

# **The Possibility of an Emancipatory Form of Madness**

**Cynthia Cruz**

**Abstract:** How is the possibility of an exit from capitalism possible in the madness of capitalist forgetfulness we find ourselves in? How might an examination of the idea of the impossible, that which is not non-existent but, rather, beyond definition, help us locate such an exit? Through a discussion of capitalist madness alongside Hegel's concept of madness, this article raises these questions while, at the same time, compiling an encyclopedia of madnesses with the idea that there may be a form of madness, expelled from the realm of what is possible, that might lead us out from the madness of capitalist forgetfulness to something entirely new.

**Keywords:** Hegel, madness, emancipation, the French Revolution, philosophy, temporality

But you're in love with what's impossible.  
—Ismene to Antigone, *Antigone*<sup>1</sup>

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The act of falling in love is one of four examples of what Badiou calls the event, a phenomena he defines as impossible.<sup>2</sup> To fall in love is to drop into a moment of instability. We cannot know when or if we will fall in love, there is no way to prepare for it (or conversely, how to avoid its arrival). And it is only in retrospect that we can see what has happened to us. This is why Badiou can describe falling in love as one form of the event. The concept of “fall” also has a correlation to the original, biblical Fall. This moment, too, in the schism between, wherein the world changes radically and both subjects are altered forever, there occurs a moment where the subjects are “plunged into absolute uncertainty” while simultaneously encountering freedom. Through the rupture, through disruption and error, something new appears. Another word for disruption is “Verrücken.” Madness, in other words, can be understood as a kind of “fall,” one that shatters the subject's previous held conceptions and beliefs. At the same time, it is precisely through this rupture, the annihilation of the world and who they are, that knowledge is acquired. I propose, in this paper, to attempt to answer a small list of questions I have been grappling with. First and foremost is the question of emancipatory possibility: how is such an occurrence possible in the madness of capitalist oblivion we find ourselves in? This question intersects with the idea of the impossible, or the possibility of the impossible, which is what we must call emancipatory possibility. Throughout this paper we will be compiling a compendium

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1 Sophocles 2003, p. 57.

2 Badiou, 2018. 92.

of madnesses, one both akin, and not, to Hegel's. In *Philosophie des Geistes*, the third book of his *Enzyklopädie*, Hegel collects and categorizes various types of madnesses, describing their symptoms. Here, we will be compiling madnesses of capitalism alongside madnesses excluded from capitalism with the idea that there may be a form of madness, one cast out from capitalism, that can lead us from the madness of capitalist oblivion we find ourselves in to something entirely new.

Capitalism is presented to us as the only possibility. To attempt to imagine an alternative is to veer into the realm of that which is not possible, which is to say it is to appear mad. Still, we know there is another possibility, even if this knowledge derives from so-called failed emancipatory attempts. Though not completed, these attempts mark the site of a truth yet to come. Though their presence is no longer one that is material, they left a trace of possibility as all events do. There is possibility precisely because previous attempts at emancipation failed which means there was at one point a possibility which suggests that this possibility exists even now, as a trace, a form not yet materialized.

Jean-Pierre Dupuy in *How To Think About Catastrophe* describes how, because the idea of the end of the world has become second nature, we no longer notice it. As a result we are unable to do anything to deter its inevitable occurrence:

This is the terrifying thing about a catastrophe: not only does no one believe that it will occur, even though there is every reason for knowing that it will occur; but once it has occurred it appears to be a part of the normal order of things. Its very reality suddenly makes it seem banal, commonplace.<sup>3</sup>

What Dupuy is describing is a form of oblivion. We can see this forgetting as a form of habit. The practice of repeating an action, one that begins as a deliberate choice result in an aspect that becomes sublimated into one's everyday being. What at first seems strange and may initially be experienced as a shock, eventually becomes, in a sense, nothing at all. It becomes *second nature*. Each time we learn a new skill, every time we learn anything at all, in that discreet moment who we were is gone. Even so, we are not yet who we are about to become. When we enter this gap between, we enter a moment of instability, what Hegel describes as a moment of madness. In this moment we are without a nature. Indeed, in a sense in this moment we are nothing.

With habit one no longer know what one is doing because one acts without thinking about one's actions or why one is engaged in their actions in the first place, Once a behavior becomes habit, it changes,

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<sup>3</sup> Dupuy 2022, p. 51.

morphing into mere repetition. It is as if the action is *doing us*. And this mechanical behavior—fine when we are driving a car or riding a bike—becomes something entirely different, something sinister, perilously close to death. “Therefore,” as Hegel writes, “although, on the one hand, by habit a man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its *slave*.”<sup>4</sup> Though this numbing quality can render one an automaton, it can also free us from madness which is why Hegel posits habit as a remedy for madness. Habit provides stability for madness’s instability, as Hegel explains, “The essential determination is the liberation from sensations that man gains through habit, when he is affected by them.”<sup>5</sup>

Because it provides stability, habit is necessary for both a subject’s interior cohesion and for social cohesion. And yet, due to capitalism’s plasticity, its ability to adapt itself to everything, what we have is capitalist habit. The very mechanism that ought to provide a remedy for madness becomes, itself, a form of madness. If habit is the practice of repeating an act that becomes nothing over time, then capitalist habit is habit that, sublimated into capitalism, makes, through the act of repetition, everything the same. As a result, difference vanishes. Capitalist habit makes natural that which is not. We become accustomed to the shocks and crises inherent to capitalism. As a result one forgets the reality of capitalism. Indeed, one forgets capitalism, which is to say one forgets reality. Forgetting reality and instead grasping onto what appears as reality but is mere simulacra (in the constant stream of images behind which exist nothing), the subject under capitalism, disconnected from reality, believes in what does not exist. This state of being is defined by Hegel as madness.

With capitalism there is a problem of imagination, due to a problem between what is imagined and what is real. “There is a rupture,” as Harmut Böhme writes, “in capitalism between the way things appear and their real or actual meanings.”<sup>6</sup> We have a situation where we are unable to discern reality from unreality while we are also unable to imagine any alternative to the structure we find ourselves within. Because capitalism contaminates all aspects of its world, including our minds—we think, for example, and dream in capitalism—there is no outside to capitalism. Frederic Jameson’s comment that the end of the world is easier to imagine than the end of capitalism speaks to the deficit in imagination that has been brought about vis-à-vis capitalism. Indeed, there is both concretely, since 1989, no outside to capitalism (all current systems in the world are capitalist) and, because capitalism contaminates everything, there is also no way to imagine outside of capitalist

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4 Hegel 2007, p. 134.

5 Ibid., p. 131.

6 Böhme 2014, p. 243.

imagining. In fact, with capitalism, imagination (forgetfulness of the past, of who one is, and of the very structure one is living in) is what obscures.

In his discussion of catastrophe Jean-Pierre Dupuy argues on behalf of a decision process where one determines that the unimaginable catastrophe will occur, precisely in order to prevent such a world-ending catastrophe from happening in the first place. Rather than the truths that exist within our unconscious that we do not have conscious access to where what we know but do not know exists, what we have here is a truth we know but do not know due to fetishistic disavowal, a disavowing that allows us to immediately forget what we know.<sup>7</sup> We are aware just how dire the situation is. Nonetheless, we forget and do nothing about it. This structure shares a likeness with that of psychosis, where the psychotic subject knows something to be reality yet brackets this reality off, sequestering it away.<sup>8</sup> In other words, in order to exist within capitalism, to survive, subjects must disavow reality. Reality is rejected, neither cognized nor digested. It is thrown out into the subject's exterior, where it remains alien to them. Further complicating this dilemma, Jelica Šumič writes how it is not just the past we disavow, but also the future, "This anticipated, programmed amnesia is, namely, the ability to wipe out not only what has happened, but to annihilate the very idea of the possibility for something to happen, in short, the ability to erase the possibility of the possible."<sup>9</sup>

We might find a way out of this impasse by positing the very split at its center. By recognizing that we bracket off what we do not want to know because we wish it not to be true, this act already does something to subjectivity. We become aware that we know. Further, by conceptualizing what was previously a cognitive blindspot, we immediately gain access to it. At the same time, the act creates a distance between the concept and ourselves. We are now able to conceive of it. Similarly, by positing the presupposition of such catastrophic symptoms as mass poverty and unemployment, for example, and the destruction of animals and nature, by retroactively locating the presupposition of these symptoms in capitalism, we are able to locate capitalism, a structure that otherwise remains hidden. Without such means, attempts at critiquing capitalism are themselves appropriated into its structure, vanishing into its machinery. Frederic Jameson's "cognitive mapping" provides an additional tool by which to access what otherwise remains impenetrable. Here, what is invisible

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7 And as Alenka Župančič adds, it isn't that what is disavowed is removed from sight but rather, that its "game changing behavior" is removed. See "Alenka Župančič, "On Antigone, Iran, Marx, and a lot of other things," *Crisis and Critique*: <https://youtu.be/zlr5Db9ZG1>.

8 Freud 2001, p. 41-61.

9 Šumič 2014, p. 79.

becomes imaginable as a concept, as Jameson explains, “this is exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do ... to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole.”<sup>10</sup> One caveat must be added to this formula: since the 1970's and 1980's the very term capitalism has been replaced by abstractions such as neoliberalism, which result in further obfuscation. To amend this, we must return the term capitalism back to capitalism. Doing so situates it in its proper place as a structure, and, with its suffix, “ism,” places it squarely among other such systems that, though they change superficially according to culture, remain substantially the same. Once we are able to conceptualize capitalism, we are then able to comprehend the catastrophic situation we find ourselves in. This connection is critical: it is what allows for a waking up from capitalist oblivion. However, this connection is precarious because it is in the very act of making what was previously implicit, explicit, that fear and terror arise and we retreat into disavowal to protect ourselves from it. “The fear of catastrophe fails to deter.” Dupuy explains “The heuristics of fear is not a ready-made solution to the problem; it *is* the problem.”<sup>11</sup>

In her analysis of the end Alenka Župančič,<sup>12</sup> using the example of quitting smoking, describes two structures of what she terms its economy. The first is a repetition informed by the choice of deciding to end, as Župančič explains, “Because there is clearly an economy here, an economy that allows me, for example, to go on smoking, while the possibility of quitting is here just in order to help me smoke.”<sup>13</sup> The second is one fueled by the end. Precisely because we are at the end, we determine to *really* enjoy ourselves. “Differently from the previous configuration,” Župančič writes, “in which the end (as possibility) was inherent to the repetition, what is at stake here is rather that *repetition is inherent to the end*; there is something about the end itself that drives the repetition, and repetition is essentially *repetition of the end*.”<sup>14</sup> With both of these configurations we have a repetition of the end that is lacking a true end. We have an end that keeps on ending.

The end that we refuse to believe, though we know it to be true, has, in fact, already occurred. We tell ourselves the end is yet to come to ward off what has already happened, to ward off what is happening now, as Oxana Timofeeva argues, “As opposed to what is usually said,

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10 Jameson 1991, p. 51.

11 Dupuy 2002, p. 92.

12 Župančič 2016, p. 3.

13 Ibid., p. 4.

14 Ibid.

catastrophe's time is not in the future, but in the present, which we can only grasp as the past, because it flows..."<sup>15</sup> As Timofeeva asserts, the one event which has already happened, that which haunts our every moment, can be worked through with psychoanalysis vis-à-vis its trace as symptom, parapraxis, and so forth. But the catastrophe is something entirely different:

Catastrophe is meta- traumatic. It happens absolutely: at the beginning there is—there was—always already the end. Catastrophe defines the borders of a collective and the true sense of what we call history."<sup>16</sup>

We are trapped within the after of capitalism's coming into being. As if in an enormous and immeasurable aquarium filled with a black gelatinous substance, we exist in an *ever*, suspended between a revolution that keeps revolutionizing (and yet never changes) and a future that we believe will bring the end, and yet is always merely one more repetition of the non-end, non-time, we find ourselves in. The present we exist in is one lacking a present, as Badiou argues, it is a world lacking a world. In this nonworld, there is another world that haunts this one, a world we gain access to through what Badiou terms "exceptions" as he explains, "The objective is to identify the tracings of exception, which can be viewed either as internal externalities (what happens in Genet's *The Balcony*), local externalities, or perhaps as superficial scratches, scratches one the surface, marks on the surface constituting exceptions to the law of this surface."<sup>17</sup> It is through locating such traces that we might gain access to a present, or to another world.

Capitalism is a world in which subjects are told everything is constantly changing while nothing ever changes. It is a world of infinite movement where there is constant proliferation (of labor, goods, suffering), ever-widening growth, it is, nonetheless, as if time has stopped. The mind and the body of the worker, engaged in the same repetitive movement hour after hour, day after day, is changed through this mechanism. Everything becomes calculable, a unit of time, and all things are broken down to the work hour. In contrast to the worker's sense of time, the usury and the financial capitalist does not work, but, rather, allows their money to work for them. This does something to time. There is a strange paradox between these two experiences of time under capitalism: for the worker, time is both internalized and constricted, while for the usury or financial capitalist, time is external and expansive. The

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<sup>15</sup> Timofeeva 2014. p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Badiou 2023, p. 25.

effect of fictitious capital creates an additional warp in the temporal due to fictitious capital's reliance upon future labor. While ordinary labor is defined by a worker who is paid after their work is completed, with fictitious capital a subject receives payment for work they have yet to complete. This mechanism, where a subject labors in the present and future to repay a debt in the past, cuts into the future and the present (where the labor they engage in to pay off their debt exists), and the past (where the cut occurs from which the original loan commences and interest begins to accrue and an additional, ever-growing new debt appears). As with capital, there is magic inherent in fictitious capital. The financial capitalist or usury bases their decisions on pure speculation fueled by a belief that arbitrary decisions will result in profit, while the debtor, too, believes they will one day earn enough to pay the debt (and interest) off. As with the gambler who has gambled everything away, coming to the end and believing, due to their having already lost everything, this final gamble will be the one that wins everything back and more, in both instances we are dealing with a subject who is risking everything based entirely upon a magical belief, as Mladen Dolar explains:

Economy and childish magic shake hands, the superstitious belief that loss will be made good by a contingent thrust, that one can cancel out the risk incurred and lost only by a more daring risk, that the like will find the like by some magic attraction, one debt will find the other and will be thus restored, that the double loss will yield the double gain. There is a magic economy at the bottom of financial economy, quite beyond the calculation of risks and dangers, beyond the supposition of rational players and rational choices in the economic game.<sup>18</sup>

What Dolar is describing is an act of madness not unlike the mesmerizing power of imaginary voices in, for instance, Daniel Schreber's description of his state of psychosis.<sup>19</sup>

If capitalist time is defined by a state of stagnation and freneticism, fictitious capital further complicates this structure. We might, in other words, have a system in which stagnation and freneticism coexist along with the present, past, and future. Subjects find themselves existing entirely on fictitious capital: taking out student loans and using credit cards then using these forms of fictitious capital to pay for other forms of fictitious capital (using one's credit card to make a loan payment) these very forms of capital, existing, as it were, on nothing. In this case,

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<sup>18</sup> Dolar 2014, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Schreber 2000, p. 131.



when at work, the worker is no longer “earning” money but, rather, “returning” money to the creditor. And, because student loans and credit cards earn money from interest, the worker, even when working to pay off the borrowed money, is still not even paying off the fresh debt from the interest that is constantly accruing. This structure has its origins in exchange value and its structure of infinite repetition and division, which leads to a leveling down of everything and the idea that all things can be equalized, counted, and that all is calculable. This leads to indifference and a world in which subjects are unable to distinguish themselves from others.

According to Hegel, a subject unable to differentiate them selves from others is one who is insane. Thus, madness is inherent to capitalism’s very structure. Indeed, capitalism does something to the symbolic order and subject-formation. Everyone in capitalist society is changed, as if in a cult, individually and en masse, without awareness of this phenomena. It is a cult without meaning, in which its subjects are unaware they are in a cult, as Benjamin writes, “Capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction.”<sup>20</sup> The essence of capitalist madness, exchange value and the magical quality of money, is a substance that spreads like a contagion. The structure of exchange exists already in magic as reciprocity, and, like religion, magic is a controlling substance, as Kojin Karatani writes,

Magic is the attempt to control or manipulate nature or other people by means of the gift (sacrifice). In other words, magic in itself already includes reciprocity.<sup>21</sup>

With its spectral form and occult-like qualities, these “crystals” are akin to Marcel Mauss’s description of magic as “a living mass, formless and inorganic, its vital parts have neither a fixed position nor a fixed function. They merge confusedly together.”<sup>22</sup> And, in *Capital* Marx describes value as spectral materiality [*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*], a gelatinous [*Gallerte*], substance extracted from the laboring body of the worker and transposed to objects which then become filled with this invisible and yet charged substance:

Let us look at the residue of the products of labour. There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin 2004, p. 288.

<sup>21</sup> Karatani 2014, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Mauss 1972, p. 108.

labour, i.e. of human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure. .... As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values—commodity values [*Warenwerte*].<sup>23</sup>

Magic serves as a binding force, uniting what otherwise would remain disparate, in disunity. What we have then is a spectral substance that mesmerizes, as Marx writes “The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes.”<sup>24</sup> Fetishism draws out subjects’ feeling which arise from within the subject without their awareness, overwhelmed by feeling yet unaware what feeling they are feeling. Money with its hidden mysterious powers, alters the very structure of society, as Marx writes:

If *money* is the bond binding me to *human* life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all *bonds*? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal *agent of separation*? It is the *coin* that really *seperates* as well as the real *binding* agent—the [...] *chemical* power of society.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel’s description of the mad subject, one who is “dreaming while awake,”<sup>26</sup> aware but unable to articulate what it is they are aware of; aware something is wrong but unaware what this something is, describes the subject of capitalism. This occurs when a subject does not know what the feeling is they are experiencing or they do not have a language for what they are experiencing. This internal split tears the subject to pieces resulting in *Zerrießenheit*. In English *Zerrießen* means to “tear,” “rip,” or “rupture.” Here, it is the subject who is torn or ripped apart. Though ruptured and torn to pieces, a subject can, nonetheless, find themselves by positing a limit. Just as a dream is a form within which the substance of the dream appears, when a subject posits a limit between its self and its exterior, it creates such a form through which to stabilize this void.<sup>27</sup>

In capitalism we lack a language to express what we are experiencing. The language we have access to, the language of bourgeois society, does not match our experience. It is the language

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23 Marx 1976, p. 128.

24 Ibid., p. 187.

25 Marx 1975, p. 324.

26 Hegel 2007, p. 117.

27 Ibid., p. 22.

of right, the language of equality, of no difference, *Entsprechende*, or *Ent-sprechende*, a language unable to articulate anything. Or, rather, nothing but exchange. This language that translates all experience into claims of right, itself, does something to language. First, because with the language of right we are only able to speak by articulating how our rights have been violated, we have only a language that is negative. Second, because bourgeois language is the language of the law, it is the language of charge. Therefore, the only language we have to speak about our claims is monetary. This means the only language we have access to is one that is negative and is immediately exchanged into the language of the negative and that of exchange. What cannot be captured in this language—everything external to claims due to infringement of our rights—remains, but in an unspeakable language, a form of excess we are unable to access because we don't have a language that corresponds to it. In order to speak of what one wants, one must first have a language for it. However, we don't yet have such a language. This language we don't yet have for what we don't yet have, is the poetry of the future.

Alongside an awakening from the forgetfulness of capitalist oblivion we must also awaken to what Badiou calls traces of exceptions and to the possibility of the appearance of an event. The two terms are interrelated. The tracings are usually found in Badiou's four canonical categories: art, science, politics, and love, while Badiou gives Paris, May 1968 as an example of the event because, though its material manifestation did not result in radical change, its occurrence resulted in a rupture through which the possibility for something entirely new to appear, appeared. Describing the effects of May 1968 on himself and other young Germans, Karl-Heinz Dellwo explains, "For us this was a situation where historically something like a window opened up, or a door, and [we] had to try to push it open."<sup>28</sup> An event is the possibility for something entirely new to appear, as Badiou states "Basically, an event, for a world, is something that has the ability to make what did not exist before in this world."<sup>29</sup> The emergence of such an occurrence is unforeseeable. One cannot predict when, or even if, such an event will occur, nor can one know what shape it might take. Further, such occurrences are marked by retroactivity. One is unable to fully comprehend what has transpired until afterward. "It is the event, Badiou writes, "which belongs to conceptual construction, in the double sense that it can only be thought by anticipating its abstract form, and it can only be revealed in the retroaction of an interventional practice which is

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28 Dellwo 2018, p. 355.

29 Badiou 2023, p. 348.

itself entirely thought through.”<sup>30</sup> It is structural, in other words, and may or may not be filled in with a historical phenomenon. Such an occurrence simultaneously ruptures reality and is also subject-forming akin to Lacan’s act which, similarly, alters the subject as they move through it.

It cannot be assumed that a subject will recognize such an appearance when it appears. In order to recognize its appearance one must first make the decision to place communal emancipation before one’s own individual needs and wants. This determination is akin to Jean-Pierre Dupuy’s insistence on the necessity for the acknowledgment of catastrophe in order to avert its coming into being. With regard to the possibility of the appearance of possibility, we ought to anticipate its appearance even if we don’t believe in its inevitability. We don’t have to believe (consciously) we just have to believe that our unconscious believes. The act that sets this belief (of non-belief) in motion is a subject’s determination. Crucial, too, is that a subject make this determination on their own and for themselves. This unconditional solidarity cannot be brought about through external forces. It either exists or it does not. Describing his decision, while in solitary confinement, not to disavow his actions in order to protect himself, Dellwo explains:

This unconditionality of solidarity is indispensable, gratuitous, and unavailable. This is not demanded, you have it.....Each egoism dissolves the coherence of the group at the other’s expense....This does not come as an exigency from the outside, but from inside oneself.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, such a determination is one that is not possible. To place the communal before the individual is to rupture the very structure of capitalism, one constructed of atomized individuals whose very survival is dependent on separation and competition. To invert this structure is to insist on an alternative reality. The subject’s determination to place the welfare of the communal before their own binds the subject with the communal while also binding the subject and the communal with the determination. Though each subject experiences their own oppression individually, one’s individual suffering does not exist in a vacuum, but, rather, occurs among the universal suffering of capitalist oppression. One’s individual suffering exists in the gap that overlaps both individual and universal suffering. Recognition of this bond is crucial and is at the heart of what Michael Walzer describes as the covenant:

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30 Badiou 2005, p. 178.

31 Dellwo 2018, p. 367.

The covenant is a founding act....Their identity, like that of all men and women before liberation, is something that has happened to them. Only with the covenant do they make themselves into a people in the strong sense, capable of sustaining a moral and political history, capable of obedience and also of stiff-necked resistance, of marching forward and of sliding back. Hence the centrality of the covenant and the importance of reflecting upon its precise character.<sup>32</sup>

What drives a people forward toward emancipation is this bond, as Marx writes, “no class in civil society has any need or capacity for general emancipation until it is forced by its *immediate* condition, by *material* necessity, by its *very chains*.”<sup>33</sup> Writing on the Exodus, Walzer makes explicit the connection between the oppression the people share and their shared idea of emancipation:

Without the new ideas of oppression and corruption, without the sense of injustice, without moral revulsion, neither Exodus nor revolution would be possible.... it is the new ideas that make the new event. They provide the energy of the Exodus, and they define its direction.<sup>34</sup>

It is in the coalescing of the proletariats’ determination to place the communal before the individual and the appearance of possibility that something new can be brought about. This might be described as the coinciding of philosophy and praxis, or the formulation of an idea (philosophy) and one’s determination to place the communal before the individual (praxis), as Marx writes “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.”<sup>35</sup>

The idea, like the casing of a dream in which the substance of the dream exists, provides unity to disunity. It protects the individual, as well as the group, from madness, while also binding individuals to one another. The result is a community bound by an idea. Describing the effect of Paris, May 1968 Dellwo explains “Suddenly, the idea of another world was concrete, it was there and it was liberating, a new breathing, a slashing of the mist of habits.”<sup>36</sup> Here, Dellwo makes explicit

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32 Walzer 1986, p. 76.

33 Marx 1976, p. 186.

34 Walzer 1986, p. 40.

35 Marx 1975, p. 4.

36 Dellwo 2018, p. 355.

the connection between the appearance of possibility in the form of May 1968 and the idea of emancipation it transported along with it. One needs an idea for emancipation, the idea of emancipation. An idea also provides direction. In his description of the Exodus, Walzer writes:

...it is the new ideas that make the new event. They provide the energy of the Exodus, and they define its direction.<sup>37</sup>

Even without a formulation for how one might bring about emancipation, the idea itself, even in the form of an empty form, still works to bind individuals to one another. Indeed, the idea of emancipation, as long as we are thinking, conceiving, and theorizing its possible formulation, exists, as a form or a specter, awaiting to be filled in. It is the idea that precedes us: temporality is changed. When we conceive of an idea, this thing we have dreamed up, floats before us, awaiting the act of our filling it in. It is a future that exists in the present and yet it is constructed of the past. A shared idea of emancipation binds and drives. It provides, in other words, what is lacking in the structure of capitalism (a thrust to propel us from the infinite flow and repetition of sameness and a bind that binds atomized individuals to one another). And because this idea is constructed by the proletariat, the “nothing” of capitalism, we have a something constructed of nothing, a something that otherwise does not exist. It is as Hegel writes, “Never before, since the sun has been in the sky and the planets have turned around it, had man stood on his head, that is, based himself on the idea and constructed reality according to it.”<sup>38</sup>

The world the proletariat is intent on bringing about is one that does not yet exist: it exists entirely within the realm of the imagination. Because what occurs in one’s mind is entirely subjective, insistence on this imagined reality is madness. As Hegel articulates, madness occurs when a subject takes a merely individual subjective representation to be objective truth. The subject is “creating some content or other from its own resources and regarding this purely subjective item as something objective and *fixing* it in place.”<sup>39</sup> When a subject is cognizant “of the contradiction between their merely subjective representation and objectivity, and yet cannot give up this representation but insists on making it an actuality or annihilating what is actual”<sup>40</sup> this is also considered madness. Thus, the refusal to accept the capitalist world as it is and the resolve to make actual an imagined world can be described as madness.

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37 Walzer 1986, p. 40.

38 Hegel 1963, p. 447.

39 Hegel 2007, p. 124.

40 Ibid., p. 126.

A subject's determination to forsake their self interest for the larger cause of communal emancipation mediates the appearance of possibility. Though one does not know when or in what form such an appearance will occur, one now knows that it will. Further, one's commitment to emancipation is a form of subject formation. When one makes such a determination, they are no longer the same. In the moment of determination a subject lets go of everything they knew and everything they believed up until that moment. In that moment, they enter the void of unknowing. Such a decision is a form of action, an activity (*in der Tat*) which immediately becomes fact. Conjuring this new reality into being brings about the possibility of its appearance because once the subject places the communal before the individual, the world is flipped upside down. The reality of capitalism where each individual thinks only of themselves, their needs and wants, is put on its head. When one makes this determination, everything changes. Now that everything is changed, now that the world is upside down, traces or forms of possibility become visible.

By engaging in this act of determination, the subject is already engaged in the emancipatory struggle. As Etienne Balibar writes, "in action" also means that we are speaking of an *activity (Tatigkeit)*, an enterprise unfolding in the present to which individuals are committed with all their physical and intellectual powers."<sup>41</sup> The action the proletariat is engaged in is one that is both physical and intellectual. In this way, we have a coming together of what has been made disparate, the separation of intellectual and physical labor. We have already, in this one discrete movement, a revolutionizing of revolutionizing. Marx's concept that philosophy has only theorized but must now act here becomes actualized. The worker becomes philosopher. If the philosopher is one who completes philosophy, who, once they have completed the task of philosophy, vanishes along with philosophy, then something else happens with the worker-philosopher. Here, instead, we are speaking of the Hegelian structure where one gains knowledge through an encounter with error, the annihilation of everything one knows, and by entering into the unknown. Or, as Marx writes "proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh."<sup>42</sup> This mode of thinking stands in contrast to capitalism, a system of infinite repetition which, instead of encountering error and learning from it, sublates error into its very structure. Such a system blindly transcends its limits but without acknowledging these limits.

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41 Balibar 1995, p. 22.

42 Marx 1979, p. 106-107.



The German word for impossible is *ausgeschlossen*, meaning that which is “excluded” or “barred. That which is impossible is not non-existent but, rather, is beyond definition. For Lacan, the impossible is that which exists beyond the limit. It exists, but one must move beyond the limit in order to reach it. For Hegel, what is finite is “not what is true.”<sup>43</sup> Rather, it is a “*transition and a passage beyond itself*.”<sup>44</sup> In Hegel’s description of spirit’s becoming, this finitude is an “end,” a form of death through which spirit must pass in order to become. This annihilation presents infinite unknowing, and thus, doubt. Nonetheless, spirit must also kill this doubt by moving through it. In *Philosophie des Geistes* Hegel describes the moment where spirit recognizes its limitation as one where it can adhere to this limit or, instead, by recognizing this limit, it can move through it, an act Hegel describes as an act of madness. The marking of a limit defines the subject: I know what I am by determining what I am not.<sup>45</sup> Each time a subject posits something they fall back into the void of their abstract interior, back into madness. This means that to become a subject one must necessarily move through madness: madness remains a possibility for all. This is why for Hegel madness is “an essential stage in the development of the soul.”<sup>46</sup> For Hegel the consideration of limitations as fixed, and thus, insurmountable, is the worst of virtues, a form of vanity.<sup>47</sup> What Hegel describes as vanity is self-doubt which, due to its extreme self consciousness, is a form of self-centeredness, “This vanity will emerge in the development of the mind itself as the mind’s extreme immersion in its subjectivity and its innermost contradiction and thus its turning point, as *evil*.” It is through the process of moving beyond its limitations and by emptying out its doubt about moving into this unknowing, that spirit transcends and becomes.

Self doubt can be understood as a form of self consciousness, a fear of what will happen. In contrast, anxiety is the terror of the unknown as one enters into it. Anxiety, for Lacan, is the suspension between a moment where the subject no longer knows where they are and a future where they will never be able to refind themselves.<sup>48</sup> As for doubt “Anxiety is not doubt, anxiety is the cause of doubt.”<sup>49</sup> Self doubt, as Hegel writes,

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43 Hegel 2007, p. 22.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., p. 114.

47 Ibid., p. 22.

48 Lacan 1991, p. 226.

49 Lacan 2014, p. 76.



must be annihilated. Anxiety marks the of proximity of the unknown. One must live with anxiety. This designation of self doubt versus anxiety and vanity versus becoming mirror the difference between two kinds of terror. On one hand, we have the terror of those in charge, a terror of what the people might do were they to awaken to reality, and on the other hand we have the terror of those who revolt. The former is the terror Sophie Wahnich describes when she writes of a “mechanized” terrorism, one that constrains its subjects from within.<sup>50</sup> The terror of those who resist can be divided again into two: that of those who engage in a blind fury that is pure feeling, an empty negativity, and one that is a construction, one whose action serves a precise, predetermined purpose. We might divide these two further into two: one that is self annihilating and one that is other-annihilating. The one is liberating or affirmative while the other is negative, destructive. Liberating terror is one that is bound to the interior, while terror that is other-annihilating is concerned with the external. The former is one that is not against. Its act is not meant to communicate with the other, rather, it is formed entirely from within the subject’s interior. In this way it is akin to Lacan’s act and to Benjamin’s divine violence. The terror one must enter into is self-annihilating because its action is not one that is self-valorizing. In other words, such an act is one without a self. Though terror is the highest level of anxiety, it is essential for overcoming finitude, as Badiou writes:

None of that which overcomes finitude in the human animal, subordinating it to the eternity of the True through its incorporation into a subject in becoming, can ever happen without anxiety, courage and justice. But, as a general rule, neither can it take place without terror.<sup>51</sup>

Freedom, anxiety, and terror are, thus, intrinsically linked.

The French Revolution, as Wahnich writes, is an intolerable historical event due to its terror and our abhorrence for this terror.<sup>52</sup> As such, we are unable to examine it. Like Dupuy’s catastrophe, the French Revolution becomes an impossible historical event. Because the two share this similarity it makes it possible to use Dupuy’s analysis for our avoidance of past historical events. When we acknowledge our inability to accept the French Revolution due to its terror we can bracket off our acceptance of it and, by doing so, examine it. Something like “I know I can’t bear to examine the French Revolution due to its terror and my abhorrence for this terror. Because I know I am unable to look at it, I am

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50 Wahnich 2012, p. 28.

51 Badiou 2009, p. 88.

52 Wahnich 2012, p. 3.

setting this knowing aside, and, as a result, I am now able to examine the French Revolution.” This return to the French Revolution is crucial because it marks the rupture where the world in which we are currently trapped, took place. One question, perhaps, is how to (re) enter what this ending is. This means we need to find a means to (re) enter what amounts to a place holder, or locate the place where this rupture initially occurred and repeat it (but with difference). It might also entail locating and entering its emission, its *Ausstoß*, that which its appearance in the material world resulted in, “The *other-worldly beyond* of this, its actuality, [which] hovers over the corpse of the vanished self-sufficiency of real being, or the being of faith, and it hovers there only as an exhalation of stale gas, an exhalation of the empty *être suprême*.”<sup>53</sup> By disavowing the French Revolution, we remain barred outside the possibility of returning to this site where the possibility of revolutionary action continues to exist.

Repetition and forgetting coincide. Forgetting, because it is a knowing that is disavowed. Bracketed away in the unconscious, it awaits its reawakening vis-à-vis retroactivity when it will reappear as a form of repetition. And repetition, as a means of forgetting, because when something is repeated, something else is secreted along with it, something that remains enclosed in forgetting until it is explicitly drawn to the surface. Both serve as a means for placing on hold—repetition, because it exists as an empty structure waiting to be filled in, a specter, and forgetting, because, though it suggests a lack, it adds something. The so-called failed attempts at emancipation appear markedly different with this element added to it. These unfulfilled revolutions mark the site of a truth yet to come, as all events do. We know there is the possibility for something other than what we have now because previous attempts have failed which means there was, at the time of their failure, a possibility. This possibility did not vanish. It remains, a form not yet materialized, awaiting to be filled in. Describing the aftermath of May 1968, Dellwo explains “What will become of something that happens, of an event, is, as you know, not what comprises its whole potential.”<sup>54</sup> The French Revolution keeps repeating, revolutionizing, the result of which is a world of infinite repetition and reproduction in which nothing new ever happens. In contrast, other, failed attempts at emancipation, though incomplete, are structurally different in that, though they did not result in emancipation, they were not completed. Such “failed” attempts at emancipation leave a trace due to their not having been completed: there exists an opening, a specter of possibility. They also provide evidence of the possibility of an outside to capitalism. With these past attempts, a window appears, an entry into something entirely

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53 Hegel 2018, p. 341.

54 Dellwo 2018, p. 359.

new and, though this historical moment exists materially in the past, the specter of its possibility continues to exist, awaiting our intervention. What is needed is another form of madness, not the madness of capital, but rather the madness that has been disavowed, bracketed off, expelled from the realm of what is possible. This expelled madness, this something that is nothing, this nothing that exists, but peripherally, this other form of madness, is one that might help us locate the possibility of emancipatory possibility.

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