say there will be 82 mega-corpses). Alongside Martin's maps of a bomb-struck world, Bernstein's so-called 'Victories of the Proletariat' were installed.

There were three pictures by Bernstein in the show: *Victoire de la Commune de Paris* (Victory of the Commune of Paris), *Victoire des Républicains Espagnols* (Victory of the Spanish Republicans), and *Victoire de la Grande Jacquerie* (Victory of the Great Jacquerie). Bernstein's pictures depicted historical battle scenes where the proletariat had lost to counter-revolutionary forces. In Bernstein's rendering, things were turned upside down, and the proletariat emerged victorious. On a formal level, the paintings were just as unpretentious and hastily made as Debord's signs and Martin's maps: They were constructed with toy soldiers and plastic tanks pressed into plaster and splashes of paint on top. As such, they had the look of three-dimensional kindergarten projects, yet this was not, of course, so unlike other contemporary artworks, such as those by artists associated with the *Nouveaux Réalisme* (New Realism). Artists such as Niki de Saint-Phalle and Arman were also using toys and other low culture objects in their work. But where there was a kind of uneasy fascination associated with the new consumer objects in the works by the *Nouveaux Réalisme* artists, Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' were intended as a radical dismissal of the present order of things. It was not a matter of some kind of aesthetic or 'plastic' quality but of the effect or impact of the creative expression. When it worked, art became part of a collective historical practice that showed that it was impossible to produce anything new *as art and as an individual*. Instead of individual artworks that would necessarily become instrumentalised by the spectacle, we have a radical critical distillate, a transgressive effect or subversive impact that is not art but that is nonetheless similar to the transcendental edification often ascribed to works of modern art. Ambiguity or depth had to be replaced by the precise interventions of the avant-garde, expos-

ing capitalist society's subsumption of human relations. That was also the meaning of the term 'situation': A constructed situation was the recreation of moments of revolutionary self-consciousness in which art and theory were superseded. Of course, a manifestation in a cellar in Odense, Denmark could not in itself constitute a constructed situation, but the Situationists made the attempt. Debord described the project as characterised by 'heavy-handedness', and the Situationists were well aware of the awkwardness of the exhibited objects, their failure qua artworks. And they did not engage in a similar display again, not even in Denmark. The difficulties they faced in combining a critique of modern art and the nuclear politics of fear were almost too great.

If we return to Bernstein's contribution to the manifestation, we must, of course, acknowledge the same uneasiness that characterises the description of the project as a whole. How are we to discuss these objects? It is no straightforward task to inscribe Bernstein's 'paintings' into a discussion about paintings, history paintings or battle paintings. Neither Bernstein nor Debord were painters. Martin was a painter and continued to paint pictures while he was in charge of the Situationist project in Scandinavia though this was most likely merely in order to survive outside of wage labour. By now, of course, even Debord had ended up in the National Library in Paris, but the Situationists really managed for quite a long time to resist or prevent their inclusion in the art institution. And most of the objects used in 'Destruction of RSG-6' no longer exist. Some of them went up in smoke in 1965 when a bomb exploded in Martin's house. A couple of Debord's 'Directives' still exist and now occasionally tour the world as part of exhibitions devoted to the Situationist International that are mounted from time to time. Yet Bernstein's objects no longer exist and were never intended as distinct works of art. The various elements in the show depended on each other: the mock shelter, Debord's slogans, Martin's maps, and Bernstein's battle scenes. They each had a specific function outlined by Debord in the catalogue.

In 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art', Debord begins by stressing the necessity of fusing 'an experimental investigation of possible ways of freely constructing everyday life' (the artistic avant-garde) with 'the theoretical and practical development of a new revolutionary contestation' (the revolutionary project). Only in so far as these two strands are combined will it be possible to counter the spectacle, he writes. What is needed is what he terms 'a general struggle' in which the set of artistic experiments ('the construction of situations in life') 'is inseparable from the history of the movement striving to

fulfil the revolutionary possibilities contained in the present society'. Bernstein's objects were part of this ambitious endeavour to surpass art and politics.

Of course 'Destruction of RSG-6' was not the revolution, the event in Odense was not really a constructed situation, people were after all primarily only shown an image of resistance, yet it was nonetheless an attempt to use art and the new protests against the nuclear threat. As such, it was an ambiguous attempt to deploy art to Situationist ends. As Debord writes in the catalogue, 'Destruction of RSG-6' was 'an immediate action [...] undertaken within the framework that we want to destroy'. The Situationists used art but wanted to supersede it.

With their stunt in Odense, the Situationists sought to analyse what Debord in the catalogue termed 'the new forms of action in politics and art' (including those enacted by Danish and British activists), which strove to challenge the new modes of production that separated man from the capacity to shape and direct history. The manifestation and the presentation of Situationist theory would ideally give activists 'a new language' as well as 'a new memory'. For the Situationists, it was very much a question of history. The society of the spectacle was a society that refused history. History had been broken down into isolated soundbites and self-contained images that were disconnected from any kind of historical continuum. The revolutions of the past had been completely forgotten. The spectacle was precisely a kind of representative auto-eroticism totally lacking historical depth. Everything took place in a strange closed universe where only de Gaulle and Bardot lived onscreen. The Situationists sought to break out from this closed image sphere and recreate a historical continuum, reignite the historical development, handing back self-determination to a proletariat that was being held hostage by the mesmerising spectacle. It was therefore a question of creating a connection between the present and the past, exposing the continuation between present-day resistance and past challenges to the status quo, such as the communards in 1871 or the Spanish Republicans in the 1930s. It was in this sense the Situationists argued they were continuing the project of the interwar avant-gardes and the revolutionary tradition. They were trying to reach back into history and reconnect with past radical negations but in a completely new context that necessitated a radical overhaul of these past projects and their 'surpassing'. A new revolutionary offensive had to start with the acknowledgement that 'the entire revolutionary project in the first three decades of this century' ended in complete 'failure'.²⁷ Only on the basis of this understanding would it be possible to re-

sume the revolutionary project. We are thus confronted with a complex overlapping of present and past radical gestures that did not follow a straight line but were the demands of yesterday producing the possibility for transcending the present and realising a different present. In this way, the past exposed an alternate possible reality. Where Clark is forced into giving up on the possibility of a revolutionary perspective when confronted by the present impasse of the Left and seemingly never-ending historical disasters, the Situationists desperately maintained the possibility of a radical break from the present.

Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' do just that. Her paintings are alternative memorials, turning history upside down. As Debord writes in the catalogue, the series 'corrects the history of the past, rendering it better, more revolutionary, and more successful than it ever was'.²⁸ It engages in an aesthetics of repetition in which Bernstein rewrites historical defeats as victories. They are, of course, not just any historical defeats but ones where there was a massive popular dimension and participation, in contrast to state coups such as that in Russia in 1917, where a small cadre of professional revolutionaries grabbed state power. In Paris in 1871, a city was turned upside down and taken over by its inhabitants, who engaged in a radical transformative process, and in Catalonia in Spain in 1936 and 1937, a whole region was turned into a self-managed society by worker's factory collectives and peasant collectives. With her three-dimensional plaster models, Bernstein was restoring the possibility of what once was, rendering the possibility anew. She was salvaging past revolutionary negations of the ruling order. Lost battles in which counter-revolutionary forces brutally shut down popular social experiments are replayed with toy soldiers and plaster. History is rewritten, and the proletariat comes out the victor. This rediscovery of past episodes from the ongoing epic clash between the classes opens up a different view of the present, exposing a new trajectory through history into the present. What if the proletariat had won in 1871 or 1936? History, in the Situationists' Hegelian-Marxist view, is not only a catalogue of events or the study of the past, but is instead something to be self-consciously made or remade. By imagining 1871 as a victory, Bernstein is directly attacking the spectacle that refuses history and prevents people from actively shaping not only their existence but also history, locking them into a closed eternal present. In a radical gesture of disavowal, Bernstein opposes this postcard time with a self-conscious creation of history. History is suddenly opened up and haunted by what might be. This is not a nostalgic gesture through which Bernstein seeks a return to the past; it is

a radical gesture that explicitly strives to highlight the dialectic of revolution and counter-revolution, to turn both history and the present into an open-ended battlefield of class warfare. 'Victories of the Proletariat' is not the return of the identical, of the historical facts of proletarian experiences and defeats; it is the return of the possibility of what was, making the past possible again. This is 'repetition' in the sense outlined by Giorgio Agamben in a short text on Debord's films: 'Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders the possibility anew.'²⁹ Bernstein is engaged in a similar venture, repeating the adventures of Communards and Spanish Republicans not as an act of nostalgia (or 'memory' in Pierre Nora's sense) but as an attempt to render the past possible again, restoring these lost possibilities of anti-capitalist negation. What if we have already won the Situationists playfully ask: 'Victories of the Proletariat'. The ruins of the future lay before us. Capitalism is dead, its subjectless logic already abolished. This is what victory looks like. We have already won. 'Forward! Not forgetting!'³⁰

Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' is an act of resistance against the spectacle and its indisputableness (the spectacle 'says nothing more than 'that which appears is good, that which is good appears)'), de-creating the closed world of the spectacle, disputing the facts of history. Bernstein de-creates what exists in a playful but determined act of negation using the debased existing means of cultural expression, refusing the facts in front of her, entering a zone of indifference between the past and the present, a zone of undecidability between the real and the possible where the past was put back into circulation again, where the Paris Commune and the Spanish Republic were suddenly re-played by commodity capitalism's own kitschy toy soldiers. By showing us the historical defeats of the proletariat as victories, Bernstein makes them possible again. We have the exact same situation with the exact same antagonists – yet it is completely different. The point is that everything is possible, not only the horrors of the spectacular commodity society but also another world.

Have We Already Won?

What is to be done, then? On the one hand, we have Clark and his refreshingly circumspect and forthright dismissal of the Left's future-oriented conception of history, which according to Clark has shown itself to be a nightmarish doppelgänger of the most brutal forms of capitalist modernisation. Clark is to be applauded for confronting the crisis of the Left head-on. The depth of the crisis is visible in every sentence of his text. A previous vocabulary is no longer available. The

very temporality of modernity has foundered, leaving only the past as a place of secret resistance. The breakdown of a whole tradition of Leftist thinking and practice is indeed the starting point for any serious discussion of an alternative politics. Clark is right in this respect. The two great competing fronts of the Western working-class movement, Social Democracy and Leninism, have disappeared. Leninism did not survive the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the Social Democratic parties in Europe have lacked a vision of a better future for some time and seem utterly incapable of developing such a vision following their complete neoliberal makeover. The promise of the Russian Revolution is long gone, and the Left no longer sets the agenda. Clark's proposal is to develop 'a kind of middle vision', arguing that the Left must abandon the future and rediscover the past, 'looking the world in the face'.³¹ Contemporary capital is so infatuated with the future and everything young and adolescent that the Left should not just turn to the past but somehow make itself a thing of the past: 'The Left, always embattled and marginalized, always – proudly – a thing of the past.'³² Clark thus ends up so strongly affirming the experience of defeat that he builds a new?/old? politics around it: 'There will be no future without war, poverty, Malthusian panic, tyranny, cruelty, classes, dead time, and all the ills the flesh is heir to, because there will be no future.'³³

In contrast, we have the Situationists and their attempt to rebuild a new capital-negating offensive beyond art and politics in the 1960s. There is no doubt that the conditions the Situationists were confronting have only further deteriorated, that the stakes have only heightened. But is the game significantly changed? Does not capitalist society remain characterised by a fundamental contradiction between capital and labour? This contradiction has in fact been further intensified with the 'neo-liberal' restructuring in which more and more people are not even able to access capital's metabolism but instead survive outside or on the margins of the extraction of surplus value.

At a time when revolutionary events primarily resurface and circulate as empty signifiers, it is of course difficult to imagine the world turned upside down by a victorious proletarian revolution. Even the biggest capitalist crisis since the 1930s and the outbreak of a new global protest wave spreading from North Africa to the USA and onwards have failed to shatter the capitalist realist dogma in the West, according to which the world is more likely to disappear in a biospheric meltdown than capitalism is to be replaced by another economic system.³⁴ Today, the notion of revolution has more to do with the unfailing ability of capitalism to



McQ's autumn/winter campaign 2007 featuring photos from May–June 1968 in Paris.

stage yet another commodity-object as *the* new thing not to be missed. 'Revolution' is more likely to appear as a description of washing powder or a pair of jeans than a break with the ruling order and transformation of society. The way revolutionary historical events suddenly surface and just as quickly slip away is indicative of the present situation.³⁵ These range from fashion designer Alexander McQueen's fall 2007 McQ campaign using photos from May–June 1968 (the spring campaign of that same year featured American cheerleaders) to the sudden explosion of interest in the late 2000s in *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction), which featured in movies and exhibitions.

The point is not that revolutionary events are somehow repressed qua invisible but rather that they circulate as images in an expanded memory culture that flattens out historical events, reducing them to decontextualised signifiers, which lack any function beyond 'pimping one's style'. If the nostalgia cultures of the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by a fascination with the popular cultures of the 1950s and 1960s, from adventure stories to go-go girls and staying away from a more politicised past, as Fred Jameson argued in his seminal analysis of the postmodern, present-day nostalgia culture has no problem mining more militant events, emblems, images, and styles, converting them into fashionable signs like Che and Guy Fawkes.³⁶ But the end result is the same: historical amnesia and the commodification of history.

The process Jameson analysed in the mid- and late-1980s seems only to have accelerated in the interim, taking on a new dimension in which the past is now only present as memory. Pierre Nora has aptly described this as the substitution of history with memory: 'Memory has taken on

a meaning so broad and all-inclusive that it tends to be used purely and simply as a substitute for history.³⁷ The result is that we are living in an age of 'passionate, almost fetishistic memorialism' in which 'every country, every social, ethnic or family group, has undergone a profound change in the relationship it traditionally enjoyed with the past'. This development is visible in how the historian (and historiography in general) has lost a monopoly on interpreting the past; access to the past has in this sense been 'democratised'. Today, the witness and the media as well as the judge and the politician share in manufacturing the past, replacing history with memory as collective meaning. One result of this change is that the decisive break formerly designated and constituted by revolutionary upheaval has now been generalised to such an extent that the sense of historical continuity has been replaced by the experience of constant change. The present is now unable to connect the past with the future. The line binding the present and the future to the past has been snapped, Nora argues. We are thus forced to stockpile, 'in a pious and somewhat indiscriminate fashion, any visible trace or material sign that might eventually testify to what we are or what we will have become'. The present is no longer a bridge between the past and the future but has become autonomous: Echoing Jameson's terms from his description of postmodernism, Nora writes that we are living an '*autonomising* of the present', with the future unforeseeable and the past shrouded in darkness or mist. The future is thus locked away in an irretrievable past. The revolutions of the past are unapproachable and only resurface as one-dimensional pieces of fashionability put into circulation by a global nostalgia industry. A revolutionary politics of memory appears difficult today as memory is not a neutral medium of politics but is an ideologically biased politics of post-history. 'No more monuments'...

It is thus surely difficult today to comprehend or even re-perform Bernstein's gesture of reversing history or the Situationists' rhetoric about a fusion of art and life in a revolutionary abolishment of capitalism. Although contemporary art is not only the object of an intense neo-liberalisation in which art has, especially since 1989, become a haven for newly accumulated capital across the globe but also remains a place for the ongoing dramatisation of activist art and political curating, the phantasmatic world-historical dimension present in the Situationists seems distant. The contradictions are obvious: On the one hand, 'political' artists and curators use the art institution as a space for political discussions of a sort that rarely take place elsewhere, but on the other hand, we have a booming art market – a particular market that seems to have been able

to dodge the crisis completely! – in which art institutions are deeply inscribed in the global circuit of finance capital.

Of course, the point of Bernstein's 'Victories of the Proletariat' was precisely that it was already pretty damn difficult to imagine the revolution back in 1963. That the spectacle was already trying to turn past revolutions into oblivion was a central aspect of the Situationists' analysis of the spectacle. They were already confronted by an accelerated ending yet desperately sought to keep the revolutionary perspective alive. The all-or-nothing rhetoric of the Situationist International testifies to the enormous force of historical oblivion. They nonetheless strove to combat capitalism, the spectacle, connecting disparate struggles and making visible their virtual revolutionary dimension in the present.

Where are we, then? For good reasons, Clark seeks to abandon the future-oriented stance of the Left in order to combat the eternal present of contemporary capitalism. But this gesture risks depriving us of the means to combat capitalism. His attempt to get rid of the mesmerising images of the future slides into defeatism. Even worse, he never follows through on his intention to confront the Left because he is unwilling to let go of the very identity of the Left, preferring instead to drop the revolution, as if that would enable him to control the combined and uneven development (and underdevelopment) of capitalism. He ends up abandoning not just Marxism but also the revolutionary position in favour of a resigned Weberian analysis and anti-war/violence reformism. Clark's willingness to look the failures of the euro-modernist Left straight in the eye is extremely welcome, but he paradoxically ends up saving the reformist backward-looking Left that we need to abandon in order to develop a capital-negating political practice. Imagining a future is risky business, but so is imagining nothing at all. We cannot wash our hands of the future once and for all. A politics of 'the lesser evil' is definitely not a guarantee of lesser violence but more often than not ends up being a precondition for more violence.

What to do? The established workers' movement has disappeared. That much is clear. But the goal remains the abolition of the money-economy. And the disappearance of the 'Left' and the collapse of its programmatic project (producing a working-class culture and being in charge of the production of surplus value) are in fact a possibility. The crisis is deeper today than it was in 1929 and the revolution is further than in the 1930s when only Spain was in flames. The reformist position is gone, that's Clark's (experience of a) defeat. The state-capitalist solution is no longer a possibility. In the terms of the Spanish civil war: The anti-revolutionary

socialist Republic in Madrid has disappeared. Today there is only two positions left: A Christian militarism led by Franco or the revolutionary position of POUM and the anarcho-syndicalists that did not want to cooperate with Madrid. The situation is more clear-cut today; that might turn out to be an advantage for the revolutionary project, there is less room for reformist or centrist positions. In the context of art this will have to manifest itself in a gradual abandonment of the institution in favour of activities outside.

Notes

1. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto* [*Diskussion über Theorie und Praxis*, 1956], trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p. 70.

2. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', *New Left Review*, no. 74 (2012), pp. 53–75.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

4. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002).

5. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 57. Clark thus continues a critique of the avant-garde that was also present in *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), co-written with Iain Boal, Joseph Matthews, and Michael Watts under the name of Retort, in which al-Qaida is analysed as the last vanguard. 'The Left should approach al-Qaida in the same spirit [as Nietzsche did] – with the words and actions of bin Laden resonating against those of Lenin, Blanqui, Mao, Baader-Meinhof, and Durruti'; p. 173. Note the lumping together of quite different historical figures, from Mao to Durruti, whose 'politics' cannot easily be described as the same. This is, of course, Clark's argument, that the tenor is the same from Blanqui via Lenin to bin Laden, that they all share the same futuristic rhetoric and that they all ultimately exhibit the same merciless instrumentalism.

6. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 54.

7. 'The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part. [...] It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". [...] The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers. [...] The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. [...] Con-

stant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. [...] [But today] [t]he weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [*Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, 1848], trans. Samuel Moore, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>

8. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 62.

9. Ibid., p. 63. Clark refers to Nietzsche's famous note on European nihilism from 10 June 1887, posthumously published by his sister in *The Will to Power*, in which Nietzsche writes: 'Who will prove to be the strongest in the course of this? The most moderate; those who do not require any extreme articles of faith; those who not only concede but love a fair amount of accidents and nonsense; those who can think of man with a considerable reduction of his value without becoming small and weak on that account; those richest in health who are equal to most misfortunes and therefore not so afraid of misfortunes – human beings who are sure of their power and represent the attained strength of humanity with conscious pride.' *The Will to Power* [*Der Wille zur Macht*, 1901], trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), pp. 38–39.

10. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 66. 'Aggression and human violence have marked the progress of our civilization and appear, indeed, to have grown so during its course that they have become a central problem of the present. Analyses that attempt to locate the roots of the evil often set out with short-sighted assumptions, as though the failure of our upbringing or the fatal development of a particular national tradition or economic system were to blame. More can be said for the thesis that all orders and forms of authority in human society are founded on institutionalized violence.' Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* [*Homo Necans*, 1972], trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley and Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 1.

11. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 67.

12. The formulation belongs to Pierre Nora, who describes this memorialism as 'a kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns that has broken over the world, everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past – whether real or imaginary – and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity'. Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory', *Eurozine* (April 19, 2002), <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html>

13. T. J. Clark, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, no. 2 (2000), p. 85–96.
14. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 57.
15. Cf. Alberto Toscano, 'Politics in a Tragic Key', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 180 (2013), pp. 25–34.
16. Clark was a member of the Situationist International in 1966–1967. He has rarely directly engaged in a reading of the Situationist project or directly used the terms and concepts of the Situationists, although Debord does crop up at strategic points in his art-historical works, most notably in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985). *Afflicted Powers* is the primary exception, where Clark analyses the concepts of spectacle and the critique of everyday life. With Donald Nicholson-Smith, Clark has written one longer text about the Situationists, attacking Peter Wollen and others for being overly focused on art and for misunderstanding the Situationist project: 'Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International?', *October*, no. 79 (1997), pp. 15–31.
17. Susan Watkins makes a similar critique in her rebuttal to Clark in 'Presentism? A Reply to T. J. Clark', published in the same issue of *New Left Review* as Clark's article. *New Left Review*, no. 74 (2012), pp. 77–102. Clark's use of a Weberian language really took off in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 7) in which Weber's 'disenchantment of the world' is described as the best summing up of modernity.
18. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', pp. 60–61.
19. Nina Power, 'The Pessimism of Time', *Overland*, no. 209 (2012), <https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-209/feature-nina-power/>
20. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 55.
21. Cf. Roland Simon, *Fondements critiques d'une théorie de la révolution: Au-delà de l'affirmation du prolétariat* (Marseille: Senonevero, 2001). The so-called communisation theory developed by various post-ultra-left groups after the defeat of May '68 in France, notably Théorie Communiste, discusses the 'programmatic' phase of the working-class movement in which the class struggle of the proletariat took the form of a liberation of the working class from capitalism. The goal was to increase the strength of the working class within the capitalist mode of production through the taking of power. This phase is now over, Théorie Communiste argues.
22. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', p. 55.
23. 'There is no such thing as *Situationism* or a Situationist work of art or a spectacular Situationist'. 'The Fifth SI Conference in Göteborg' ['La cinquième conférence de l'I.S à Göteborg', 1962], trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 88.
24. For a more in-depth analysis of 'Destruction of RSG-6', including its recep-

tion in the Danish press, see my article ‘To Act in Culture While being against All Culture: The Situationists and the “Destruction of RSG-6”’, in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula; New York: Autonomedia, 2011), pp. 75–113.

25. The activists called themselves Spies for Peace and were associated with the Committee of 100. For a presentation of the project, see ‘The Spies for Peace and After’, *The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly*, no. 5 (1988), pp. 61–96.

26. ‘Geopolitics of Hibernation’ [‘Géopolitique de l’hibernation’, 1962], trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology*, pp. 76–82.

27. Guy Debord, ‘The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art’ [‘Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d’action dans la politique ou l’art’, 1963], trans. Thomas Levin, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), p. 159.

28. ‘Geopolitics of Hibernation’, p. 165.

29. Giorgio Agamben, ‘Difference and Repetition in Guy Debord’s Films’ [‘Le cinéma de Guy Debord’, 1995], trans. Brian Holmes, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough, p. 316.

30. Bertolt Brecht, ‘Solidaritäts Lied’ [1930], in *Kuhle Wampe: Protokoll des Films und Materialien*, eds. Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 62.

31. T. J. Clark, ‘For a Left with No Future’, p. 75.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. This being the by now classic example of what Mark Fisher dubbed ‘capitalist realism’ in his short pamphlet from 2009: *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero, 2009). Fisher builds part of his description on Fredric Jameson’s and Slavoj Žižek’s oft-quoted statement about the inability of conceiving another society. ‘It seems to be easier for us to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism.’ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. xii.

35. For an analysis of the development that the term ‘revolution’ has undergone over the past four decades, see Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, ‘The Revolution Turned Upside Down’, in Bolt Rasmussen, *Crisis to Insurrection: Notes on the On-Going Collapse* (Wivenhoe and New York: Minor Compositions, 2015), pp. 49–71.

36. Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 111–25.

37. Pierre Nora, ‘Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory’.