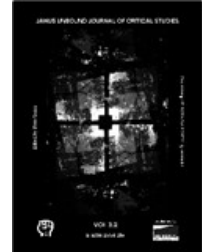




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## The Poor, Grand Capital, and Empire on Edge: Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Peter Trnka

### Preamble

A world on edge. Or several worlds, depending on decisions, cuts to be made, concerning existence. A question?

Times between thought and sign transpire rapidly, overcoming—like machine gun fire - - - starting notions. Calling for the work to be done. Outdone by “what is happening.”

Call it the world or events, if that language does not bind, restrict, or interfere. Noting—following our first critical note, “The Translator’s (In)visibility in Julio Cortázar’s ‘Letter to a Young Lady in Paris,’ ” one of several works co-authored and contributed by Bilal Hamamra, this time with Asala Mayaleh, also working here and now in the West Bank—that any translation, expression, gesture is not the same as what it is about, is (it might be said) impossible. Knowing that what is impossible becomes possible, often by the efforts of youth, the untired, the yet-to-be-exhausted.

The political ontologies of visibility and invisibility, the powers, good or ill, of ontologies, conceptions and frameworks, infra and superstructures, introduce themselves.

Time to get the work out, to let voices speak their words before—interruption, cessation, blockage, death. Thank you for the urgency in knowing this is always. Where is most pressing? What are the intense tendencies? Only little time for introducing, advertising, commenting, or jumping on the back of others’ work, but this is always the case. The urgent timely untimely. What?

The unthemed theme: the world, a world of and for the poor, on edge, teetering on edges: proliferating, spreading edges, transforming, revolving.

### Main

Thinking revolutionary tendencies and the coincidence of revolution and time, we cannot do and now we must do without Antonio Negri. I never met you in person, Toni, but I have lived with your thoughts and desires since I began to think.

In mourning to carry the spirit, to live with ghosts in preparation for better worlds. Preparing for future hauntological work, from South Africa by way of Fazil Moradi, let us phrase it with Jacques Derrida’s voice:

## The Poor, Grand Capital, and Empire on Edge

First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by localizing the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization ...) finds itself caught up in this work of mourning. (Derrida 1994, 9)

And in the language of the event, though this is not necessary, a definition of this hauntology that replaces ontology, as Derrida urged Negri to do:

Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is a ghost?* What is the *effectivity* of the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. (10)

Negri stayed instead with thinking time, ontologizing temporally and differently. We do not mind occupying (and sometimes fleeing) the nether-region, the indistinct zone between hauntology and political ontology.

The question. The question of the mark. The diacritical. The dash — - -

In Lujain Aqra and Bilal Hamamra's "Letter from Palestine: Resistance through Storytelling in Refaat Al-Areer's 'If I Must Die,'" the dash cuts on the margin, an indication and a fragmentation. Thinking through the work of mourning.

In mourning, long live the martyrs, in this case, Yousef Dawwas, killed 14-11-23, and Refaat Al-Areer, killed 6-12-23. Knowing that "death is not absence" (11). On come the hauntologies, funeral oratories, *epitaphios logos*. Knowing, practicing that is, that "the strikethrough (dash) that traces it retains something of the stroke; the strikethrough remains writing—a vestige of a vanishing act and a paradoxical trace of a future-to-come" (11).

For Al-Areer in "If I Must Die," death is not an interruption, but narrative. Here, the continual work of refusal and resistance to colonial violence, oppression, and metaphysics, and continual imagining of Palestine: Aqra and Hamamra invoke in this regard Tahrir Hamdi's work *Imagining Palestine* (2023). Life is not grand narrative but little things:

"If I must die, you have  
To tell my story, to sell my things,  
To buy a piece of cloth and some strings" (Alareer 2014, 537)

All work is a machine to note—the need for future work. The collective nature of work is obvious to anyone immersed in it—given enough thought.

Monster Substance neocolonial settler-Capitalism: originating in primitive accumulation, that is, violence and theft, it continues in violence, bloodshed,

death, death, and continual death, production of death, the zombification of the living, capture and enslavement of all and everything—it wishes.

Spectres, ghosts of coming communism, global without national or international state formations and apparatuses—direct, non-representative democratic power, the living ethical expression of the multitudes. Cosmo-communism.

The violence of abstraction and political ontology is acted out in Margherita Pascucci's dialogue, "Capital and Poverty." Imagine Capital—and hence its epoch, Capitalism—dying. Pascucci acts it out for us, at the hands of Poverty. To do so, transvalue what Capital has formed, identified, valued, and made invisible. The power of the poor, the power of the working and unemployed and alienated and disenfranchised and homeless and migrant and stateless and underground multitudes, immeasurable and beyond *ratio* and *arché*: "the common is the immeasurable, being the plus of life" (29). Life is a plurality of singularities: "In material thought the principle of the singular becomes the world, and the world is an eternal and singular fragment of us all" (30). The real is the mad assemblage of wishes, wills, and desires: "poverty creates through difference and political love" (31).

People and shadows, things and their shadows, always in two worlds: the living-dead and the dying-living, white colonial capitalism and the other, center and margin, aboveground and underground, visible and invisible. Ryan Johnson in "The Cave of Whiteness: Du Bois, Baldwin, and Wright Recast Plato's Imagery" investigates the figures of white and Black thought in an experimental recasting of the philosophical canon. Affirming twilight thinking: the obscure, perplexed, dialectically or otherwise knotted. To be able to think—if one enjoys the privileges of whiteness—"the dangerous delusions of whiteness" (53).

In Mehdi Belhaj Kacem's "Nihilism, Parody, Profanation," translated by Conor O'Dea, Capital is a *cultural* phenomenon, cultural and cultish, and Capitalism the "permanent cult" of the religion of nihilism (64). The margin, the more that escapes Capital, is here *sur-jouissance*, passion that blocks/interrupts representation. The demand for all to appear is democratic fascism, Fukuyamian capitalist-possessive-individualist-Hegelianism.

The contrary right to disappear, in Kacem, appears decisionistic and Schmittian (perhaps still too Badiouian) in its thinking—of the event—as "the sequence where all are sovereigns" (68). If this means something like the anarchic distribution of material singularities, then so be it for now—in this quick written note—now dry, as Friedrich Nietzsche would say (1917, 236). The wet thought transferred to papyrus or an equally hydrophobic medium, like an electrical net.

Thank you, poets, for always it seems setting formal features of languages before us, as reminders of at-one-and-the-same-time language's powers and limits/failings. Transdisciplinary and experimental on purpose, not by accident. Juxtaposition and mutation of media for the purposes of creation. Letters and comments and articles and interventions all gray-zoned and intersecting.

Martha White's "Slide 9. Hypatia": linguistic or visual? Both. Sliding violence in metaphysical description: "a sister is just a stranger who hasn't es-

tranged you yet,” from Benjamin Dugdale’s “hornlet.” Sonja Boon’s “forgettings” takes me to think of dream-language in connection to the putative universal language of thought or *homolegein*. Or some original and hence transcendently important (or not) mother-tongue. Do I have one? Ontological cuts. Or some proliferation of utterances, a multitude of noises, musics, and senses. Multi-media expressive, multilingual.

Language—this one right now—does not always do what the speaker wants. Amany Abdelrazek-Alsiefy shows us by reading Leila Aboulela that Muslim women differ and “harem” does not designate. And Hamad Abdullah Nazar points us to the variations on variations of Punjabi music in Radha Kapuria.

I dream in many languages, and they feel and look different. Ozayr Saloojee’s “The Little Things” shows much of this, bricolages such—similarities and differences, hardly ever repeating identities. - - - Even the machine gun bullets differ. As Deleuze says, “no two grains of dust are absolutely identical, no two hands have the same distinctive points, no two typewriters have the same strike, no two revolvers score their bullets in the same manner” (1994, 26). An intense atmosphere surrounds the amputation-(eating-writing-conversing-kitchen-)table.

Artists *uminoko*: collective assemblage with blurred edges and precise images. “ANYONE” questions—games—with the image. Reminding of *Discourse Figure* by Jean-François Lyotard (1971). Reminder: be a nominalist; the *logos* is clear and distinct only with huge losses, as Heraclitus figures by way of the obscure. Many obscurities. Just gaming, setting the rules or laws, making decision cuts. Wishing and willing. “JUST FUCKING.”

What are the potentials (now) of an image? Of serial images? Of multi-layered, edgily connected, and interpenetrated worlds of images? What are the futures of images?

Metaphysical pundits—why still taken so seriously? Ontological terrors—treat them like two-year-olds.

Origins and prejudices: where are you from? Where are you *from*? Reverse direction. Complex question. Everywhere and nowhere. Cosmo-utopianism. Julia Sushytska’s “Becoming Homeless in Language” is personal for me. My mother has always told me I was Czech and Russian. I don’t remember my grandfather, her father, speaking about it. He spoke Czech to me. As did my mother. I believe she also spoke Russian. I am still unsure how much Ukrainian she speaks, if any, for multiple, overlapping, overdetermining reasons. My grandfather, on my mother’s side, Dobřický, was born in Odessa.

Welcome Heraclitus, of the *homolegein* and at the same time the obscure (contra Descartes), Deleuze’s clear and obscure (1994): the living paradox of thought, having to work out knots as new knots are knotted—Penelope’s web—the cross-verses, the living real complications.

The power—danger—violence—of a clear and distinct dividing line is shown—shown well, that is indicated but not blindingly, hence clear but still in need of thinking through, so somewhat obscure, not crystal blindingly unsullied unprotected burning fire in the receptor eyes, namely twilight thinking—in the conversation between Edward Casey and Michael Broz, “Borders, Phenome-

nology, and Politics Interview.” Political configurations are and are not real (Karl Marx and Ernst Cassirer overlapping somewhat, in the fractally multiplied edgy border zones, on the myth of the state). In other, better, words, real has a time-location stamp. Real here and now. As any talk of nations should make obvious. Perhaps a central tension, paradox: the insistent call for national identity and belonging and the continual fluctuation of geopolitical lines. Hence the necessity, for the sake of definiteness, of the microlocal, the as-specified-in-real-gesture-so-as-to-avoid-indelible-errors-brought-by-generalization/abstraction-or-the-will-to-universality-or-god-wish.

In a word, anarcho-communist-nominalist in the sense of a real anarchic distribution of multiplicities and the political distribution of multiplicities locally, not by way of the withered/destroyed state. In other words, a plasticity, as described by Catherine Malabou (2005)—see Conor O’Dea on Malabou on anarchy as the haunting of politics, below.

Militantly nominalist and microlocal global: Bohemian. Working people at risk. Universal precarity, almost. On the level of the real: people, desires, actions. Political ontology. Ontological infection. Ontological terrorism.

Cutting thoughts. Decisions, wishes, wills. Setting rules for the game. Playing around with things (images, people, images of people—the slides, violations, rapid). Is the thinking in the linking or in the gaps between? In the unstated and understated?

The futures—not stock shares but material-imaginary plenipotent worlds—of the poor, the badly voiced and silenced, marginalized, pushed to and over the edge. What of those?

## End

Thank you, students, here and everywhere. Dedicated to the student occupations here at Memorial University St. John’s Campus in 2024; to the teacher of the future, Antonio Negri; and to my mother, Nina Trnka, *née* Dobřícky.

## Biography

Peter Trnka is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Memorial University. He has taught at Karlova University, Prague as well as The University of Toronto and York University. He has published scholarly philosophical and trans-disciplinary articles in various international journals, most recently the chapter “Disjoint and Multiply: Deleuze and Negri on ‘Time’” in the edited volume *Deleuze and Time*, as well as poetry and a cookbook.

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